



# THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

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Fall/Winter 2000

## Clinton Visits Vietnam

DAVE CLINE

Almost lost in the news media's frenzy over the Florida vote count was President Bill Clinton's historic November visit

to Vietnam. Although his trip got little press coverage and received a negative reaction from some sections of the veterans' commu-

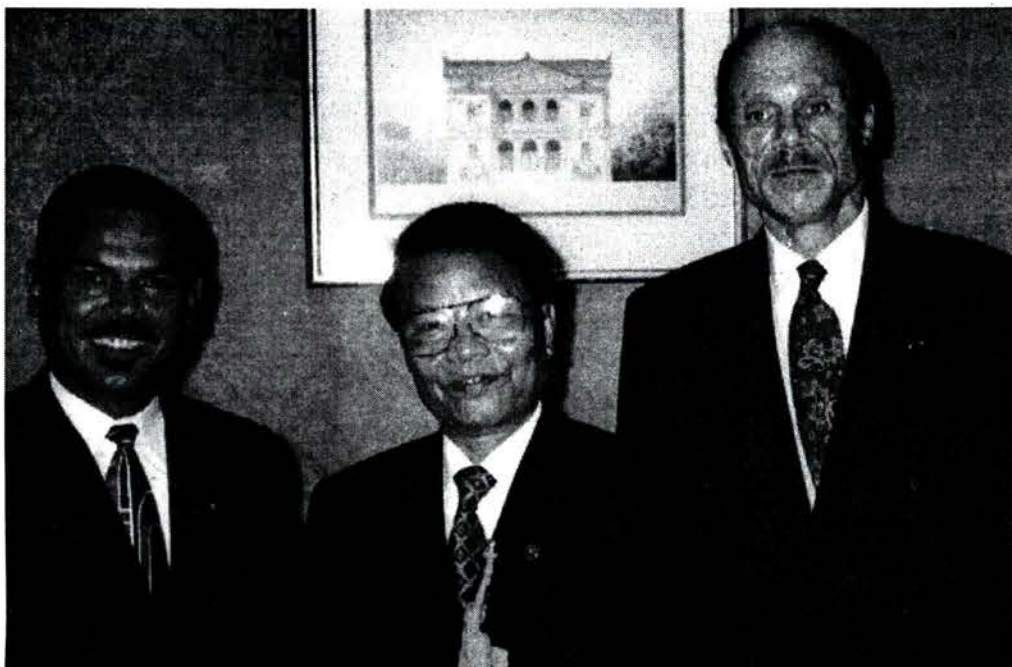
nity, it represents a positive step in the tortured relations between our two countries and should be welcomed by all progressive Americans.

The Paris Peace Agreement led to the withdrawal of most American troops from Vietnam in 1973. In that agreement, the US government pledged "an era of reconciliation" and promised to "contribute to healing the wounds of war and postwar reconstruction." President Nixon even wrote a secret letter to North Vietnam's prime minister pledging over \$4 billion in

economic aid. Two years later, Marines hurriedly evacuated the US embassy from a Saigon rooftop in the last ignoble act of America's longest war. None of the pledges of reconciliation and reconstruction were ever fulfilled. Instead, US policy remained hostile for years, aimed at isolating and punishing Vietnam.

The main reason given by the US for failing to fulfill its commitments is the POW-MIA issue. When American prisoners of war — mainly pilots shot down while bombing North Vietnam — were released, Nixon claimed that all were returned. Soon the story began to change. There were a small number of "discrepancy cases" where there was some indication a serviceman was cap-

*continued on page 21*



Tran Duc Luong (center), President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, with Vietnam veterans Jaime Vazquez (left) and David Cline. The Vietnamese president was in New York City for the UN Millennium Summit and met with several hundred American friends and overseas Vietnamese to talk about developments in Vietnam and relations with the United States

## The Toll of US Policy Toward Iraq

ROBERT NAIMAN

Ten years after the United States and its allies imposed economic sanctions following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the embargo remains largely in place. The embargo continues to exact a heavy toll on Iraqi society, even after the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 986 ("Oil for Food,") that allows Iraq to export oil to pay for food and medicine (and reparations to Kuwait). American and British obstructionism on the committee that approves imports sharply limits Iraq's ability to repair its war-damaged electrical, sanitation, and health care infrastructure. The draconian character of the sanctions regime guarantees that it will have a devastating impact on civilians; the centralized and anti-democratic character of the regime exacerbates the devastating impact. Ironically, the deprivation caused by the sanctions makes Iraqis more dependent on government rations for survival.

