



THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

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Medical Mission Possible: Vietnam

REGINA ANCOLA-UPTON

In November 1997 I traveled to Vietnam for the Kansas City based Medical Mission Foundation. I was privileged to be part of a group of 26 medical professionals, including physicians, nurses, and technicians from all across America. Our mission was to perform plastic surgery on poor and underprivileged children at the Da Nang Hospital (Quang Tach) and Quang Son Clinic, and to deliver much-needed medical supplies and equipment.

During the tiring 18-hour flight over the Pacific, I wondered what challenges were awaiting us

in this country that had endured a thousand years of cruel Chinese imperialism, followed by a hundred years of brutal French colonialism, followed by fifteen years of an unjust and immoral American War, followed by over two decades of international isolation. What we found were very warm welcomes from the hospital staff and patients — and health care facilities and resources that were less than basic.

Yes, it was a challenge to

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Regina (far right) and another MMF RN (center) with cleft palate patients and their parents in pre-op.

FMLN Vets Return to Poverty After the War

JOHN POOLE

In February I returned to El Salvador for the sixth time since 1989. Conditions on the surface have improved somewhat. There are more material resources available to some people — various stores and businesses providing access to current clothing, furniture, and food. But once the surface is penetrated, there's more to the story.

Since the FMLN has become a legitimate political party with significant representation in the Legislative Assembly, as well as

in mayors' offices around the country (including the capital), the party membership has softened its denouncement of official government proceedings and begun to splinter into factions.

Some of their ex-combatants are among those hardest hit by the recent changes. I visited Perquin, a small rural town in the mountains of northern Morazan (an FMLN stronghold during the war), that is home to the Museum of the

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John Poole (right) and FMLN vet in El Salvador.

History 'R' Us

JAN BARRY CRUMB

A truly different documentary on the choices made by Vietnam veterans and war protesters aired in January on the History Channel. At one point, an animated interview with a gray-bearded man reminiscing about being a 20-year-old grunt in-country in 1963 flashed on the screen. Stomping through the living room on his way to the kitchen, my 18-year-old son whirled around on hearing his father talking on TV, then grimaced at me on the couch, and grouched: "You weren't really in Vietnam."

Later in the program, I was identified as a founder of Vietnam

Veterans Against the War. "Oh, you organized something," said my son, suddenly impressed, plopping down in front of the tube to see what this was about.

If we aging peaceniks don't get much respect for that double-whammy war we participated in, some new purveyors of history may be coming to our aid. Thirty years after it was founded by a few angry survivors of our military misadventure in Southeast Asia, VVAW has become a respected touchstone of history.

Shortly before the History

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Also in this issue

- Teaching Vietnam
- Recollections of Tet & My Lai
- Review of Clarence Fitch Film



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From the National Office

BARRY ROMO

We are having the membership cards reprinted after these many years. They look good and are waiting for you to re-up! Yes, they will be in color and no collection will be complete without them.

This issue of *The Veteran* was printed with an emergency call to steadfast VVAW members, who responded generously. We of course get no grant money, have no outside financial backers and rely on internal support from members, family and friends. We could use your help in getting the paper to those in prison, on the streets and unemployed, who, of course, get it free. So re-up and send a donation, 'cause we're broke.

Standdown '98 will take place on June 26 and 27 in Chicago. VVAW plays a vital role in this outreach to homeless veterans by taking charge of the kitchen and supply room and coordinating all of the meals. To help out, contact Bill Branson at (773) 929-2641.

"Regret To Inform" is a feature-length documentary about widows of the Vietnam war. It's nearly completed, but in need of photographs of Vietnam vets before the war — preferably in uni-

form — with their wives, kids, sweethearts, and families. If you want to contribute a photo, contact Sari Gilman (415-553-2436 or sgilman@sirius.com).

We have to offer special congratulations to:

John Zutz, for leading the Milwaukee VVAW in raising five thousand dollars for reconciliation with My Lai by organizing the "Blessing of the Bock" beer fest which, incidentally, was a great time.

Bill Branson, for leading the Chicago and Midwest VVAW in homeless vets work. VA workers held a Vietnamese dinner for them, and of course Bill didn't show up.

Dave Cline in New Jersey, for refusing to allow the Jersey

City memorial to fade away, all the while fighting extreme health problems.

Maude DeVictor, on the 20th anniversary of the breakthrough documentary by Bill Curtis that exposed Agent Orange. VVAW was the first veterans' group to bring up Agent Orange but Maude paid all the bills with her work, her personal life and her health. A hero and example to us all.

And, last but not least, almost Catholic-like thanks to the Champaign-Urbana staff for this paper, the website and uncounted, unpaid (this is the only organization where the staff pays to do work) but appreciated work. Thanks Jeff, Lisa, Lisa, Claudia, and Joe! ☺



Joe Miller & Barry Romo from the NO sell VVAW goods at the Conference on the Elimination of Racist Mascots.

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

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States as well as active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW quickly took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we started the first rap groups to deal with

traumatic after-effects of war, setting the example for readjustment counselling at Vet Centers now. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA Hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover-up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange Victims.

Today our government is still financing and arming undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world. Recently, American troops have been sent into combat in the Middle East and Central America, for many of the same misguided reasons that

were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans are still denied justice -- facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are being cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent another generation from being put through a similar tragedy and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. JOIN US!

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see page 19 for membership info

Editorial Collective

Barry Romo, Joe Miller, Jeff Machota & Lisa Boucher

"Another Brother" Chronicles the Life of Clarence Fitch

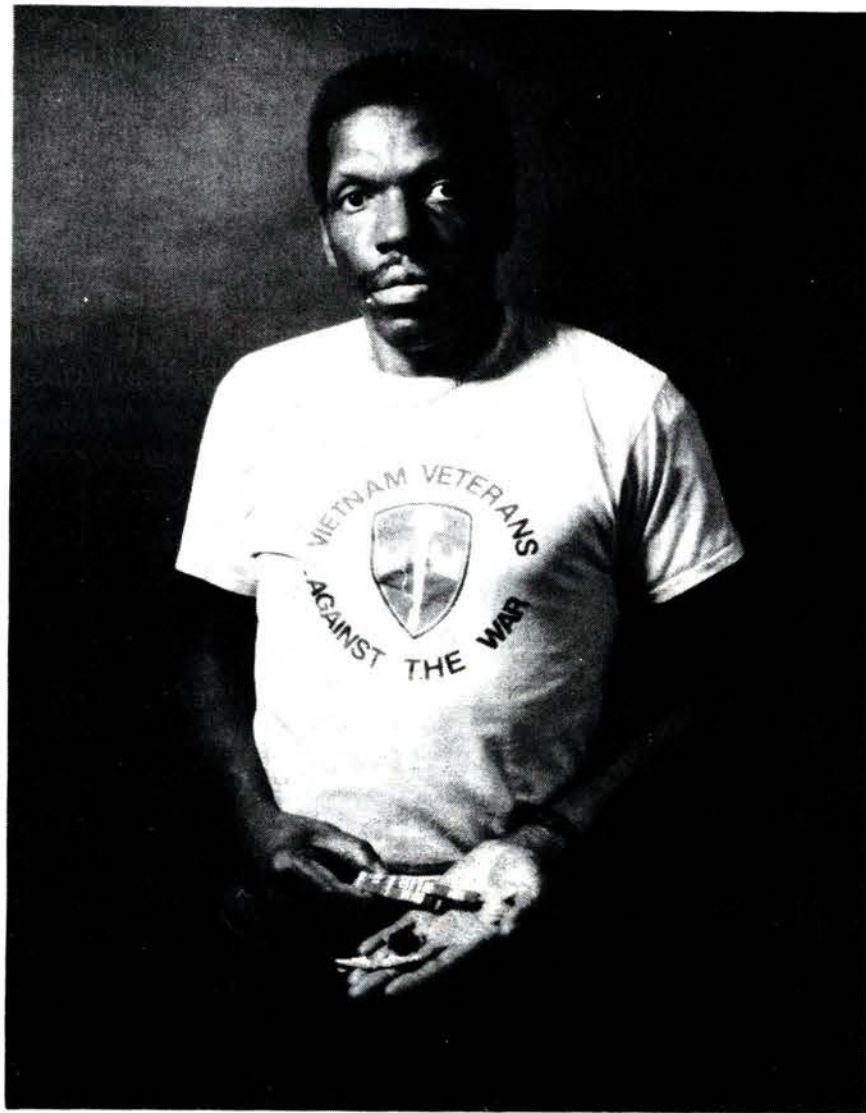
ELENA SCHWOLSKY-FITCH

1998 — 30 years since the Tet Offensive, 30 years since the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, 30 years since students were clubbed on the streets of Chicago during the Democratic National Convention. This is the 30th anniversary of 1968, a year that is etched in our national memory as one of the most turbulent years in American history. In the jungles of Vietnam and in the streets of America, our country was at war.

ANDERSONGOLD Films is proud to mark this important anniversary with the release of a new documentary film, "Another Brother," produced and directed by award-winning filmmaker Tami Gold.

"Another Brother" tells the story of Clarence Fitch, my late husband, who died of AIDS in 1990. Clarence was a combat marine veteran who used his experience in Vietnam to educate others. He served as East Coast coordinator of VVAW and was active in high school and community outreach and counter-recruiting.

Through found photographs, audiotaped interviews and archival footage, the film tells of Clarence's experience as an 18-year-old marine in Vietnam and his return home to Jersey City where he spent many years dealing with a heroin habit. In his own words, Clarence shares his difficult recovery from drugs, his mentoring role with high school students, his work as an antiwar activist, and finally, his courage



as a person living with AIDS.

This film is an important and timely project. The history of African-American GIs in the Vietnam War, the impact of that war on the black community, and its connection to the proliferation of drug use within that community, have not been adequately explored, although they continue to have a profound impact on our society. The lives of a whole generation of Americans — the baby boomers — have been bookended by the Vietnam War and the AIDS

epidemic.

"Another Brother" has been a labor of love for filmmaker Tami Gold, who was Clarence's close friend. VVAW members Greg Payton and Ben Chitty served as project advisors, and many VVAW members have supported our efforts to make this film through fundraising and providing archival materials and memories. Clarence's family has been involved since the beginning.

It will be shown on PBS in the New York/New Jersey/Con-

necticut area in June. We are creating an education package that will include a 53-minute video and accompanying study and viewer guides. We plan to distribute the film to a network of colleges, high schools, community organizations, veterans' groups, and libraries.

VVAW members and supporters who want to make sure that this film reaches a wide audience can help in several ways:

- Arrange a screening in your area. Contact your local PBS station and ask them to show the film.
- Contact local community groups, colleges, educational organizations, churches, veterans groups, etc., and ask them to purchase and use the film in their work.
- Help us continue our fundraising efforts to support the distribution of "Another Brother."

Clarence Fitch was an inspiration to hundreds of young people who witnessed his strength, resilience, and clarity of vision. "Another Brother" will carry on his work.

For more information about this project contact:

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Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

I see that Gulf War II has been postponed for a while so the evening news can concentrate on Monica. In this latest Gulf-goround, none of the players were righteous. Apparently Saddam was continuing to produce biological and chemical weapons. Unlike many dictators, he has used these weapons. That scared other governments, but it shouldn't have. Remember, he used them only for his benefactors. That was back at a time when he was an ally of the United States. Maybe he was only trying to emulate his

benefactors.

Clinton certainly didn't look good either, and that applies even if you supported the US using force. Until the Secretary General of the United Nations bailed his ass out, he was on his way to another little war. That of course would have meant a lot of dead civilians plus a few American dead.

Dead civilians are acceptable by historians if you accomplish something — or get to write the history. In this situation, Clinton couldn't accomplish any-

thing because there are only two military targets. One is to terminate Saddam Hussein. This could only happen with lots of dead American soldiers, and Clinton don't want to go there. The other acceptable target would be the chemical and biological factories, but since he don't know where all of them are, it would not be a successful mission. The only thing that would have worked is nuking the place, but nobody this side of Madeline Albright is for that.

You remember the movie "Dr. Strangelove." It came out 25

or 30 years ago and was very popular because it made fun of nuclear war and those who would promote it. Rumor has it that it was popular with Madeline Albright too. Unlike most normal people, she liked it because she could relate to the good doctor. Unfortunately, as Secretary of State, she is the chief diplomat of the US, and diplomacy seems to be the only way out of this situation. That won't happen with her

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VVAW In Our Own Words

A REVIEW BY DAVE KETTENHOFEN

***Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, by Richard Stacewicz. (Twayne Publishers, 1997)**

On Veterans' Day, November 11, 1997, Richard Stacewicz officially released his new book, *Winter Soldiers*. I was fortunate enough to be present that evening, at a bookstore in Chicago, where Richard held a book reading and signing. Barry Romo and Mike McCain, two significant characters in the book, sat on stage alongside Richard to help field questions. The place was absolutely packed. All available copies of the book were sold within minutes and backorders were taken. It was a very uplifting experience for the many VVAW members in attendance, but even more so for Richard, I'm sure.