During the early 1990s, average incomes in Iraq (GNP per capita) fell more than 80%. This

in itself indicates a catastrophic economic collapse, greater even than the 50% economic contraction suffered by Russia as a result of International Monetary Fund/World Bank "shock therapy" in the early 1990s, greater than the 30% contraction suffered by Cuba in the early 1990s due to the loss of its eastern European trading partners and the tightening of the US embargo.

A demographic survey conducted by UNICEF in 1999 indicated that the rate of death of children under five years of age in central and southern Iraq more than doubled in the second half of the 1990s from its level a decade earlier. This suggests that well over 300,000 Iraqi children, and likely more than half a million, have died as a result of the embargo.

In the 1990s primary school enrollment in central and southern Iraq fell from 98% of all children to 88% of boys and 80% of girls. In two years primary school drop-outs rose from 17% to 40%. As a result of these shifts

literacy fell from 80% to 58% of the adult population.

The devastation caused by the sanctions has led to increasing criticism internationally and in the United States. Three UN officials charged with overseeing humanitarian efforts to relieve the suffering of the Iraqi population have resigned in protest of the continued brutality of the sanctions; former UN Assistant Secretary General Denis Haliday referred to their "genocidal impact." In the spring of 2000 a US congressional letter demanding the lifting of the

sanctions garnered 71 signatures, while House Democratic Whip David Bonior called the economic sanctions against Iraq "infanticide masquerading as policy."

Meanwhile, the periodic bombing of Iraq by the United States and Britain continues, having killed more than 140 Iraqi civilians in 1999 alone. In addition, Iraqis (and American and other veterans) continue to suspect continuing health effects from the use of depleted uranium shells

*continued on page 17*



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# From the National Office

JOE MILLER

Welcome to the Fall/Winter 2000 issue!

As we enter another period of changing political administrations, our members and allies will recognize that many things having to do with war and peace and treatment of veterans seem ominously the same.

Ten years ago, VVAW members and supporters were in the forefront of opposition to George Herbert Walker ("Daddy") Bush's war against the people of Iraq. We called for active support for the troops just as we had during the war against Vietnam — "Support the Troops! Bring them home!" Since that time, Gulf War veterans have joined VVAW, just as earlier generations of veterans from Grenada, Lebanon, and Panama had done. In this issue, some of those Gulf War voices will be heard. We also continue to call for the lifting of the embargo against the people of Iraq, and we have a report from a VVAW member who has recently visited Iraq.

The fact that folks like Dick Cheney (Secretary of Defense under Daddy Bush) and Colin Powell (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs under the same administration) have prominent roles in

the new regime should give all of us pause. In view of the continuing tensions in the Middle East, the Vietnam-like war developing in Colombia, the daily struggles of the people of Vieques to oppose US military maneuvers, we must take seriously "Dubya" Bush's (or "Little Bush" as the Chinese call him) efforts to further increase military spending and his new cold war rhetoric against China. VVAW members and allies must remain watchful on all these fronts.

April 2001 will produce many memories of Operation Dewey Canyon III from 1971, the "limited incursion into Congress country." This 30th anniversary should remind all of us of the historical importance of VVAW's legacy, a legacy that many of our opponents would love to see buried under mountains of revisionist claptrap. A recent documentary on Illinois and Indiana Vietnam vets produced in Central Illinois may be seen as an example. This film is reviewed and discussed in this issue. We are also fortunate to have a first-hand account of 1971's Dewey Canyon III from Ed Damato, an early leader with VVAW. We encour-

age anyone out there with personal stories from DCIII to share them with us during this anniversary period. Send your stories by e-mail to [vvaw@prairienet.org](mailto:vvaw@prairienet.org), or by regular mail to the National Office address in Chicago.

Folks, VVAW has been around now for thirty-three years, and there is still a lot of work to be done. We need your continued political and financial support. In order to effectively attack all the social justice issues which face us day after day, we ask that each of you remain politically active, or get reactivated, on the issues that have traditionally involved VVAW members and supporters. Remember: political activism is what saved many of us and many of our brothers and sisters from isolation and despair. The fact that we are still around and active also serves to inspire newer generations of social justice activists. We can live on in the work that they will do in years to come.



JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHAMPAIGN-URBANA CHAPTER.

## 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

#### Submission Guidelines for The Veteran

- We prefer to receive articles via e-mail, but will also take mailed diskettes (3 1/4", ASCII files, PC or Mac) and paper (least preferable).
- To submit your article for possible inclusion in the next issue, email <[vvaw@prairienet.org](mailto:vvaw@prairienet.org)> with "Attn: Veteran Editor" in the subject line or mail to:  
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## Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

This presidential election captured the interest of Americans more than any other election in modern times. For the five weeks it ran it was better than a soap opera. You had lawyers talking out of both sides of their mouths. A major player had a heart attack. Conflicts of interest. Self-righteous behavior covering all sorts of deceit. Nobody could have written a better script.

In spite of the soaps aspect of it, people did have sincere interest. Some eventually got tired of it, but many people developed strong feelings and emotions and ideas on both sides. Personally rooted in the belief that these were two stiff, I even began to hope Gore would win. I figured that working-class folks would get stung one or two fewer times with Gore. Also, I like the idea of having a president of a different party than the one that controls Congress. I like that because it's harder to pass somebody's agenda, and

the agenda for both parties over the last thirty years seems to have been to transfer more wealth to the already wealthy.

Here's the irony. Most of us know it takes beaucoups bucks to get elected, and both parties accept the money from corporate America, often from the same corporations. That means that the wealthy get to say how things are divided up. Nevertheless, we go and vote.

Voting gives us the illusion of democracy, which is better than letting the idea of democracy die. It is an illusion because, yes, we all got together to choose this person who will be making decisions for us for four years or two years or six years. We don't get to make those decisions. We only get to vote for someone to make decisions. That is the limit of our democratic participation. And it's likely that the people we get to vote for are not representative of the majority of people, who are

most concerned about decent health care, education for the kids, a secure retirement, and so on.

In between the times we vote, we have little influence. Large numbers of people mobilized in demonstrations or letter-writing campaigns can have some effect, although less effect than the lobbyists who pass the money around Washington and get paid for doing so.

There are different ideas of democracy. Some people think that we live in a democracy because we get to vote every two years. Real democracy has more to do with participating in the making of the decisions that affect our lives. That we don't have.

One thing this election showed is that people were really interested in participating. Besides emotional involvement with the candidates, there was a mixture of ideas created. In stores, on street corners, and at work, people were talking to each other about the

election. One day of voting turned into five weeks of vicarious personal involvement. And your single vote almost meant something in Florida and New Mexico. There was real interest in being part of the decision making, of being part of a democracy. That's what people want. Too bad it's only an illusion.

So now we have Bush. One gets the impression that he is a man who has had his strings pulled by someone else for his whole life. His aristocratic family and wealthy friends got him into Yale even though his academic achievements were dubious. They got him into various business ventures — usually the oil business — where he made his fortune. Then they bankrolled his run for governor and then the presidency where the bankroll broke all records.