"We did what we did because we loved our country and wanted our country to realize that it made mistakes. I am just as patriotic as my father or my uncle or anybody." Those were the words of Jack McCloskey (1943-1996) as he explained his reasons for speaking out against the Vietnam War. In *Winter Soldiers*, Richard Stacewicz interviews thirty past and present members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War to give the reader an inside look at what has made the organization tick for the past thirty years.

The style of the retrospective interview used in the book works marvelously. Richard leads into each chapter with a brief historical background of the period, then skillfully guides the interviewee through the period with simple but excellent questions. The storytellers are given the freedom to "let go" and speak their minds — and they do. The result is a very intimate, colorful, easy to read series of memoirs. Continuity is maintained by returning to each of them as history marches on. In each successive chapter we learn a little more about the characters and are drawn into their conversations. Curiosity beckons the reader to look ahead for glimpses of other views in the forthcoming chapters.

Stacewicz begins with the

storytellers facing the prospects of war. Barry Romo says, "I thought I was going to Vietnam to save my Catholic brothers and kill communists, who were the new Nazis in the world." And Dave Cline remembers, "I recall thinking, I know that there's people saying it ain't right and stuff like that, but at the same time, I really didn't think that I was in a position to make that judgment." Some had very strong convictions, oth-

one of them: "By June 1st...we actually had our first organization meeting. I had the names of maybe two dozen people. We formed an organization utilizing the same name that was on the banner." As the war raged on through the Sixties and into the Seventies — Tet, My Lai, Cambodia, Kent State — the war protests escalated and VVAW's influence spread throughout the country with a membership of over 50,000. As

tion the group should take; some wanted to concentrate on anti-imperialist issues, others primarily on veteran issues. Participants on both sides of the debate are given the opportunity to express their positions in the book. The events that transpired took a tremendous toll on the organization but didn't kill it. "A lot of people who originally went with them [RU/RCP] said 'Fuck you,' separated, and stayed VVAW. They just couldn't control us. One thing about us: whatever kinds of infiltrators and police and whatever we had, we shed ourselves of a lot of them," recalls Bill Davis.

Many continued the fight. VVAW's focus on veterans' issues continues to this day. Agent Orange, PTSD, homelessness, VA cuts, Gulf War issues, historical revisionism, et cetera, are still problems that are being dealt with. As Mike Gold put it, "I feel that VVAW is still living. On the twenty-fifth anniversary you could really see that. There were lots and lots of people who came here and really wanted to be a part of it again."

Richard Stacewicz has put together a really fine book. Through this oral history, students of the Vietnam War are able to hear the candid voices of those who fought that dirty war and then returned home to fight the war against war. He has done a great service not only to them, but also to the men and women of VVAW. I would like to add that, in addition to the tremendous amount of research that Richard put in on this book, he has worked many long, hard volunteer hours alongside other VVAW members on various projects over the past seven years. Thank you Richard!



DAVE KETTENHOFEN IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR FOR VVAW AND MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER.

**"We did what we did because we loved our country and wanted our country to realize that it made mistakes. I am just as patriotic as my father or my uncle or anybody."
- Jack McCloskey**

ers were confused and unsure of what they should do. Most ended up basing their decisions on the strong, religious, anti-communist upbringing that was prevalent in the 1950s: America is always right, be a patriot and do what you're told.

Many diverse opinions that had existed between the young citizen-soldiers soon vanished as they were united with the common bond of opposition to the war. Innocence was lost as the young soldiers experienced the reality of war and life in the military. "It was like a bubble, a membrane in front of my brain went. I thought, What the fuck did I do? I turned 180 degrees at that instant. At that moment I changed my mind. I'm not bullshitting you. I says, Holy shit, I fucked up," recalls John Lindquist on his first day of boot camp. Stacewicz probes the vets' memories for their experiences and the reasons why they came to the conclusion that America's war was indeed wrong, and why it was patriotic to express their opposition to that war.

On April 15, 1967, in New York City, a small group of Vietnam veterans marched in a peace demonstration behind a banner that read: *Vietnam Veterans Against the War*. Jan Barry was

Mike McCain put it, "We started understanding as a group of people [that] it was easier to be a soldier than it was to be a critic of the government, of the state, of the society; but that if we were to be true citizens, that's what we had to do. You can't accept things at face value."

Stacewicz's coverage of the volatile 70s is of particular interest. VVAW's most noteworthy operations such as Dewey Canyon III, Operation RAW, the "Winter Soldier" hearings, and Operation Peace on Earth took place. We are privy to the planning and execution of these events which catapulted VVAW to the forefront of the antiwar movement and gave it a true legitimacy. Also, during this era of tremendous growth, the organization was forced to fight off heavy attacks from the government, most notably the trial of the "Gainesville Eight". Ann Hirschman says, "...you could hear John Mitchell stating in public on the radio that the Vietnam Veterans Against the War were the single most dangerous group in the United States. We scared a lot of people."

With the war nearing its end, VVAW was forced to deal with internal divisions. There were differing opinions on which direc-

History 'R' Us

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Channel aired "Choosing Sides: I Remember Vietnam," which prominently featured VVAW as a key bridge between once gung-ho GIs and the antiwar movement. Twayne Publishers issued *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, as part of an oral history series on social movements. Earlier in 1997, a detailed retrospective on VVAW's 1971 "Dewey Canyon III" encampment in the Capitol appeared in the mainstream Vietnam Veterans of America magazine.

In 1996, Rutgers University Press published a pair of academic works examining aspects of VVAW's legacy: *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era* and *Hearts and Minds: Bodies, Poetry, and Resistance in the Vietnam Era*. For years, on campuses across the country, VVAW's revolt against the Vietnam War has been the subject of Ph.D., master's, and senior honors theses. Many VVAW alumni have been repeatedly invited to speak to college and high school classes. Virtually every year for the past decade, I've been interviewed by college students, from Harvard to working class state colleges, who want to write a history project about VVAW and its legacy.

This is an incredible outcome, given the fact that the repressive powers of five presidents — LBJ, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush — were dedicated to destroying the credibility of antiwar organizations. That an officially blacklisted organization, hounded for years by the FBI and targeted for destruction by the Nixon White House, has such staying power is testimony to the integrity of its members and what they did and had to say.

Paying the highest compliment a writer can to people he has interviewed, *Winter Soldiers* author Richard Stacewicz noted in his preface: "Before conducting the interviews, I had gone through the VVAW archives, and through FBI files and the records of the Nixon administration that referred to VVAW, and I found that the speakers' narratives correlated well with the surviving written records — and with each other."

Imagine that! War veterans who tell war stories that aren't tall tales. Listening to what VVAW members had to say, Stacewicz dropped his idea of writing a book

largely based on archive documents seasoned with some veterans' quotes. "My initial plan was simply to use bits and pieces of the interviews to construct my own interpretation of the history of VVAW. As I transcribed the interviews, however, I realized that these veterans and their supporters had eloquent and powerful voices, and that they should speak for themselves. I therefore decided to develop an oral history in which the story of VVAW would be told primarily through their narratives."

Stacewicz was inspired to do a book on VVAW after witnessing Chicago police arrest Barry Romo at a January 1991 rally against the Persian Gulf war. Learning that Romo was a VVAW national coordinator, Stacewicz was astounded to realize that although he was a graduate student in American history he knew very little about VVAW. Who were these people, some of whom were still protesting wars, he wondered.

Meanwhile, Richard Moser, a doctoral candidate in American history at Rutgers University in New Jersey, was working on his book project on antiwar Vietnam vets. Like Stacewicz, Moser was fascinated by VVAW's creative twists on traditional American historic icons, especially the *Winter Soldier* idea derived from a radical rereading of Thomas Paine's Revolutionary War challenge to the "summer soldier and sunshine patriot."

"*The New Winter Soldiers* seeks to understand how thousands of American soldiers and veterans created something good from what was one of the worst experiences of their lives," he wrote. "We need to reckon with the militia movement's claim that they are the inheritors of the citizen-soldier legacy. *The New Winter Soldiers* presents the history of a vastly different development in American soldier traditions — one that turned paranoia, hate, and the glorification of weapons and war into citizen activism for social justice and peace."

Over at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania, English professor Michael Bibby spent the early 90s reading poetry of the 60s. Political poetry made him uncomfortable, but he became fascinated with "Vietnam-era activist-poets." Inspired by *Winning Hearts & Minds: War Poems by Vietnam Veterans*, "the first collection of dissident poems in US history produced by

soldiers during wartime," published by 1st Casualty Press, formed by VVAW members, Bibby titled his book *Hearts and Minds*.

Initially, Bibby had aimed "to examine the canonized poetry of the 60s" — until he discovered the "poetry of activists," such as that published in alternative press, black liberation, women's liberation, and underground GI publications. In his research, he found that academic and commercial publishers had banned antiwar poetry from mainstream literary anthologies not only in the 60s but into the 90s. The more he read, Michael Bibby wrote, the more impressed he was with "activist poets" who "sought to bridge the gap between public and private, heart and mind, and bring the war home."

Despite cringing sometimes over how interviews turn out, I'm delighted that writers and documentary makers have been drawn to investigate why and how we protested the war. One pleasure in reading these books has been learning about other VVAW activists, many of whom I never met or only knew as another participant in what had long ago become a hazy maze of antiwar actions. These books convey the spitfire eloquence and creativity of men and women who chose VVAW as their forum on Vietnam, war and peace, and other issues. I also frankly enjoyed the way VVAWers bluntly discussed internal disagreements — over tactics, politics, leadership. This is the way VVAW was, from day one.

To Richard Moser, the challenge that GI and veteran antiwar raised "radically remade the idea of American history itself." Among other things, he argues: "Perhaps the most dramatic and influential moment of the antiwar movement came when two thousand veterans collectively returned their war regalia on the steps of the United States Capitol during Dewey Canyon III." Like the changes wrought by the first citizen-soldiers, the new winter soldiers also unleashed a "shot heard 'round the world." But, VVAW did what it did without firing a shot.

What is remarkable in reading these two "winter soldier" studies of VVAW is how vets who had just come home from an orgy of violence insisted that what VVAW was about was finding nonviolent ways to end the war

and promote social change.

When six of us sat down to formally found VVAW on June 1, 1967, just as the Six-Day War broke out in the Mideast, we had no way to enforce that shared belief. We had no notion of the concept of conflict resolution. We only knew that military actions we had been a part of had not worked, indeed had backfired. Living in New York City, we experienced the smoldering violence in urban neighborhoods treated by police as though they were Viet Cong villages. We knew we had to address and challenge the root causes of war in Vietnam and government-sponsored violence at home. We set out to find effective ways to fight for our sense that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" included Vietnamese and Americans, friends and foes. It was a radical idea, one that shook up the federal government, traditional American society, and leftist partisans in the peace movement.

"This is a book about ideas-in-action," Richard Moser wrote, after interviewing some 75 antiwar Vietnam veterans, whose accounts excited him to investigate a phenomenon that he felt stood the traditional notion of history on its head. "Free from military restraints, [war] veterans articulated a broad and mature vision of peace and social justice."

Independently examining myriad actions by VVAW members and former members in communities across America, Richard Stacewicz came to a similar perspective. "VVAW was plagued by internal dissension. But many veterans saw that as part of their commitment not only to ending the war but also to what they considered true democracy," he wrote. "In addition to veterans' causes, antiwar veterans who became affiliated with VVAW branched out to address many other national and community issues. Indeed, this is perhaps the greatest legacy of the VVAW," Stacewicz stated in his summary.

I'm looking forward to some new book or video examining VVAW's continuing work-in-progress.



JAN BARRY CRUMB WAS VVAW'S FOUNDING NATIONAL PRESIDENT, 1967-71. A COEDITOR OF *WINNING HEARTS & MINDS*, HE IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN NEW JERSEY.

Thirty Years Ago

BARRY ROMO

Thirty years ago, I was sitting at Chu Lai base camp getting totally and completely drunk. I had spent the last eight months with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade as platoon leader and staff officer. Had survived the field, and the Tet. I was now being "infused" (transferred) to a new brigade fresh from the States, along with a bunch of seasoned officers and NCOs. They were short on combat leaders so we were supposed to infuse experience into the cherry unit.

We were briefed by Division staff officers about the terrain, the enemy and the unit. The 11th Inf. Bde. had been trained in the jungles of Hawaii (the 196th had been trained in the jungle snows of Massachusetts); it was also the only brigade trained in amphibious landings in the army.

The Division staff officers were proud of this and the unit's body count, while we were talking, in fact, a battalion-sized task force. TC Backer (named after its commander, a Major Backer) was racking up the body count. Five hundred confirmed VC/NVA bodies! My friends and I were jolted to sobriety. Five hundred confirmed enemy bodies? Startled, one of us asked, "How many friendly casualties?" The Colonel answered with pride, "Only one American — a machine gunner who shot himself in the foot." Well, that didn't make sense to us. Five hundred to one? So another of us asked, "How many weapons did you take off the VC?"

"Well," answered the Colonel, "three."

Even our military brains knew in an instant what was hap-

pening. Five hundred body count, only three weapons and only one self-inflicted wounded American. One of us said, "They're killing civilians, aren't they?"

The proud Colonel didn't answer, he just ended the briefing and sent us to Lieutenant Calley's 11th Brigade, around My Lai.

Another Division staff officer, with one tour under his belt, made the initial Division investigation into a reported massacre at My Lai. The finding by Major Colin Powell was that no massacre had occurred, case closed.


Which brings me to Monica Lewinsky. Here's a woman who wanted no publicity, no book deals, no 'Hard Copy'. And because she didn't want to be questioned about her sexual activity, she's being hounded by the press and prosecutors. Not even old Joe

McCarthy called in mothers to question them about their daughters.

All this on the 30th anniversary of the My Lai massacre.

Why hasn't the press gone after that mass murderer, former Lt. Calley? They know where he is: working outside Fort Benning, Georgia, selling cheap jewelry at inflated prices to army trainees. Where are 'Hard Copy' and Geraldo and CNN and all the rest? Respecting Lt. William Calley, Jr.'s privacy!

Since when does a child murderer have privacy? And what about the Major who became a General, the Chairman, who did not see, could not find, was nowhere around? Shouldn't they be questioned at least by the press?

Isn't covering up a crime a crime? 

Dispatches from Firebase K.C.

DOC UPTON

Viet Med

Firebase KC member Regina Ancola-Upton, RN, CCRN, spent last Veterans' Day in Vietnam on a medical mission. Look for her article elsewhere in this issue.

Iraq Vigil

On Sunday, February 15, the day before Koffi Annan announced the present agreement with the government of Iraq, VVAW was one of several organizations that took part in a "Vigil for Diplomatic Solutions to the Iraqi Standoff" at Kansas City's J.C. Nichols Fountain. About one hundred people (representing the American Friends Service Committee, American Muslim Council, Catholics for Justice, Alliance for Democracy, Pastors for Peace, PeaceWorks, Veterans for Peace, and VVAW) carried signs, sang songs, and beat drums along one of Kansas City's busiest thorough-

fares.

One speaker from each of the co-sponsoring organizations addressed the gathering, and "Diplomacy, Not Bombs" was the common theme. Other points brought forward included: "Military action will only cause loss of life and escalate the conflict"; "Military action will increase support for Saddam Hussein"; "Military action increases the risk of chemical disaster"; "Military action may end the weapons inspection program"; and "Military action will increase anti-US feelings in the region." Several speakers stressed that if the UN and the Iraqi government reached an agreement Saddam Hussein must comply with it.

It was agreed that the Vigil would continue on a weekly basis, "until the threat of U.S. bombing has ended" — and small contingents have been at the Fountain

every Sunday since.

Nine Years


The Vietnam Veterans Radio Network (the Arts, Education and Service project of VVAW-Firebase KC) will mark the ninth anniversary of its weekly half-hour transmissions "from behind the lines of Hypocrisy and Revisionism" on July 14.

VVRN is currently transmitted by, and provided free of charge to, community, university, and other non-commercial FM radio stations in the United States, Canada, and Belgium...and worldwide via short-wave from Radio For Peace International in Costa Rica. Joe Bernard, RFPI's Program Director, has described VVRN as "forthright in its criticism of US involvement in the Vietnam War and those that followed. Its provocative message is interspersed with music of the era,

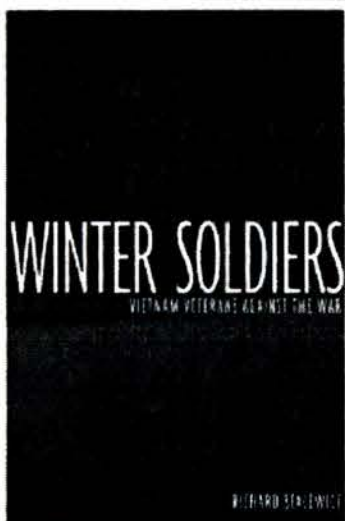
giving life and memory to the words...a program unique and sometimes shocking in nature." For complete information on RFPI, its broadcast frequencies, and quarterly program schedule on the Web, consult:

<http://www.clark.net/pub/cwilkins/rfpi/rfpi.html>

VVRN is now available by subscription, produces fundraising tapes for organizations, and provides individuals with free copies of the transmissions in which we use their thoughts (recorded on full-size cassettes only).

VVRN is VVAW's voice on the airwaves. Use it, and that's an order! Send your taped thoughts to VVRN, 7807 North Avalon, Kansas City, MO 64152, or call (816) 587-5966. 

DOC UPTON IS MIDWEST REGIONAL COORDINATOR FOR VVAW.



Winter Soldiers

An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War

by Richard Stacewicz

Winter Soldiers asks why some of the Americans who served in Vietnam returned home to oppose the war. Growing up in the shadows of World War II, these young men volunteered or were drafted as "citizen soldiers." But their patriotic fervor was shaken by the brutal realities of this war. Back in the US they joined the antiwar movement and, as soldiers who had actually fought, they could not be dismissed as draft dodgers. Stacewicz seeks to tell their story by interviewing over thirty members of the VVAW and drawing on their archives, FBI files, and Nixon Administration records.

1997 • 0-8057-4579-3 • 356 pages • 40 illustrations • cloth • \$30.00

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UPS Strike

BILL DAVIS

Last summer's Teamster strike against United Parcel Service (UPS) was at once a stunning victory for organized labor but also a reason for hope on the part of the 'newly disenfranchised' — the armies of underpaid part-time workers. Viewed by the multinational corporations and growing service industry as a deep and expendable labor pool, part-time workers stepped into the spotlight.

From the time the 120,000 International Brotherhood of Teamsters members at UPS walked off the job and struck UPS in the first week of August '97, UPS, the international package giant, was reeling, beat at its own game of media manipulation and public relations. Formed in 1906, UPS has grown steadily to control upwards of 70% to 80% of daily shipped ground packages in the US and an increasing share of the air shipping market. In direct proportion, UPS has grown to 180,000 workers in the US alone.

In the early '70s, about 15% of UPS's employees worked part time. Now over 70% of its employees are part-timers, not unlike the growth in all industries worldwide. Unfortunately for these UPS part-timers and their equals everywhere, wages and benefits have not kept up with the growth in their ranks.

The American public quickly sided with the Teamster strikers, given their own experience with a

burgeoning economy that offered few full-time jobs but a raft of casual, temp, or part-time 'situations'. Few were more surprised by the popular support than the beleaguered IBT led by President Ron Carey, himself a former UPS driver.

The IBT, long reviled in print, politics, and film as the very embodiment of corrupt unions, under a coalition of East and West Coast teamsters and Teamsters For a Democratic Union (TDU) activists led by New York Teamster local leader Ron Carey had wrested control, through elections, away from many of the 'old guard' Teamster bosses by a slim margin. Young, energetic, and diverse, the Teamsters faced off in the media against a smooth, smarmy and conservative UPS.

UPS, long accustomed to the role of media darling, the friendly brown giant, was stunned to find itself cast in the role of villain. In spite of millions spent on advertising and bankrolling a huge stable of Congress members to do their bidding on labor and safety issues, UPS's PR 'suits' came off wooden and dogmatic before the media and public. The American public had fallen for UPS's own 'ambassadors of service', the drivers and package handlers — their friends, neighbors, and children. The 'underemployed' work force of the 'service economy' flexed its muscle, perhaps for the first

time.

After three high-profile weeks of massive picketing, stirring rallies, and acts of solidarity from the broad AFL-CIO family, UPS declared victory in the negotiations and crumbled. UPS had pumped its lower and middle level management full of hang-tough, we're-in-it-to-the-bitter-end optimism — then abruptly pulled the plug and declared the new five-year contract length their major goal, forsaking any further talk of pension control, health care, and union busting. The Teamsters returned to work with their original health care plan in place, control of their own pension funds, and language to implement a plan for converting more part-time jobs to full time and with increased benefits and pay across the board.

Recent events have taken a little sparkle off the victory. UPS, determined to prove the axiom that "mean people do, indeed, suck," embarked on a program of petty and vindictive retribution when the workers returned. Teamster President Ron Carey has stepped down from office under allegations of fund mismanagement. With Carey disqualified for reelection, the progressive slate faces a challenge from Jimmy Hoffa, Jr. for future control of the Teamsters. In April Hoffa was declared eligible to run for General President in the upcoming election, despite having been

found guilty of numerous examples of misconduct. His campaign has been fined thousands of dollars, and his chief strategist, Richard Leebove, was barred from participating in any further election activity, but it's clear that Hoffa's campaign isn't as nice a target for Congress as Carey's was. Running against Hoffa will be Ken Hall, who was co-chair of the negotiation committee during the UPS strike.

Many secondary contract struggles (such as health care) drag on. UPS, crying poor, recorded their most profitable quarter in history following the strike, raising the privately held stock twice and showing deep pockets when challenging labor issues.

Clearly though, the pendulum has swung to labor this time. Fresh on the heels of the Teamster win, other unions such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) drew strength from the popular victory and have begun making inroads into the vast labor reserves known as the part-time workers.



BILL DAVIS IS A VIETNAM VET, FORMER US AIR FORCE STAFF SGT. AND CHIEF STEWARD FOR THREE NORTHERN ILLINOIS DISTRICTS OF UPS IN LOCAL 701 I.A.M. & A.W. DAVIS HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VVAW FOR 28 YEARS.

My Lai

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Calley was found guilty of the premeditated murder of at least thirty-three Vietnamese non-combatants (after being charged with personally killing 109). He was dishonorably discharged and sentenced to life in Leavenworth. The sentence was reduced to twenty years by President Nixon.

Calley served three years under house arrest, and was then pardoned by Nixon.

In February 1971 Vietnam Veterans Against the War conducted the Winter Soldier Investigation: testimony by veterans who participated in war crimes, showing that the use of terror and mass destruction tactics against civilians was pervasive, and resulted directly from U.S. war policy.

Calley's trial ended in April

1971. Less than a month later VVAW protested, on the steps outside Congress, by discarding their wartime decorations and denouncing their participation in the war.

Opinions about the causes, effects and lessons learned from the My Lai massacre vary widely. It seems that only now, after thirty years, has the initial shock faded and knee-jerk attitudes softened enough to allow the incident at My Lai to be put into perspective. The Vietnamese, while remembering the negatives of the past, tend to focus more on the positive aspects of the future.

The Soldier's Medal, America's highest non-combat military award, was recently given to ex-Warrant Officer Hugh Th-

ompson who flew his light helicopter into the middle of the horror. Placing the chopper between the GIs and the civilians, he ordered his crew to shoot American troops if necessary, and flew numerous young children to a nearby hospital. He had earlier received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions that day.

Thompson refused to accept the Soldier's Medal unless it was presented in public, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall, and successfully demanded that his crew be awarded the same medal.

In Vietnam, March 16, 1998 brought the dedication of a Vietnam-American Peace Park. Built by veterans who at one time fought each other, the 4.5 acre park is the latest effort to improve the economy of the My Lai area led by American veteran Mike Boehm and assisted by the Quakers. Included in the recovery and recon-

ciliation efforts are a revolving loan fund, improvements to the local hospital, and raising funds to build a new school.

These efforts are ongoing. Please specify "My Lai Projects" on your check.

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For more information, contact:
Mike Boehm
phone: (608)244-9505
fax: (608)251-5457
email: vapp@igc.apc.org



JOHN ZUTZ IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER AND FORMER VVAW REGIONAL COORDINATOR.

Medical Mission Possible: Vietnam

continued from page 1

perform the surgeries and provide the care that our long-deprived patients required. Yet working side by side with our Vietnamese hosts we overcame the obstacles (language, few operating rooms) and repaired the cleft palates and/or cleft lips of twenty-eight Vietnamese children and a 29-year-old adult's cleft palate.

On the last day of our mission, which had added a new dimension to our lives, the physicians and staff of Da Nang Hospital bid goodbye to each of us during a simple luncheon. Their carefully prepared and delivered speeches touched everyone, and feelings of sadness and gladness mixed together to make us cry. In his parting words, one of the Vietnamese physicians told us, "Each of you has sacrificed your time to share your talents...Treasure the experience, and thus, the meaning of life."

It started before him, but it is evident that since President Clinton's lifting of the unjust and immoral embargo, Vietnam is moving rapidly to liberalize its economy and attract foreign investment. After centuries of war, occupation and partition, a united Vietnam is emerging as Asia's most exciting new frontier for business and tourism.