During Bush's time as governor, Texas was rated at or near

*continued on page 21*

## Notes From the Boonies

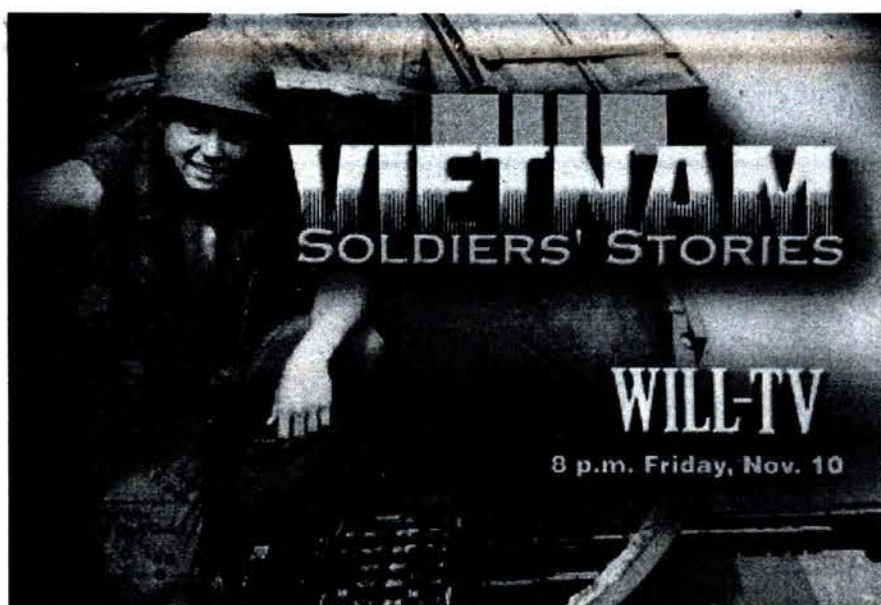
PAUL WISOVATY

If everybody in the world is entitled to fifteen minutes of fame, then Barry Romo and I have each eaten up about three minutes of ours. We're not sure what we'll do with the twelve minutes we have left — if Barry ever lives to see them, what with that Colombia thing — but we do know about those first three. He and I were among thirteen Vietnam vets featured in a Champaign-Urbana PBS documentary called **Vietnam: Soldiers' Stories**, and if it hasn't been picked up by your local PBS station in Boston or San Diego, don't worry. We'll gladly send you a copy, for a modest fee plus shipping and handling.

I hope that I may speak for Barry when I say that, at least at first, it was nice to be asked. Even though VVAW members made up only 15% of the vets interviewed, I believe that our readers will agree that all Vietnam veterans, whatever their political persuasion, have a right to express their opinions about the war. I very much mean that. Having offered that disclaimer, I will only note — with equal sincerity — that our opinions are the correct ones. (I never said living in The Boonies makes us humble.)

When Tim Hartin, the show's producer, first approached me

about this project in May 2000, he stated clearly that it was not his intention to do a "political" piece. Individual vets would be free to tell their stories, in their own words, and what they said was what got put on film. The questions from David Inge were excellent, and I'm certain that none of us ever felt that we were being "led" in one direction or another, or, as we say in the criminal justice system, cross-examined. Having said that, it will be apparent that, if thirteen vets were interviewed for about forty-five minutes apiece, and the final show consisted of about fifty minutes of veterans' statements, quite a bit got left out. In one sense, I have no problem with that. It was a one-hour documentary, and I suspect that some of the statements that I made in my forty-five minutes either didn't make any sense or, worse yet, caught me in a 50s moment when I completely lost my train of thought and just kind of sat there with my mouth open. (I do appreciate the fact that those were not included.) In another sense, it will be obvious that, if a producer has eight to ten hours of raw video footage to draw from, and which he has to trim down to less than an hour, he is both cursed and blessed. He is



cursed in that he faces the enormous task of having to decide which 90% to leave on the cutting room floor, and which 10% to include in the final version. He is blessed in that he gets to leave 90% on the floor, and to include the 10% he likes.

It is at this point that I have to start wondering exactly what happened here. As Joe Miller correctly pointed out, in his November 27 letter to the editor of the Champaign-Urbana *News-Gazette*, the documentary leaves the viewer with the conclusion that "there was no anti-war veterans' movement . . . GIs and veterans had nothing but hatred for the anti-war movement . . . (Barry Romo) does not get to tell how nearly

50,000 Vietnam veterans came home from our war to join VVAW and work with a welcoming peace movement." (The "welcoming" part is important; most Americans still believe that the customary treatment of returning vets, by anti-war types, was to spit on us at airports. We know that was in fact a rare occurrence, and that those who behaved in that fashion were not representative of the legitimate movement. Besides, by behaving that way, they also risked getting their heads broken. We were anti-war, but as Barry will tell you, that doesn't mean we were pacifists.)