We made the most of our free time, and our tour guide, Song, patiently guided our city-to-city bus rides through mountainous passes, past magnificent temples and ruins, and along the white beaches.

The Vietnamese people are warm, friendly, and cosmopolitan. And Vietnamese culture is undergoing a renaissance, marked by the reappearance of traditional dances and unique musical instruments unseen throughout the war years.



Regina (right) and another MMF RN take a break on the bus ride from Hue to Da Nang.

Upon seeing a disabled veteran of the American War, proudly wearing his tattered field jacket and selling replicas of NVA pith helmets, I wondered if he might have fought against my husband in '69. I wondered how things could have been if the American government had allowed

Vietnam's national unification elections, scheduled for July 20,



REGINA UPTON, RN, CCRN, IS A MEMBER OF VVAW'S KANSAS CITY CHAPTER, MOTHER OF VVAW MEMBER NIKKI UPTON, AND WIFE OF VVAW'S MIDWEST COORDINATOR DOC UPTON.

VVAW's Midwest Region Meets

JOE MILLER

At the 1997 National Steering Committee Meeting (NSCM) in Chicago, there was much discussion about new and returning VVAW members and the need to reinvigorate our regions across the country.

It was decided the Midwest Region should have its meeting in an area that might allow for greater participation by those who find it difficult to get to Chicago or Milwaukee. The folks in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois offered to host this meeting on April 25, 1998.

In preparation for the event, a new VVAW Chapter was established in Champaign-Urbana (C-U) on February 28, at which time we discussed tentative plans for the Regional gathering. These included housing for those who needed it, food and drink for the meeting, and a public event that would follow, enabling the crew of young political activists who have been working with VVAW over the past few years to meet folks from outside C-U and Chicago.

The Regional meeting was a great success. We had sixteen folks from C-U, Milwaukee, Chicago, Eau Claire (Wisconsin), St. Louis, and Tuscola (Illinois). A solid agenda had been worked out through e-mail and other communication by the two facilitators, Lisa Dixon and Claudia Lennhoff,

and it all ran smoothly for four hours straight.

In addition to the detailed and energizing Chapter reports, there was a National Office report from Barry Romo (Chicago). People were reminded that the next NSCM has been set for October 31, 1998, in Chicago, and that much of the business discussed at this and other Regional meetings should be brought forward to that gathering for further discussion and decision.

A central part of this meeting concerned *The Veteran*, since the editorial collective responsible for the paper lives and works in Champaign-Urbana. There was a review of the articles to be printed and the timeline of publication. Serious discussion took place concerning the problem of distribution at the regional levels, revisiting the discussion that we had at the last NSCM. This led to a review of the status of the VVAW database (to be housed in C-U) and fundraising efforts, and it was agreed that a national mailing should be attempted sometime this summer in order to check the validity of addresses we had. Also, work on a new membership card would be brought to the next NSCM, with a mock-up of the new card to be ready by July 15.

In response to the great amount of youth organizing done

by the C-U Chapter, with immeasurable assistance from the Chicago Chapter, there was a discussion of the role that can be played by VVAW in training young social justice activists. The point was made that we in VVAW seem to be able to relate well with youth, perhaps because of our own arrested development.

The remainder of the meeting consisted of a broad discussion of the role of the Internet in organizing, its strengths and its dangers. Since the VVAW web page and the new e-mail lists are located in Champaign-Urbana, this was a very important issue to review. The next National meeting will be dealing with this and many of the other issues raised at this Midwest gathering.

Following the meeting, we set up for a panel discussion entitled "Keeping the Vietnam Syndrome Alive." This was meant to be a public event at which VVAW members could meet some of the local activists. We had VVAW members on the panel that ranged from World War II through Korea and Vietnam to one of our most recent members, a former Navy officer who left service in 1995 and is now doing work on the campaign to ban land mines.

Though the crowd was not as big as we had hoped, those in attendance learned just how far

and how deep VVAW's experience goes. Folks were enraptured by the range of stories and the clear depth of commitment to social change reflected in those stories.

One of our members, a young woman who is a Gulf War veteran, drove three hours from her current home in Galesburg, Illinois to attend this panel. We were all glad to see her, and she knows she has a real community with VVAW. Toward the end of the panel discussion, she finally raised her hand and asked, "Does it (the pain of memory) ever go away?" Then she broke into tears. She was immediately surrounded by her VVAW comrades, all of us in tears as well. The answer to her question was our embrace, as an organization that is made up of survivors who have made it a lifetime commitment to fight back whenever young men and women like herself are sent into harm's way, then forgotten.

This is why we do what we have been doing for more than thirty years, folks. This Midwest meeting and the events following reinforced that in everyone who was there. It would be a great thing if we could have regular regional reports like this in every subsequent issue of *The Veteran*. There is still a lot of work to be done. Let's get to it!



Conference on the Elimination of Racist Mascots

BROOKE ANDERSON

Chief Illiniwek, the mascot and logo of the University of Illinois, by mocking the sacred rituals and symbols that give meaning to the lives of Native peoples, degrades Native Americans on the U of I campus and nationwide. Such halftime minstrel shows are a significant obstacle to Native peoples' efforts to forge modern and individual identities and maintain pride in their diverse cultural traditions. Chief Illiniwek and other racist mascots have devastating effects on Native American students, faculty, and staff on this campus and everywhere. The movement to end this racist tradition has become a focal point for activists on the University of Illinois campus, and has drawn attention from international human rights organizations.

On the weekend of April 3, 1998, anti-racist activists, artists, and academics from all over the country came to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the first national Conference on the Elimination of Racist Mascots (CERM). The conference was sponsored by the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative (PRC), People Against Racism (PAR), Alumni Against Racist Mascots (AARM), the Native American Students Organization (NASO), and the National Coalition on Racism in Sports and the Media (NCRSM). CERM was also endorsed by more than thirty campus and community organizations, studies programs, cultural houses, University departments, businesses, and churches. Vietnam Veterans Against the War was one of these fine organizations. Conference organizers included VVAW members Jeff Machota, Joe Miller, Jim Holiman and Lisa Dixon.

Over sixty panelists and keynote speakers participated, includ-

ing Charlene Teters, founder of the anti-Chief movement; Kenneth Stern of the American Jewish committee; Gary Brouse, Director of the Interfaith Council for Corporate Responsibility; Clyde Bellecourt, founder and Director of the American Indian Movement; Vernon Bellecourt, spokesperson for the American Indian Movement; Billy Mills, 1964 Olympic Gold Medal winner; and

cot and logo.

A Friday night panel discussion, "Dialogue on the Elimination of Racist Mascots," attracted a crowd of five hundred. Nearly three hundred people attended the actual conference the next day. The conference was also covered by every Champaign-Urbana media outlet as well as by the Associated Press, United Press International, CBS Radio and the Brit-

conference, and especially to our good VVAW friends, Barry Romo and Bill Branson, who generously donated their time to train security personnel for the conference, lent us radio headsets, and served as a reserve security team. Thanks, Bill and Barry!

To obtain a booklet containing CERM resolutions or to purchase video or audio recordings of any of the panel sessions, please



Speakers and presenters from CERM (VVAW guys in the white caps, of course).

Floyd Red Crow Westerman from "Dances With Wolves."

The conference consisted of a series of workshops and panel discussions to explore issues of importance to anti-racism activists, especially in respect to national and local movements to end the use of racist mascots. Through these workshops we were able to create a national unified front against the degradation and misrepresentation of Native peoples, enhance the effectiveness of our strategies, and more powerfully demand the establishment of a Native American studies program and cultural house, recruitment and retention of American Indian students, faculty, and staff and the immediate and unconditional removal of the Chief Illiniwek mas-

ish Broadcasting Company.

The reality and magnitude of CERM is evidence that together we have won the support of people of conscience everywhere. This conference was a tremendous inspiration to all who participated, and hopefully such energy will drive this movement and others forward toward the realization of our goals. CERM was also an incredible opportunity to network with activists across the nation, and we hope to continue to work with our friends and allies, not just on anti-racist mascot issues but on all issues of social justice.

But none of this would have been possible without the support of our allies, like VVAW. Special thanks to Vietnam Veterans Against the War for endorsing the

email Brooke at baanders@uiuc.edu or call the PRC office at (217) 352-9782. More information about the PRC and the anti-Chief movement can be found at: <http://www.prairienet.org/prc>



BROOKE ANDERSON IS A SOPHOMORE IN PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS. HER POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT INCLUDES THE COALITION TO STOP MEDICAL WASTE INCINERATION, THE STUDENT ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION COALITION, AND THE FREE BURMA COALITION. SHE CURRENTLY WORKS WITH THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ACTION COOPERATIVE.

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On Teaching High School Students About the Vietnam War

JOAN DAVIS

One of my students from last year ran up to me in the hall and asked excitedly, "Ms. Davis, did you see the story about Hugh Thompson in the newspaper?" This made my day. Not only did he remember our unit on Vietnam and the mock trial we did about My Lai, but he was excited to see the recognition, although belated, that a real Vietnam veteran hero deserved. Learning about Vietnam made a difference to him and his understanding of our country's history.

I have taught United States history for ten years in a Chicago suburban high school. Though the community is a predominantly white, conservative town, I have been fortunate to work in a progressive social studies department that has given me great freedom to teach what I feel is important using my preferred method of instruction. As a Sixties activist and veteran of the antiwar movement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I clearly believed when I started teaching that Vietnam must be taught thoroughly and that certain lessons from that war must be shared with my students. I tell this to my students at the beginning of the unit so that they understand my perspective from the start. Social studies teachers — and all teachers — should share their beliefs with their students and not pretend to be teaching some supposedly "objective" history. All teachers have a point of view. Our textbooks and other resources we choose to incorporate in our courses are not ideologically neutral. On the other hand, we should not be afraid to expose our students to alternative views as they struggle to develop their own understanding of history.

Over the past ten years certain aspects of teaching about Vietnam have changed, while others have remained the same. Students are still extremely interested in learning about Vietnam. This is especially helpful since many students consider required US history to be one of their worst courses, having suffered through watered-down US history classes in the earlier grades. Students still come into the class with a lack of information or a great deal of misinformation concerning Vietnam. Students still have relatives who

were involved in some way with Vietnam, although in ten years it is starting to become ancient history to students who have a very short historical perspective. What has changed is that students no longer come in with a strong anti-communist bias. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, students today have only a vague understanding of the Cold War ideology that permeated the interpretation of history. This makes teaching the

ers assume — especially new teachers. Generally, there is an assigned textbook and a general outline of content, but within the four walls of a classroom very few eyes are watching what you do. If students are learning and positive feedback is being received, teachers must take the risk of teaching what needs to be taught, and clearly that is Vietnam. If teachers look critically at what is taught in the course of the year, most will be

Emphasis must be placed on the courageous actions of the Vietnamese people and those at home who protested the unfair policies. This long and determined struggle helped change the course of history.

war somewhat easier because there are fewer preconceptions of what this conflict was about.

Teaching Vietnam needs to be put in a broader perspective, and I feel that the topical approach to history that I use helps. Students have been exposed to US history in the earlier grades, and rather than creating a course that seems to be a repeat of what they already have been taught, I use a thematic approach. Through earlier units students have already been exposed to the concept that much of what is good about this country has come from people assembling to demand their fair share of the so-called American Dream. Through a study of Native American issues, the labor movement and the civil rights movement, students have an understanding that, by the 1960s, people were demanding that their government fulfill its mission of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" for all its people. They are somewhat aware that during this tumultuous time the Vietnam conflict broke out and made people even fight even harder.

I find that a minimum of three weeks is needed to teach Vietnam in any depth. Teachers may not have the freedom to spend this much time on Vietnam, but, based on my experience, I think there is far more freedom than many teach-

able to find areas where material can be omitted. Within the context of Vietnam, many lessons can be incorporated that address broader US history issues. I strongly feel that less than three weeks can give students a taste of the conflict, but one which will not remain with them for very long.

What can be covered in just three weeks? There are thousands of resources to use in teaching Vietnam. If a teacher has had little study of this period, I would recommend Marilyn Young's *The Vietnam Wars*. Although it is fairly dense, it is extremely readable and full of material that could be excerpted for the classroom. The chapter on Vietnam in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* is an excellent summary to start with to get an overall perspective (and highly praised in the very popular movie "Good Will Hunting"). Clearly, the better-educated the teacher, the better the instruction will be. The assigned textbook may or may not be helpful. We recently adopted *The American Odyssey* (written by Gary Nash), and its chapters on Vietnam are excellent.

Apart from the necessary written information, Vietnam must come alive to the students. This can be done by using excerpts from the PBS multi-volume documentary, "The Vietnam War." Joe

McDonald's (of Country Joe and the Fish) "The Vietnam Experience" is a 30-minute music video that works as a great opener to the unit, combining footage of the conflict here and abroad with powerful music. "The War at Home" documents the antiwar movement at the University of Wisconsin-Madison while incorporating it within a broader perspective. Feature films certainly are effective, but it is often difficult to decide which to use. I have found that "Platoon" works well in the classroom and raises many of the important questions that students need to discuss. Outside assignments such as book reports or movie reviews are also a way to increase information without taking time from class.

I also involve students in a mock trial of My Lai to determine the guilt or innocence of Lieutenant Calley. This activity culminates with a viewing of the documentary "Remember My Lai." As mentioned previously, when Hugh Thompson was recently awarded the Soldier's Medal several of my former students were really excited and knew why he deserved it. Students can also be encouraged to raise money for the My Lai Peace Park and to realize that activism is still very much needed today. If there is a Vietnamese community nearby, ties with that community could be developed.

The most important teaching tools have been the personal accounts of veterans and activists who have come to school and shared their stories. I have worked with several teachers to do a full day in-school field trip (we call it a "teach-in") in which we brought in speakers to tell their stories. Since I am a member of VVAW, I am fortunate to have personal contacts with excellent speakers, but don't be afraid to access your students' resources. Often fathers or other relatives are willing to come in and seldom do they paint an untrue picture of the conflict. Of course there are always people with their own agendas, but those people are becoming fewer and fewer. People might not have a developed political perspective, but if their stories are honest they are always very powerful. Including interview assignments is another way to encourage that stories are shared. I invariably have students who did not know their fathers were in Vietnam until they asked. With distance from the conflict, some are now ready to share their experiences with their children.

If a variety of resources are used, teaching about Vietnam will be exciting to your students. There is one problem to be aware of, especially when young people today are so cynical about the world, and especially about our government. As they

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Teaching the Vietnam War

W.D. EHRHART

From *In the Shadow of Vietnam: Essays, 1977-1991*. (McFarland, 1991)

"His voice trailed off as though it were the end of an early-morning party, with wine bottles and beer bottles lined up along the windowsills and across the floor and everybody out of cigarettes."

Imagine the man who belongs to that voice. What do you conjure? Bone-deep physical exhaustion, perhaps. A soul too weary for anything but a kind of hollow resignation. The party's over, but there is nowhere else to go, nothing to look forward to. All that remains, like lingering cigarette smoke and the odor of stale alcohol floating heavily in the still air, is silence, thick and deep and all but impenetrable.

That sentence, buried in the early pages of Larry Heinemann's superb novel of the Vietnam war, *Close Quarters*, is, in my estimation, one of the most powerful and evocative sentences pen ever put to paper. In thirty-five words, Heinemann graphically offers readers a frightening glimpse of the cost of war, the toll war takes on the human psyche. It is a hard nugget of truth, capable of breaking teeth and impossible to swallow whole. One cannot read sentences like that without being brought up short, without confronting the reality behind the generations of mythology and rhetoric that propel young men (and now women, too) to the killing fields. Indeed, if one wants to know the essence of war, how it feels and smells and tastes, what it does to those who are scorched by its flames, one is likely to find more truth in literature than in any history ever written.

But of course, most people today read neither history nor literature. In my class on Vietnam War Literature this past semester, I took a poll on the first day: fewer than half a dozen students had ever read a book about the Vietnam war. But every single student in the class had seen at least half a dozen commercial movies about the war. And for most of my students, all but one under the age of 35, those movies, together with several popular television shows and a few vague childhood memories, constituted the sum total of their knowledge about the most turbulent event in US history since the Civil War.

For those of us who lived through those years, especially those of us who came of age during those years and were deeply affected by Vietnam, it seems impossible that the stuff and substance of our lives could be for others nothing more than history, as remote and inaccessible as the siege of Troy, perceived only through the distorted lens of the glitz-and-glitter world of Hollywood. But succeeding generations cannot absorb

the experience of previous generations by osmosis.

That is why I teach the Vietnam war. I think it is important. I think people ought to know what happened and why. Here is the course I taught this past semester for the William Joiner Center at the University of Massachusetts at Boston (I taught it as a literature course, but it can just as easily be taught as history using virtually the same materials):

I begin my course with a history book: George Herring's *America's Longest War*. Because my students generally know nothing worth knowing about Vietnam, it is essential to offer them at least enough basic history to allow them to place the literature into some kind of historical con-

... it seems impossible that the stuff and substance of our lives could be for others nothing more than history ...

text. We read Herring a chapter or two at a time, just prior to which-ever book corresponds to that period of the war. I have disagreements with Herring; I would prefer to use Michael Maclear's *The Ten Thousand Day War*, but it is too massive and detailed to use in conjunction with the eight additional books I assign. Herring's book is the best short history that I have come across.

After reading Herring's chapter on the French Indochina War, we begin the literature with Graham Greene's novel *The Quiet American*, set in 1952 and written in 1954. This book is undoubtedly the most remarkable book ever written about the war. That an English journalist could see so clearly and dispassionately the whole terrible disaster into which the United States even then was so energetically and blindly hurling itself is only slightly less amazing than the fact that no one who mattered paid the slightest attention to Greene's warning.

Next we read Tran Van Dinh's *No Passenger on the River*, a novel set mostly in Vietnam in 1963, and written within a year after the overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem, which is the climax of the book. Long out of print, Dinh's

book was just republished in 1989. In the past, I have used Smith Hempstone's *A Tract of Time*, which deals with the same period, but Dinh's book offers the advantage of a Vietnamese point of view, something that remains hard to come by in the literature available in English. The students also read the poetry of Jan Barry, who served in Vietnam as a young enlisted soldier in 1962. (All the poetry in the course is taken from *Carrying the Darkness: The Poetry of the Vietnam War*, Texas Tech University Press, 1989.)

Larry Heinemann's *Close Quarters*, set in 1967-68, comes next. This is perhaps the hardest

selection to make because the overwhelming majority of books about the war are written by veterans and deal with the American combat experience. Many of these books, both novels and memoirs, are very good. (One thinks immediately of Philip Caputo's *A Rumor of War* or Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*.) But "the Vietnam experience," it seems to me, is in fact much larger than the simple story of American boys slogging through the paddy fields, however compelling that story may be. One book on that aspect of the war is enough. And if I can only use one, it has to be *Close Quarters*.

All through the 1980s, as the public image of the Vietnam veteran was transformed from drug-crazed psychopath to cultural icon, I have been wondering how long the rest of the "Vietnam generation" would stand silently on the sidelines, allowing popular culture to obliterate the fact that the overwhelming majority of my generation did not serve in Vietnam, though many were nevertheless touched, and sometimes deeply affected, by the war. Finally, in 1988, *Saigon, Illinois* appeared. The novel's author, Paul Hoover, was a legal conscientious



objector during the war who did alternative service in a Chicago hospital. The book is funny, sensitive and honest, giving at last a credible voice to those who chose not to go, or at least to one significant segment of that group. In conjunction with *Saigon, Illinois*, we also read poems by others of my generation who did not go: Christopher Bursk, Charles Fishman, James Moore, Bill Tremblay and Tom Wayman.

It is a little awkward, for me and my students both, to teach my writing, but I do, and it is usually very rewarding and enlightening for all of us. The book I use most often is *Passing Time*, a nonfiction memoir that covers the years immediately after I returned from Vietnam, roughly 1969-74. While there is no shortage of books about the combat experience, as I said, books which deal at length with the aftermath of the war for those who fought it are still relatively few (one of the best is William Crapser's extended short story "Wild Child," which appears in his collection *Remains*), and that part of the experience is important, as any vet will tell you: in Vietnam, no matter how bad things got, you could always look forward to your rotation date, but once you got back to The World, there you were, and you just had to get by as best you could. It wasn't easy, and for many vets, the passing years have not made it any easier.

By this time, we've read all of Herring, chapter by chapter, and we move on to a concentrated discussion of the poetry of John Balaban, D. F. Brown, Horace Coleman, Bryan Alec Floyd, Yusef Komunyakaa, Walter McDonald, Basil T. Paquet and Bruce Weigl. Long before they reach college, most students are

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Teaching the Vietnam War

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convinced that poetry is either boring or inaccessible or both. But I can't teach a Vietnam course without resorting to poetry. The poetry written about Vietnam is both plainspoken and eloquent. If your students think they don't like poetry, or can't understand it, have them read some of this stuff; it'll blow their socks off.

Vietnam affected women, too, in all sorts of ways, and I try to reflect that in my course. The book I use is Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*. Though women's literature on the war is still relatively sparse, I could easily have chosen Lynda Van Devanter's *Home Before Morning*, Patricia Walsh's *Forever Sad the Hearts*, or one of several oral histories about women in Vietnam. I chose Mason's novel, set in Kentucky in 1984, because its teenaged female protagonist is endearing and believable, because Mason's treatment of veterans is thoughtful and sympathetic, and because Mason understands intrinsically the frightening fluidity of the boundary between reality and contemporary popular culture. The ending is too easy, but you can't always have everything.

Speaking of endings, I close the course with Robert Mason's *Weapon*. Mason is the author of an excellent memoir of helicopter warfare called *Chickenhawk*, but if I used that, I'd have to drop *Close Quarters*. Moreover,

Weapon does something I can't do with *Chickenhawk*. Set in Nicaragua in 1988, *Weapon* allows me to pull the entire Vietnam experience out of history and connect it to the world we live in today. There is little value to history if one cannot demonstrate its

There is little value to history if one cannot demonstrate its relevance to the present and the future . . .

relevance to the present and the future, and that's what *Weapon* does.

That's the course, in a nutshell. It begins, as the war did, forty years ago; it ends in the present, just as the war and its aftermath have stayed with us. My students and I have also had the added advantage of classroom visits by Jan Barry, Larry Heinemann, Yusef Komunyakaa, and David V. Connolly, a Vietnam veteran and poet from South Boston. But you don't have to be a student to take this course. You can read all of these books on your own and come away with a pretty decent understanding of a very complex and unsettling time.

Certainly, the course does not cover every aspect of the war.

I would like to have spent more time on the experience of black soldiers, and had intended to use A. R. Flowers's novel *De Mojo Blues*, but the book is out of print, so the only black voices the students hear are Coleman's and Komunyakaa's. I would like to have had more literature by Vietnamese; after all, it was their country. The voices of support troops and rear echelon soldiers, ten times

elation, often a difficult and uncomfortable revelation.

But that's okay. In fact, that's the whole point. I want them to imagine, however imperfectly, the dilemma of a boy with a fresh draft notice in his hand, the weight of a rucksack after ten hours of humping the boonies, the damage high speed steel does to human flesh, the terrible anguish that is so benignly pigeonholed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Had US policymakers possessed a little imagination, they might have heeded Graham Greene's warning. Had the American people heard that voice trailing off "as though it were the end of an early-morning party, with wine bottles and beer bottles lined up along the windowsills and across the floor and everybody out of cigarettes," they might have asked a few more questions before allowing their children to be sent halfway around the world to kill and be killed. Human lives, our own or anyone else's, ought not to be squandered. A little imagination might have saved the world a whole lot of trouble. It might still. And there is nothing to stimulate the imagination like a good book.



BILL EHRHART IS A MARINE VETERAN, POET AND AUTHOR, AND LONG-TIME MEMBER OF VVAW.

On Teaching High School Students

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learn about the dishonesty of the US government in developing its aggression against Vietnam, and its dishonorable dealings with protesters and veterans, this cynicism can be increased. This is not what we as social studies teachers want to see happen. Emphasis must be

placed on the courageous actions of the Vietnamese people and those at home who protested the unfair policies. This long and determined struggle helped change the course of history. This emphasis will hopefully serve to combat cynicism and increase students'

desire to be part of changing what is still wrong with this country's uneven record in affording a just and fair society to all. Teaching about Vietnam will hopefully empower students to realize that they can do something useful. They may rethink their career choices and/or link up with other young people to work around is-

sues in their community. While not all students will take up the call, none will if there is not an attempt to teach them what they can do to make a difference.



JOAN DAVIS IS A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER AND MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.



Veterans' Day, San Francisco, 1977.

FMLN Vets Return To Poverty After The War

continued from page 1

Revolution. The town lost the mayoral race last year when the mayor went with one of the FMLN splinter groups. ARENA, the right-wing power in El Salvador, stole the election with heavy bribery and "voters" from other towns brought in by trucks.

The ex-combatants who have settled in the area formed a coffee-growing cooperative with 35 families. The cooperative is named Diaz de Enero (Tenth of January) after the date of the signing of the 1992 Peace Accords. They grow the coffee in common and have small plots on which they grow

the food that they need for survival.