I cannot argue with one thing

*continued on page 6*



# The Continuing Struggle

KURT HILGENDORF

When I was asked to speak at VVAW's annual Veterans Day ceremony in Chicago, several things immediately sprang to mind. Lucky for me, since I was asked only about a day before the event.

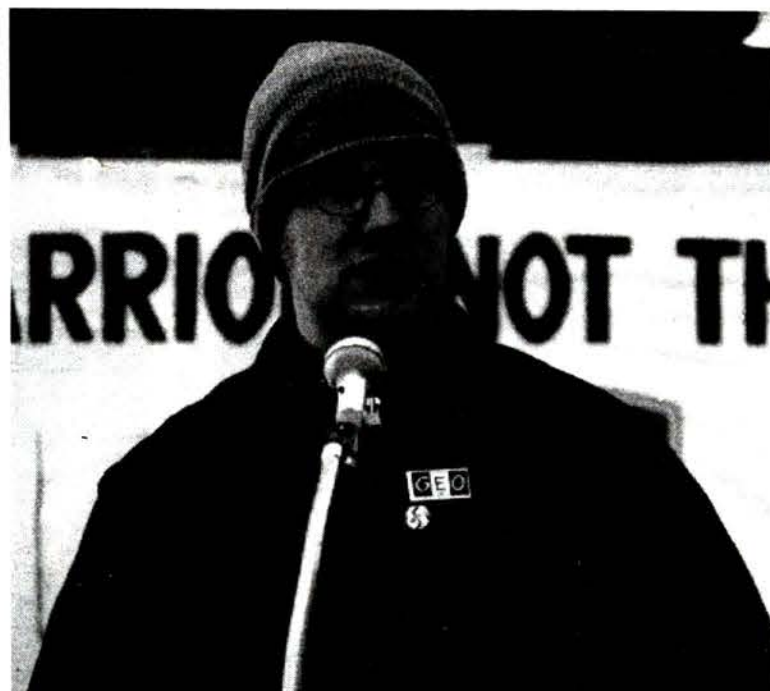
I decided to talk about how VVAW continues to struggle for justice by providing leadership and guidance to new generations of activists. The Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative (PRC), based in Champaign-Urbana, has received much help from VVAW over the years, and we've become increasingly more effective as an organization due to this assistance.

VVAW led numerous security workshops for the PRC and taught us how to effectively, efficiently and safely organize direct actions. During Champaign's Million Mom March in May 2000, PRC members were able to avoid a potentially serious confrontation. The local chapter of the National Rifle Association staged a counter-protest and attempted to block the sidewalk next to a busy street. Even though we were seriously understaffed and suffered communications problems, the seven PRC security members were able to block the very vocal and

agitated NRA members, take the street, and safely allow the nearly 500 marchers to pass. March organizers were ecstatic about our presence and thanked us many times.

The PRC was also asked to provide conference security at a conference on Colombia in early November. Security was tight since Colombian citizens' lives were in danger. The presence of a member of the Colombian consulate made the situation even more tense. Friday night's session went off without a hitch. Saturday morning, however, was hectic, as conference organizers asked the consulate member to leave the conference, and PRC security members were left with the duty of making him leave. He quickly realized that we were organized and serious and left without protest. We also took a Colombian torture survivor to the airport later in the day. As a result of VVAW's leadership and our organization, we were able to avoid any major incidents and the conference was a success. We even received an offer from a conference organizer from Washington, DC to hold security workshops there.

VVAW has also been more than willing to participate in PRC



Kurt Hilgendorf at Chicago VVAW's Veterans Day Event 2000.

events in Champaign-Urbana and the University of Illinois. Bill Davis came in May to speak on the 30th anniversary of Kent and Jackson State. Barry Romo, with Sister Carolina and Brother Omar, human rights workers in Colombia, spoke at a PRC event on Colombia in September. Audience members overflowed the room, and the event brought in more than \$500 to contribute to the struggle for human rights in Colombia.