Their serious problems seem to be concentrated in two areas. They have difficulty with being in touch with and expressing feelings that were suppressed during the war years. They were able to share their war experiences with me for a few hours in a special meeting, but the people who are close to them are concerned about what has been happening in their current lives. Some have abandoned families since the end of the war. Some want to forget all about the war.

While they have worked their coffee plants and soil to the point of becoming certified as organic growers, they lack the resources to get enough money out of the processing dimension of coffee production. They need a machine to remove the shells from the coffee beans. It may be a matter of only US\$1,500 to buy the machine. If that turns out to be accurate, I'll be asking for more donations. So far, I have \$500 pledged for the purchase.

I imagine anyone reading this article can identify rather strongly with what these veterans have experienced and are experiencing now. My hope is that we can develop an ongoing relation-

ship — one that can address both the emotional and the financial problems that they face. Remember our brother and sister veterans in the struggle!



JOHN POOLE SERVED IN VIETNAM FROM 1968-1969 IN CHU LAI, NEAR DA NANG, AS A SUPPLY SERGEANT FOR HQ CO. OF 123RD AVIATION BDE. OF AMERICAL DIVISION. HE'S BEEN TRAVELING TO CENTRAL AMERICA AND ACTIVE IN CENTRAL AMERICAN ISSUES SINCE 1984.

Fraggin'

continued from page 3

around.

What I am wondering about is motivation. I suspect that Saddam's defiance helps keep him in power. Remember, Iraq was a developing country. Many of its people were beginning to enjoy 20th century amenities. Then the Gulf War came along and bombed them back into the nineteenth century. Now they're poor again, and 25% of their infants die. They probably have a lot of hate for Saddam, so he provokes the US, Clinton responds, they remember the last American air attack and hate Clinton more than Saddam, who now plays the defiant hero's role.

As for the US, you always have to follow the dollar if you're looking for motivation. In the case of Iraq, the first Gulf War happened at a time when Saddam was planning to lower the price of oil and increase his sales volume. That was a no-no, and Iraq had to pay for it. That time and this time there was also a matter of saving face. Saving face has an economic component. If some country successfully rebels and exits the US-dominated market system, then others

might also be encouraged to do so. So they can't be allowed. (According to the Pentagon Papers and Robert McNamara, saving face played a large part in keeping the unwinnable war in Vietnam going for so long.)

If the basic reason for being willing to slaughter Iraqis is economic, how do individual presidents and those who support them willingly partake in the decision to slaughter? Certainly racism plays a part. After all, the Iraqis are not like (most of) us. But I think it goes deeper.

Before things got peaceful, I heard Clinton say that if we had to rain destruction on Iraq, it would be all Saddam's fault. There is no logic in that statement, but it serves (because he believes it) to absolve Clinton and friends of all moral responsibility. But it goes farther than simply absolving them. It claims that they are now instruments of morality as they understand it.

Remember when, during the situation leading up to Gulf War I, George Bush always mispronounced Saddam's name? It always sounded like Sodom as in

Sodom and Gomorra, the two biblical cities that were destroyed (including the babies) because they were evil. That came after Ronald Reagan's presidency where he referred to his enemy as the Great Satan. This is the righteousness that Clinton inherited.

Okay, congregation, get out your bibles and turn to Ezekiel, Chapter 9. The Lord is pissed at the people of Jerusalem for their sinful ways. He tells his servant Ezekiel, "Pass through the city after him and smite! Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women." Then turn to Joshua, Chapter 6, where Joshua fought the battle of Jericho (invading the land of Canaan). "Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and asses, with the edge of the sword." Inquiring minds want to know: why did they get so upset with the asses?

So, I guess it's part of our Judeo-Christian heritage to slaughter people when they're bad — and when they don't follow the American way that we know will be good for the rest of the world if they'd only listen. You have to

understand that when you're president. Either that or Ezekiel and Joshua were having oral sex with a young babe and started a war to cover their tracks.

Many people got a kick out of the movie "Wag The Dog" coming out at this time and seeming to reflect reality. A president starts a war to cover up his sexual misconduct. One commentator suggested that it was the opposite, that they created the sex scandal to cover up an embarrassing war. Actually, that makes more sense. Clinton looks like he's making love, not war. Nothing would have been accomplished by Gulf War II. And there was a bonus. His popularity rose. I guess Americans lust in their hearts like Jimmy Carter and wish that they were playing around too. So it was better he kept it in his pants, especially for the old men, young men and maidens, children and women, sheep, oxen and asses of Iraq.



BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, AUTHOR AND EDITOR OF THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION AT AMC-O'HARE. HE'S A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF VVAW.

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With the Armored Cav in Vietnam

A REVIEW BY JOEL GREENBERG

***A Hundred Miles of Bad Road: An Armored Cavalryman In Vietnam 1967-1968*, by Dwight Birdwell & Keith Nolan. (Presidio Press, 1997)**

A Hundred Miles Of Bad Road is one of the most well-written and interesting personal accounts of the Vietnam experience that I have come across.

The book brackets the period of Tet 1968. In it we get a feel for the change in the role and activities of Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry Division, the attitudes of personnel who were there earlier in the period as contrasted with those who came later, and the changes the men in this unit went through during this span of time.

This is one of the few books written about an armored unit in Vietnam, so we get a rare insight

into the experience of this facet of the war.

A unique aspect of this book is that one of its authors, Dwight Birdwell, is of Cherokee heritage. He gives us a glimpse into the prejudices and discrimination Native Americans had to face. During his time spent in Korea and Vietnam, Birdwell describes incidents he experienced because of his heritage.

One conflict Birdwell confronts is being in the rear versus being in the field. Several times he is faced with the decision of working with the Troops radio repair section in their base camp of Cu Chi; each time he elects the field. On one occasion, after a period of heavy combat during which time he was wounded, he asks his friends what he should do. He takes their advice and transfers to the radio repair section.

Soon feeling out of place in the rear, he is back on the tanks in the field.

Part of his reasoning is his belief that the US was in Vietnam to kill the enemy and that he could not do this if he was in the rear. At one point in the book, Birdwell discounts his time spent in the rear from what he considers his time in-country. The guilt feeling of not being in the field with one's friends (of letting them down and not participating in the 'real' tasks of war) is clearly described within the context of the hardships of combat and the authors' changing attitudes toward the war.

Birdwell started from an unquestioning acceptance of the war and came to the realization that people were wounded and killed because of unnecessarily risky tactics in the pursuit of nothing more than body counts and med-

als.

While this book is a positive contribution to the collection of literature on Vietnam, the authors stop short in their conclusions about the nature of the war. Despite the bravery, dedication and heroic acts by Birdwell, members of his unit and others who served in Vietnam, we have to realize that the war was wrong and the US had no business being involved in the first place. Coming to the conclusion that over 60,000 GIs and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese died for nothing is not easy. Anything short of this however, leaves the door open for future Vietnams.



JOEL GREENBERG, 501 SIG BN
101 ABN NOVEMBER '67 - JUNE
'69, IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO
CHAPTER OF VVAW.

The Tet Offensive

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fall out in the rack I was ordered to Staff Sergeant Taylor's office again. "Private Lindquist, pack your sea bag. We are sending you up north."

"North," I said. "How much further north can I go?"

"You are going to Cua Viet and you will catch a ride by the ramp in Dong Ha at the river." Luckily I'd never unpacked, but the offers of extra magazines from two other guys in the hooch gave me an uneasy feeling. When I got to the ramp I finally found out what was going on. Starting on April 29, elements of 2nd Battalion 4th Marine had found 5000 NVA from the 320th Division and the battle of Dong Ha had begun.

The initial six days of heavy fighting centered on Dai Do Hamlet, 1.5 miles northeast of Dong Ha. Heavy fighting continued till about May 16, around Nhi Ha and involved 3/9 to the west, 3rd Bn., US 21st Infantry and, once again, 2nd Bn., 4th Marines. Although greatly outnumbered, the marines prevented the 320th Division from assaulting Dong Ha Combat Base.

As I turned to the ramp I looked west on Highway 9 into the center of Dong Ha. It looked like a Vic Morrow set on combat. Two-story stucco French-style buildings half blown away. I

looked across the ramp over the river and jets were still dropping bombs and napalm. Luckily we were riding on a PBR boat — a Navy river patrol boat. Fast, light and heavily armed. The Chief had us lock and load, and lay out on the deck at various angles, and we left for Cua Viet. We passed near Dai Do as we entered the main river channel. Lots of sniper fire but no B-40 rockets until we were about two miles downstream.

Cua Viet Base was about two miles north and ten miles east of Dong Ha. It sat on the South China Sea and featured a Navy offloading ramp for LSTs, a sea-bee base, home for 1st Amtrak (amphibious tracked vehicles) and home of 7th Separate Bulk Fuel, and Camp Kistler. It was my home until September of 1968, and where I experienced over a thousand rounds of artillery from the DMZ. It was there I had my last experience of the mini-Tet, on May 25, 1968.

Since my arrival on May 5, we had been frantically building the new bunker. There was four of us, radio operators. We handled all radio traffic to Dong Ha and while offloading Navy AOGs and Shell oil tankers. (It always made my blood boil because a Marine private made about \$130 a month

and the Shell Oil guy made \$1200 a month. Well, I guess we weren't in it for the money.)

Since we were on the sea-coast we could only dig down two feet before we hit water, so our bunker sides were very thick and had many, many layers of sandbags. About fifty meters from our bunker sat sixteen 10,000-gallon fuel bladders lined up in two rows. I always wondered what would happen if we were in the bunker and all that fuel "went up" so close to us. On May 25 I received that answer.

The Russian 152mm field gun has a longer range than a US 155mm and is a badass gun. We were close enough to the DMZ that we could hear the rounds leave the tube in north Vietnam and count the eleven seconds it took to arrive. A whistle overhead was a good sign because it meant it was going beyond us. The first 15 rounds were okay, all whistles. PFC Jones and I looked at each other because each whistle got shorter. Finally no whistle at all, just rounds exploding very close. Yes, they found the field on round twenty and now it was time for fire for effect. All 160,000 gallons of JP-4 aviation gas, a jet fuel, was on fire. An eerie light roared outside and it started to get hot. It finally got so hot it was time to get out or roast like a turkey in an oven.

We heard five more rounds leave the tube, we got up, grabbed the radios, ran to count ten, and hit the dirt. Man, it was like a movie. Geysers of sand erupted all around, five more rounds left the tube, ten more seconds running, hit the deck. Up again and we made the next bunker. After 111 rounds it was over, and the field was on fire. Four hours later we went back to our bunker.

Luckily for us this happened in good old Cua Viet. We were in a sea of sand where the killing radius of artillery was ten meters, instead of fifty to a hundred meters on the sun-baked clay that was the norm for Dong Ha. No new fuel bladders replaced the ones that burned. I am still glad I enlisted in October of 1967 and not September of 1966 or I would have made the entire Tet 1968 offensive and might not have made it.



JOHN LINDQUIST IS A CITY WORKER
IN MILWAUKEE. HE SERVES ON THE
EXECUTIVE BOARD OF AFSCME
LOCAL 423. HE'S A MEMBER OF THE
MILWAUKEE CHAPTER OF VVAW.

Nam Boogie (Tet Version)

HORACE COLEMAN

Okay, it goes like this: BK (Beau Coup Kilo) and I had just finished a 14-hour night shift at Paris Control. Paris was Tan Son Nhut's (TSN) detachment of the 619th Tactical Control Squadron, which had radar sites scattered from the DMZ to the Ca Mau peninsula. We were weapons controllers, air traffic controllers, scope dopes. People who mostly helped keep the right people stay alive and the wrong ones get dead by playing sky traffic cop.

We were sitting around in the Tomb, the Tan Son Nhut Officers' Open Mess, having breakfast and thinking about knocking back a couple of eye closers before going home, sleeping fast and pulling another night shift. In-country time had long since become a fast-moving stream flowing into a muddy tropical river of jumbled events and sensations. The Land of the Big PX was an almost-forgotten fable we'd once lived in.

Days meant more than nights. More fire fights, more shot up or shot down aircraft. Days meant broadcasting "heavy artillery warnings (B-52 strike)" notifications — so no friendlies would be there when it rained iron and HE. Days meant FACs letting it urgently be known they could use any "spare birds with play time," machine guns, napalm or 20 mike mike to spare.

Nights meant reece birds going "up North" — into northern South Vietnam and southern North Vietnam. You had to coordinate with the Army to temporarily shut down the H (harassment) & I (interdiction) fire that made your radar scope look like a grease pencil-on-glass drawing of the inside of a sliced up beehive. That was so low-flying birds on in-country reece missions didn't inadvertently make aces out of artillery crews.

Monsoon meant cold rain that fell at a 45-degree angle — or higher when the wind blew harder. Which meant more ground action. Which meant more aircraft low on fuel and stacking up in the traffic pattern as they needed Ground Control Intercept hand-offs to RAPCON (radar approach control) for bad weather landings. Tan Son Nhut was the world's busiest airport at the time, having taken the sure enough heavy-weight champenship from Chicago's O'Hare Airport. The

Dry Season meant the "usual" mugginess and mania.