The struggle for social justice must be lifelong, and by constantly developing new organiz-

ers and activists, the struggle will continue. Thank you, VVAW, for providing not just me but scores of student activists with role models and leadership. Thanks for teaching us that we have to keep fighting and struggling for just social change.



KURT HILGENDORF IS THE NEPHEW OF A VIETNAM VET, A SENIOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, AND A MEMBER OF THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ACTION COOPERATIVE.



Marcus Vilar speaks about Vieques at Chicago VVAW's Veterans Day Event 2000.



Barry Romo speaks about Colombia at Chicago VVAW's Veterans Day Event 2000.



Chicago VVAW members (in back row) working the Winter Homeless Veterans' Standdown in Chicago.



# James Major Bradley Gates, Jr.: Atomic Veteran & Activist

SOURCE: <[HTTP://WWW.PG.NET/USERS/B/BOB/AAV\\_BIOS.HTM](http://www.pg.net/users/b/BOB/AAV_BIOS.HTM)>

As a member of the Alliance of Atomic Veterans, Jim Gates has participated in civil disobedience actions against weapons testing at the Nevada Test Site since 1986. He joined radiation victims in rallies and conferences in Washington, DC, New York City, San Francisco, Berkeley, Las Vegas and Chicago. Jim has worked closely with political leaders including Mayor Harold Washington, senators Carol Mosley Braun and Paul Simon. Yet his own story is not well known, although it was included in the 1978 documentary *Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang* and the 1995 British production *Geiger Sweet, Geiger Sour*. Jim Gates is a rare kind of person who in 1955 sacrificed his own well-being to open the issue of atmospheric weapons experiments to the light of day. When his insider knowledge was given public exposure by investigative reporter Paul Jacobs, history was made.

lion ton TNT-equivalent) hydrogen bomb. The government called the contamination at Rongelap a mistake in wind direction — although there is proof that it was premeditated. The US government carried out over 200 atmospheric nuclear tests from 1945 to 1963 using over a quarter million GIs as guinea pigs.

In the winter of 1955, Paul Jacobs picked up Jim Gates when he was hitching to Las Vegas. They soon became friends, and then Jim gave Paul inside information, contacts and rendezvous with others on the base. After several years of research, Jacobs published a series of stories which helped to blow the lid of secrecy at NTS. With the world outcry backed by scientific documentation, the USSR, US and UK entered into an atmospheric test ban in 1963. As a result of Jim's whistle-blowing, the military made things very difficult on him by losing and destroying records.

collapse and a burst appendix. After Jim miraculously survived septicemia, doctors found that his appendix growth had been festering for forty years. Unquestionably, all of this stems from Jim's contamination on the nuclear test site, at the various ground zeros during tests and clean-up operations and even around the base.

Like so many others at the test site, Jim ingested radioactive dust as well as receiving direct prompt radiation from the bomb and contaminated earth and air. While Atomic Energy Commission investigators in protective suits walked around with Geiger counters, GIs at Camp Desert Rock went about their daily routine. Jim Gates was involved in a series of fourteen nuclear explosions in Operation TEAPOT with yields ranging from one to 43 kilotons. A kiloton is 1,000 tons. In comparison, the Oklahoma City bomb was 2.4 tons. Jim's recollection of these events placed him in the general vicinity of a half mile from each.

One test blew Jim out of a trench and rendered him unconscious for eleven days — only to awaken to find stitches clear around his left arm and leg. Scientists at TEAPOT were attempting to develop a number of new devices: "Dial-A-Yield," a variable blast and radiation concept which included the predecessor to the neutron bomb, and "Bigger Bang for a Buck," or miniaturization for ICBM strategic warheads and field artillery for the Euro-theater tactical weapons. After TEAPOT, Jim later tried to obtain a medical discharge but was denied. He found himself transferred to Germany and then back to Chicago where he was temporarily assigned to teach chemical, biological & nuclear war training at Nike ABM bases near Lake Michigan.



Jim Gates at Chicago VVAW's Veterans Day Event 2000.

While in the army reserve he drove cabs in Chicago.

Jim's legal battle was featured as the cover story of the *Journal of the American Bar Association*, "The Legal Fallout," by Nancy Hogan. Her article reviewed the litigation quagmire facing all atomic veterans. Since 1978 Jim has been fighting for his rights and the rights of thousands of veterans. He is a father of eight children and has twenty-nine grandchildren. He has always worked many jobs, such as jobs at the post office, steel mills, driving cabs and in his own restaurant. With his disabilities, he gets by on Social Security, which barely pays rent. He had even been denied that for twelve years in which time he became homeless and suffered a heart attack with no hospitalization. After a long fight, he received back pay only to suffer an appendix burst followed by heart failure, on the 40th anniversary of Operation TEAPOT.



Born in Chicago, Illinois in 1935, Jim Gates experienced the poverty of the Black South Side, plus the home impact of W.W.II. Patriotic, he entered the military at a very young age, using his older brother's ID and ended up in combat in Korea at 15, early in 1951. Upon returning in 1954 he was reassigned to Camp Desert Rock, Nevada for practice in nuclear warfare field maneuvers. Meanwhile, the chemist and Nobel laureate, the late Dr. Linus Pauling encouraged the independent journalist Paul Jacobs to investigate the Nevada Test Site (NTS). Dr. Pauling had proof that radiation was damaging living genes. He believed that human experimentation had been carried out that year on Marshall Islanders at Rongelap in testing a 15-megaton (15 mil-

Even with records proving his service in the military from 1951 to 1977, he was not rewarded military retirement. He had proof of his role in the weapons tests, yet like other atomic veterans he could not obtain service-connected disability.

Jim's physical problems go back to the early 1970s as his teeth began to fall out. All of his teeth have come loose or had to be surgically removed as malgrowths in his jawbone forced them up. Doctors have found muscular skeletal problems and connective tissue disorder which have debilitated his strength and coordination. He has spent time at Hines VA Hospital, but has been given no systematic treatment for his conditions. Recently, he has had heart failure, lung-

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# The Mythology Continues

A REVIEW BY JOE MILLER

## "Vietnam: Soldiers' Stories"

A documentary from WILL-TV  
(PBS station at the University of  
Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

Producer: Tim Hartin

Co-Producers: David Inge and  
Carol Forsythe

Color/55 minutes

Thirteen Illinois and Indiana Vietnam veterans, men and women, reflect on their war experiences in this moving film, and the diversity of experiences and responses to the war on the ground come through in a powerful way. The producers should have left the reminiscences to the war itself, to the time in and around Vietnam. This would have resulted in a strong enough commentary on what that war did to Vietnamese and Americans alike.

However, Hartin, Inge, and Forsythe ventured into the mine-filled territory of Vietnam veterans and the anti-war movement. As a result of their approach to this controversial topic, in the

opinion of this reviewer, they undermined the whole project. Thus, they have contributed one more unfortunate example of attempts to whitewash the true history of the anti-war movement and the central role played by veterans in that movement.

As far as the producers are concerned, there was no anti-war veterans' movement. In their view, based upon the selected segments of interviews, GIs and veterans had nothing but hatred for the anti-war movement, feeling, for example, that young people who died at the hands of the Ohio National Guard at Kent State in 1970 "got what was coming to them."

Two of the interviewees included VVAW member Paul Wisovaty of Tuscola, Illinois, and Barry Romo, who served as an infantry lieutenant in Vietnam during 1967-1968 and is currently a National Co-Coordinator. Viewers never hear Romo's discussion of the close connection between active duty GIs, war veterans and

the peace movement in this country. He does not get to tell how nearly 50,000 Vietnam veterans came home from our war to join VVAW and work with a welcoming peace movement to end the destruction of Vietnam and its people and to bring US troops home alive and well.

Instead we are presented with footage of hippies, Yippies, and the Chicago police riot in August of 1968, along with a voice-over that gives no clue to the fact that, according to the FBI, nearly 500 members of VVAW were also in the streets in Chicago protesting the war and the sham convention taking place at that time. There is no discussion of the nearly 3,000 GIs who joined VVAW while still serving in Vietnam in 1971.