All time meant was so many hours (not many) until "work" or how many hours left on this shift (too many). The only time that ultimately counted was the number of unfilled squares left on your short timer's calendar. 15 Feb 68 was the time I was looking for. And a Freedom Bird was the thing I wanted. BK and I never did have that morning drink.

A squawk box in the O Club went off: "All personnel report to your duty stations immediately!" It was a short jog to the radar "shack." There we found out the balloon was way up. For weeks in late '67 and early '68, you could feel the war coming to Saigon. You could hear the B-52 strikes getting closer every night.

Intelligence had given us the news there was going to be an aerial invasion of South Vietnam. All we scope dopes knew for certain was that the NVA had a few biplanes and some helicopters. The MIGs in the North had all been chased out of the air or shot down, for all practical purposes. If it flew in the South, it was either a bird or ours. Nevertheless, we went to our military version of Janes to get "the word" — which wasn't much.

If you think you're going to be involved in fighting a plane, there are a few things you might like to know, like its combat and maximum altitude, its max speed, favorite tactics, its fire control system's lock-on range. Of course the official Air Force manual's skimpy paragraphs on the MIG expected to be coming to dinner were inadequate. But nothing happened at Christmas. After all, it wasn't Tet yet.

When the Tet Offensive was roaring in-country, fighter bombers were taking off from TSN and dumping their loads at the end of the base's runways. These fighter bombers were strays who couldn't get home or had been quickly relocated. APCs and tanks, not normally seen on base streets, were clattering around. Vietnamese and American MPs mixed it up with VC on the base's perimeter and, appropriately enough, in a cemetery.

Some over-anxious young Air Force troop, eager to get in on the action, climbed into one of the radomes with an M-16 to take a whack at the VC. The MPs de-

cided there was a sniper up there and shot him out of the saddle, also knocking out the radar during a crucial period. Which may be why our CO didn't pass out weapons. We were more dangerous to ourselves and each other, in his estimation, than the VC. The MPs would protect us. Which led a few of us to wonder why we inadequately trained TAC [Tactical Air Command] Trained Killers were in Nam in the first place. That's a joke, folks.

Anyway, the peak of my Tet participation was trying to guide a chopper from Tan Son Nhut to the US Embassy in Saigon. The VC were attacking the embassy. The civilians inside needed guns and ammo to hold them off until they were relieved from the ground.

That chopper never got high enough for me to make radar contact with it. I tried to give the pilot street directions — just like you would to a lost motorist. I used my memory of streets I'd walked and what might show up by air, a street map someone dug up and a VNAF sergeant from Saigon whose English was on a par with my subpar Vietnamese.

The pilot didn't recognize most of the landmarks I told him about as he flew down Trung Minh Ky street. He finally managed to find his way to the embassy anyway. Then I lost radio contact with him after he switched frequencies to talk to the embassy. I called his call sign repeatedly but got no answer. Finally another chopper pilot came up on frequency and said "Paris Control, I just saw a chopper get shot down by the embassy!"

After a few decades, some things are clearer. As in the overall conflict, the US won the major battles but lost the one that counted. The "will of the people" (North Vietnamese, VC, VC sympathizers, anti-Saigon government or anti-American types. And people running hustles or just trying to last out the war) ultimately exceeded our mental stamina.

The losses we inflicted, triggered, supported or instigated in Southeast Asia exceed the pain reflected by, and carved into, The Wall. Asians quickly proved they could trash each other without our help.

We still believe in using the highest technology available to not risk American troops' lives while defending Americans who,

for the most part, really can't be bothered to physically defend themselves or their interests themselves.

That seems to apply to most of the messes we've stuck our snouts into since then. It isn't care-free being Leader of the Free World. And we still don't know enough about the people and places we keep trying to straighten out. Or the reasons we're really doing things that benefit we don't know who in ways we don't know.

But Nam was "fun" while it lasted. As some lifers used to say, "Don't knock it. It's the only war we've got." Remember the posters and T shirts that said "Travel to strange lands, meet exotic people, and kill them"? Or "Kill them all and let God sort them out"?

Well, our generation took its turn at the ageless game people have played for ages. And we relearned what people have been relearning forever. Now if we could just figure out what it all really meant....

After a few days of Tet I got a chance to get the word out to my folks and wife telling them that I didn't know what the news was saying but I was all right but might not be home when expected. When I'd been stationed below the Delta, some print stories had gone out about how my outfit had been overrun — when there hadn't been a shot fired around us for clicks in weeks. So God knows what people were hearing now.

One day, when the smoke cleared a little, I got a jeep ride to my on-the-economy quarters and 15 minutes to get some gear together. My Vietnamese landlady asked me, "What we do now? What happening? What about us?" I said "I don't know, mama-san. Time for me to go to America."

That was a lousy answer but it was true. I felt a more intense version of the way I had when a young woman came to the door of the "villa," the floor of the Saigon apartment building my old outfit leased in Saigon. I used to call myself "a Den Dad in a whorehouse." She'd asked where was the GI who'd gotten her pregnant. Gone stateside like we all would. Leaving the Vietnamese to clean up after us. As always.

I'd learned about the pucker factor and keeping your honor

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Aaahhh Bock!

LISA DIXON

In the beginning, there was beer. And it swirled throughout the fundament amidst large vats and kegs, and was without form and substance: Miller, Hamms, Schlitz. Old Style. Bleck. And lo, John Zutz looked upon the earth, and saw that there was a great wailing and gnashing of teeth across the land; that the people wanted more. Zutz could not bear to see his people suffer. So, with a roar and a mighty wave of his hands, he called upon the forces of the mighty brewing industry, and behold, the light was separated from the dark, the good from the bad, the beer from the Bock. Ahhh, sweet, sweet Bock, nectar of the gods! We give thanks for thee, and for the bringer of Bock, John Zutz.

On Sunday, March 22, 1998, VVAW and Madison Friends Meeting held the tenth annual 'Blessing of the Bock,' a beer-tasting festival held on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Much beer was joyfully imbibed, much fun was had, and quite a bit of money was raised for a good cause.

To begin the afternoon, a solemn and graceful blessing was given by Father James Flynt, honoring those who have suffered and

fallen under oppressive regimes, and those who have fought and continue to fight against racism and imperialism around the world. As part of this opening, festival participants were spontaneously called upon to participate in a short flower ceremony presided over by the local VFW post. After that, participants commenced worshipping in their own jubilant manner.

Over thirty independent microbreweries and a few major companies from around the Midwest participated, each with two or more beers for the sipping. Just think. Over sixty different beers. All in one room. It boggles the mind. For those not inclined to partake of the brew, there were plenty of root beers and ciders and a couple of sparkling waters to sample as well. Pizza, hot dogs, pretzels and, most especially, Edie Zutz's "kickass-sweet-hot-knock-you-in-the-bock mustard" were also available for purchase and consumption.

All was presided over by the towering presence of Sir John Zutz, ever-present clipboard in hand, wearing his "Sunday best" especially for the occasion. Many volunteers gave their time in lieu of cash, and worked a couple of hours before, during or after the



Dave Kettenhofen and Bill Branson serve up beer at the Beer Fest.

event, unloading kegs, pouring beer, mopping floors, and, well, drinking. Raffle tickets purchased won an assortment of prizes from T-shirts to mugs, and an auction of donated goods was held late in the day. About \$5,000 was raised, and proceeds went to the Peace Park memorial in My Lai. And \$500 was also donated to our illustrious **Veteran** newspaper.

Kudos to John Zutz, and to all whose hard work throughout the year culminated in a most enjoyable, comradely afternoon; Thanks for showing us a good time, and for continuing to help build bridges with our brothers and sisters in Vietnam.

BEER BLESSING

Bless this creature beer which by kindness and power has been produced from kernels of grain.

May it be a healthful drink for Mankind.

Grant that whoever drinks it with thanksgiving may find it of help in body and in Soul.

— Roman Ritual



LISA DIXON IS A MEMBER OF THE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER OF VVAW, THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ACTION COOPERATIVE, ALUMNI AGAINST RACIST MASCOTS, AND THE FEMMEBOT FATALE FIRST REGIMENT. SHE LIKES BEER.

Nam Boogie (Tet Version)

continued from page 15

(such as it was) as much as possible. How to look out for your people, and to shut up and listen to whoever knew something worth knowing. And to not let rank go to my head. Also, how precious, fragile and random life is. How people react under pressure, when we're scared or when we think no one's looking. That troops with guns don't make good ambassadors. That arrogance and ignorance reinforce each other and can really make a mess.

I learned that, when pushing comes to shoving, I would do what I had to do to stay alive. I'm as human as the next impostor. But, there are lines you shouldn't cross easily, often or without a damn good reason. Not enough people have learned that.

Life is full of decision points and ambiguity. The more chances you handle, the likelier you are to make an error. Besides, you can't beat yourself over the head forever. Give someone else a chance to do it; your arms are tired, aren't

they?

My Vietnam experience began when I had to bum a ride with Air America to escape the Transient Barracks and get to my outfit. Sometime before Tet I'd run into the same guy from Chicago that I'd met on a flight to California. We'd hung together in San Francisco, during our last night in the States. We'd wandered the streets, going into and out of clubs. In the A.M. we'd bussed to Travis AFB to catch the morning time machine ride that would change reality. I'd accidentally run into him again at the end of his tour. He'd gotten a little drop and was leaving early.

He'd been a jump-rated air traffic controller, assigned to work with the Army in the field. He had a 500 — if not a 1,000 — yard stare look and a clipped, quiet and ominous tone. It was obvious he'd seen too much, didn't feel like talking about it and thought we weren't doing it right. I wondered why we were doing it at all. I felt

glad my request for a transfer to Dong Ha had been turned down.

What did I really learn in Vietnam and during Tet? It took years to sort it all out. It goes like this:

- Military "superiority" (the ability to inflict more damage than the opponent can) doesn't guarantee victory.

- A racist and xenophobic attitude towards a people makes it difficult to truly "win" the heart or mind of anyone worth a damn. Everyone wasn't like that but more than enough were to make me wonder if we didn't make as many VC as we killed.

- The less well-acquainted you are with history, the more likely you are to have unpleasant experiences.

- In most endeavors the primary advantages of youth are brashness, enthusiasm and energy. Unfortunately, they have to be very well directed and applied to be useful in the long term.

- When you televise an unsuccessful, undeclared, unwar in which the unwilling are made by the unqualified to do the unneces-

sary for the ungrateful, you're really asking for trouble. So, the next time there's a semi-major dust up, news access is restricted, how well costly "smart" weapons work is overstated. And the Pentagon stalls and lies about the health problems the troops are having.

- If you're a support troop, have your own piece. If you don't know (or haven't been taught) how and when to use it, you really shouldn't be where you are.

- We did some good. For instance, many people who didn't want to live under communism got a chance not to. Of course they had to leave the country to do it but they got a chance for a different life.

- America's a pretty good country but you should never love it more than it loves you.

Sometimes, somewhere, someone learns a little something. Maybe not much but something. We may as well use it. We paid for it.



HORACE COLEMAN HAS BEEN A WRITER, PROFESSOR, AND PUBLIC SPEAKER.

Vietnam Veterans' Children At Risk!

Media Release - 20 March 1998

The Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia (VVAA) today announced that the recently completed Vietnam Veterans' Health Study shows clearly that their children are at risk, confirming what veterans have been saying for 20 years. Apart from greatly elevated rates of spina bifida, cancers and a range of other normally rare diseases, the study reveals that the number of deaths of Vietnam veterans' children from the combined causes of accident and suicide is 250% higher than for other young Australians.

"We are horrified," said Mr. Clive Mitchell-Taylor, National President of the VVAA. "Australia has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world, but this is worse than anything we could have imagined! The statisticians have told us that they would have expected about 440 of our children to have died from accidents or suicide, but the questionnaires completed by our Vietnam veterans reports over 700 more deaths from those two causes alone. How can anyone explain this, or the range of genetic illnesses and deformities?"

Mr. Mitchell-Taylor acknowledged the role of Minister Bruce Scott and officers of Department of Veterans' Affairs in commissioning and conducting this study. He said the study would not have been possible without close cooperation and support. The magnitude of the results have surprised all concerned, even the veterans, who had anticipated most of the reported outcomes.

The Vietnam Veterans' Morbidity Study, completed by nearly 85% of all Vietnam veterans, shattered all Australian records for response to a Government survey. The VVAA was formed on the basis of concerns about the health of veterans and their children, and this comprehensive survey has been a goal for almost 20 years. The overwhelming response confirmed beyond doubt the Vietnam veterans' commitment to the study.

"The findings of the report are so significant that the Government must take action immediately. . ."

The responses themselves show beyond doubt that veterans, their spouses and their children suffer from a range of illness at rates undreamed of by other Australians. Examples include leukemia and prostate cancer (300% of the expected rate), cancer of the colon (350%), male breast cancer (2500%), ischaemic heart disease (200%), and motor neurone disease (6000%). The reported incidence of spina bifida in children is more than 1000% of the expected rate, cleft lip or palate over 400% higher and absent body parts 1000% higher. A high percentage of veterans' partners have sought treatment for stress, anxiety, depression or sleep disorders.

Mr. Mitchell-Taylor said "The findings of the report are so significant that the Government must take action immediately. Australians cannot ignore this

problem for another single day."

The Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia was one of three ex-Service organizations represented on the Steering Committee of the Health Study. Although the Report states that there is a clear link between the findings and exposure to combat stress and chemicals, it falls far short of addressing this in its recommendations. The recommendations relate either to validating the self-reported rates of illness, or to ex-

dress them."

"What do we do now? The VVAA asks that every Vietnam veteran commit to the validation of the data. Let's prove that the responses we gave were correct. Encourage the children, most of who are adults in their own right, to allow their medical records to be examined and confirmed. It can be done quickly, and it can be done in a way that will satisfy the Government. At the same time the VVAA undertakes to ensure that personal information is isolated from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, with validation being done through a third party. We will do everything in our power to get this done quickly and accurately. We seek the support of the entire veterans' community and the Australian public to ensure it takes place."

After consultation with DVA, the VVAA expects that initial validation of some of the rarer diseases of both veterans and children will take place within a matter of weeks. Mr Mitchell-Taylor asked veterans to remember, "We are jumping this final hurdle for our children. We are doing it for ourselves. We are establishing standards to ensure that the veterans and peace-keepers who follow us will not have to go through the same rejection and ridicule in seeking treatment or recognition of illnesses."



Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia

National Council Inc

50 Brodie Street,

WANGARATTA VIC 3677

My View

JOHN ZUTZ

Wow! What a bombshell! It clearly appears to be a smoking gun. There is now statistical proof that Vietnam veterans, their spouses, and their children have significant genetic, medical, and mental problems, at rates undreamed of by "normal" people.

A survey done for the Australian government by the AC Neilsen Corporation was sent to over 51,000 Vietnam veterans. It was answered by an astounding 41,000+. That's the same AC Neilsen who predicts elections from 200 responses. They gave

the survey a 5% margin of error.

Those numbers alone made me suspicious enough to start asking questions. The answer I came up with is that the numbers, unbelievable as they may seem, are true, though they have not been confirmed.

As damning as all this seems, little will come of it. Though these numbers, and this accuracy, would be good enough to predict a presidential election, it won't be good enough for the scientists.

They'll whine that these are all self-reported illnesses. They'll

ignore the fact that Vietnam veterans' groups have been begging for a comprehensive survey like this for over twenty years, and that without the backing of the vets' organizations there likely would have been no response at all. They'll snivel that there was no control group. They'll ignore the fact that an 85% response to any survey is totally unheard of.

Then the scientists will argue for five to ten years about how a real study should be set up. They'll take another three to five years to get funding, and another

five years to do the study. The final report will be twenty pages long, and have lots of charts and graphs. It will conclude that more study is needed.

In the meantime veterans and their families will hurt.



JOHN ZUTZ IS A FORMER VVAW REGIONAL COORDINATOR. HE IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER OF VVAW.

With apologies to the Beatles:

It was 30 years ago one day,
when the "band" began to play

MY LAI 16 MAR 68

We lied and they died.
In a ditch of a tomb
carved from gloom and
burnished with brutality.
In a reality, uber alles,
of military follies.
Four hours of chattering
guns and metal teeth
scattering Mais and flowers.
Shattering the blind, crippled,
crazy, fat, skinny or lazy.
Eight (or less) to eighty, we didn't mind.
Though it isn't kind to remind.
Just patriots doing our best
to lay "enemy" souls to rest.
Like Wounded Knee, you see.
Or, Ft. Pillow where willows wept.
We've done it before—
and will some more.
We did our duty of kicking bootie.
The village called Pinkville
is Nowheres and NoThinkville.
One of those places "victory" was
splattered on our faces.
Dead or alive, gooks don't matter.
The "specialist," corporal,
sergeant, lieutenant, captain,
major and colonel Calleys
never hide in alleys.
So, we say with pride:
"Hooray for our side!"

— Horace Coleman

BEAT ME, WHIP ME, ABUSE ME, MY DEAR GOVERNMENT

Bombard my brain with sound bites
That make my senses dull.
A thousand things I need to buy,
Make sure my mind's too full.

Tell me lies all day and night
Till it starts my head to spin,
So when I finally hear the truth
I'll yearn for lies again.

Give me things to think about
That make me choose a side.
Don't let me think about right and wrong
And truth, above all, hide.

Run two guys for office,
Don't tell me that they lied.
Campaign for months convincing me
That they're both on opposite sides.

I don't care if they have the same backers.
I don't mind the lies they spin,
Or the killing and bombing and burning,
Just so my side wins.

— Sarge Lintecum

OBITUARY

Dan Priester, an active member of the Chicago chapter of VVAW, died Tuesday, February 24, 1998 from heart problems. Dan, an Army Vietnam vet, joined and became active during the Persian Gulf War. He worked on the homeless vets standdowns until his heart became too weak for him to participate. He hated war and never got over the Vietnam Syndrome (may we all stay infected). He will be missed.



Veterans' Day, Chicago, 1977.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

National Office

P.O. Box 408594, Chicago, IL 60640

Membership Application

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____
 E-mail address _____
 Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
 Branch _____
 Unit _____
 Overseas Duty _____
 Dates _____
 Military Occupation _____
 Rank _____
☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW e-mail list

Membership in VVAW is open to all people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The initiation fee is \$20.00, sent to the National Office (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

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

Signature _____
 Date _____

(Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.)

MACV Insignia

US Military Assistance Command (MACV) [official design by the Institute of Heraldry, US Army]. Under this insignia 60,000 Americans and 3 million Vietnamese died.



Yellow and red are the Vietnam colors. The red ground alludes to the infiltration and aggression from beyond the embattled yellow "wall" (i.e. The Great Wall of China). The opening in the wall through which this infiltration and aggression flow is blocked by the white sword representing United States military aid and support. The wall is arched and the sword pointed upward in reference to the offensive action pushing the aggression back.

It was first issued to the 12,000 "advisors" in Vietnam in March of 1963.

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War



We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. As with all the propaganda put out by the government to justify US intervention in Indochina, the MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China, but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is 30 years old. It belongs to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without permission.

Beware of VVAW AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individualists calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist." Their activities are centered mainly in Seattle, San Francisco and New York City. They often claim to be part of our organization and their most recent antics include burning American flags at demonstrations.

"VVAW AI" is not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAW AI" is actually the creation

of an obscure, ultra-left sect called the Revolutionary Communist Party and is designed to pimp off of VVAW's history of struggle and continued activism. Their objective is to create confusion and deception in order to promote themselves.

We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit. Don't be fooled: they are not what they claim. Forewarned is forearmed.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.



For more information:

- VVAW, PO Box 408594, Chicago, IL 60640
- 773-327-5756
- vvaw@prairienet.org
- <http://www.prairienet.org/vvaw/>

RECOLLECTIONS

My Lai

JOHN ZUTZ

What Americans refer to as the My Lai Massacre happened in the quiet village of Son My, only a kilometer from the coast of Vietnam in Quang Ngai Province. On March 16, less than two months after the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese launched their famous 1968 Tet Offensive, Bravo and Charlie Companies of the 11th Infantry Brigade of the 23rd Infantry Division entered the hamlet of My Lai and killed at least 347 Vietnamese, mostly women and children. The official Vietnamese death toll is 504.

One American platoon forced over seventy civilians into a drainage ditch and shot them at close range. Another platoon advanced through the village shooting anything that moved, including surrendering families. A third platoon killed over ninety civil-



ians in nearby My Khe hamlet.

Women were raped, men were beaten, livestock was killed and thrown into wells to poison the water. Even infants were included in the point blank executions.

Though the numbers were fudged in their official report, Charlie Company, under Captain Ernest Medina, captured three personal weapons (American), and suffered one casualty (self-inflicted in the foot) during the

attack.

The incident was then covered up by several levels of the Division Command, apparently not through direct knowledge, but by failing to make direct inquiries.

In 1969, after being released from the service, Richard Ridenhour wrote letters to the Secretary of Defense and other officials describing what had happened. The Army investigated and the first public account of the incident was published in the New York Times in November of 1969. In December, Life magazine featured full color photos of the slaughter taken by an Army photographer.

Of the seventeen officers and NCOs subsequently court-martialed, eleven were dismissed for lack of evidence, five were acquitted. Only Lieutenant William

continued on page 7

The Tet Offensive

JOHN LINDQUIST

Tet 1968 Vietnam means different things to all the Marines who were involved. After thirty years we have had time to put the Tet offensive in perspective.

As I look back at it, this offensive was a long, drawn-out affair. I feel that it really started January 21, 1968, with the beginning of the siege of Khe Sanh, continuing through and beyond the Tet holidays. Fighting the length and breadth of Vietnam did not end with the battle of Hue City. The spring counter-offensive that included the relief of Khe Sanh, (Operation Pegasus), a raid into the A Shau and the battle for Dong Ha City must be included. Most people forget to include what was known as mini-Tet: May 5 to May 27, 1968. This was my part.

My involvement with Tet '68 started in Camp Pendleton, where I was getting ready for radio school. I was on guard duty (Headquarters & Supply) in the Del Mar area. I was looking forward to many weeks in school, but no such luck: school was now nineteen training days. Replacements for the 'Nam were already needed. After radio school it was fifteen days of staging battalion and off to Vietnam on April 30, 1968.

We rode to Norton Air Force Base and boarded a Braniff jet for the trip to Okinawa. Fifty of us had orders for FLC Da Nang as radio operators, but at Camp Hansen that all changed. Forty-five went straight to 3rd Marine Division Khe Sanh, three to FLC Da Nang and myself and one other to Dong Ha with orders for LZ Stud. I was new and I told "Stretch" not to worry because LZ Stud must be short for student. We flew to Vietnam and landed about 0900 on May 4, 1968. What struck us all was how hot it was. We were quickly taken to a wooden shack to secure air transport to Dong Ha. We looked so clean and everyone looked so salty. There was a scattering of men with thousand-yard stares. We loaded onto a C-123 for a noisy ride to Dong Ha.

When we landed it became a madhouse. The ramp descended and some NCO ran in saying, "Get out now." Other Marines threw our gear out the back. The plane never shut down its engines. Hot air and red dust blew all over as we tried to find our gear. The plane taxied to the north end of the beach matting steel air field, turned around, headed back toward us, and took off. As I walked toward the hut on the west side of the

airstrip I heard artillery impacting nearby and a jet was dropping napalm not very far away. I said to myself, "Damn — what did I get into?"

I reported to the "air terminal" (that little shack) and was pointed toward 3rd Marine Division Supply for my gear, and the armorer issued my rifle, an M-16. My orders read FLSG-B H&S Co. Communications Platoon. In the communications shack Staff Sergeant Taylor welcomed me aboard, assigned me a hooch (living area) told me to get some chow and said that I was on A-Guard tonight. I wondered what A-Guard was and a friendly PFC in the area said, "You mean you're on rocket watch?"

"What the hell is rocket watch?" I asked. He replied, "You'll figure it out."

As I looked for rockets in the sky, another marine laughed and took pity on me. "Got stuck with rocket watch already?" he asked, and I answered that I smelled a rat. He said it was good that I'd figured out the usual newbie trick. He advised me to get some chow and get back because the corporal of the guard was coming with a truck to pick up the A-Guard.

After chow I received a rack

and a foot locker, loaded my magazines, got an extra bandoleer of ammo and waited for the truck. About 1900 hours we were trucked out to the line of bunkers that sat on the railroad track line, and the sergeant of the guard dropped two men off at each bunker. I was in bunker 30, the last one on the east side of Dong Ha Combat Base.

I got the 0200 to 0600 watch and was told to get some sleep. There was no sleep: artillery, outgoing and incoming, continued sporadically, and the C-130s dropped flares all night. At 0200 it was my watch. We didn't stand watch in a bunker but in the fighting hole off to the right and below the railroad grade.

Across Highway 1 and the Quang Tri River artillery fell, red and green tracers arcing in the sky in the eerie light of the occasional flares. At times, sniper fire opened from across the road but we kept fire discipline; the order of the day was to get permission to fire. The sky started to lighten, I did not fall asleep, I survived my first night, welcome to mini-Tet.

We rode back to FLSG-B and had chow and as I prepared to

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