This film adds to the revision of history, begun under the Reagan administration, that claims there were no anti-war GIs or veterans, there was no resistance movement in the field that effectively limited the ability of the Nixon adminis-

tration to continue the war on the ground. As VVAW members and supporters know, this flies in the face of historical fact, and it feeds the ignorance among the general population, especially young people, about the real resistance among war veterans and active-duty GIs to the war against the Vietnamese people.

Citizens should beware of so-called "documentaries" like this that claim to present "soldiers' stories" from the Vietnam era without including the stories of tens of thousands of us who came home, were embraced by the peace movement, and worked for years under serious government threats and overt repression to help end that war.

Too bad. It could have been a better film.



JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL  
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URBANA CHAPTER.

## Notes From the Boonies

continued from page 3

Joe said here. But I have to ask myself, as suggested above, "What happened here? How did WILL, the University of Illinois PBS affiliate, come to produce a film which, by commission and omission, presented that misleading picture to its viewing public?"

I don't know. To play devil's advocate, we're not talking about the Armed Forces Radio Network, or *Stars and Stripes*. The Public Broadcasting System in this country has been for many years a poster child for the sort of media that Jesse Helms regularly decries, and demands that its plug be pulled. (I'm certain that Senator Helms is a regular subscriber to *The Veteran*, nonetheless.) In any case, anything Jesse doesn't like is awfully hard not to support. For the past couple of years, I have been a modest financial supporter of WILL, and I plan to continue that support. I have a really hard time imagining that three local PBS producers got together one day, after a long night of slugging down Chivas Regal and toasting George W. Bush, and said to each other, "We're really going to stick it to these liberal anti-war assholes."

Like I said, I don't know why they did that, or perhaps more

accurately, how they wound up doing it. Naive sort that I am, I don't even know if they know they did it. I suppose that one would just have to ask them, which I plan to do very shortly. (To be specific, I'm going to send them this column.) I do know, as do our readers, that there were up to fifty thousand Vietnam vets actively involved in the anti-war movement, which was unprecedented in the history of this country. I have also discovered, through multiple conversations with teenagers and even people my age, that this may be one of the best-kept secrets of 20th Century American history. I'm still looking for the first high school history book that mentions it. Most of them seem content to suggest that: "A lot of young Americans objected to our involvement in Vietnam." God only knows why, of course, because the authors seldom bother to burden their young readers with answers that might prove too confusing or depressing for them to handle. As I tell my high school students (Tuscola High School still invites me back each year, by the way), we were very much a decisive component in getting our country out of that war. Even when Nixon made us

show our "good paper," we had that. Of course, a lot of honorable 'Nam vets also left with bad paper, for no good reason, which is another shameful aspect of that war.

With regard to GIs' attitudes about the anti-war movement, I noticed one thing in the film I thought was particularly sad. One of the featured vets made the statement, referring to the Kent State murders (he didn't call them that), that for a lot of GIs in Vietnam, there was a part of them that said, "Good. It's about time those guys got theirs." He's right; a lot of vets felt that way thirty years ago, and a lot of them feel that way today. But most of us — at least, most of us in combat units — recognized that, as Yossarian said to a dangerously naive Clevinger in *Catch-22*, "the enemy is anybody who is trying to get you killed." Weren't nobody in the legitimate anti-war movement trying to get me killed, and I don't recall seeing Abbie Hoffman's name at the bottom of my draft notice. More importantly, leaving self-interest aside, the anti-war movement wasn't protesting only the fact that 58,000 Americans were in the process of getting wasted. They were objecting as much to the fact that two to three million Vietnamese, mostly civilians, were getting killed. Vets in the field, if not

necessarily those stationed in base camps, knew that. We saw firsthand what our government was doing, and we supported the efforts of the home front anti-war movement to try and stop it. We realized that what we were doing was, to use an obscure legal term, a crime.

Getting back to that veteran who made that statement about Kent State, I have to admit that I can't dismiss him as easily as I'd like. He's a Vietnam vet. Like most of us, he's still carrying around a lot of baggage, and he didn't ask for it and he didn't put it there. I think he's wrong, but I would never criticize him. I just wish he could come to grips with what we ("we" being not us vets, but the United States government) really did over there, because that might help him in his own healing process.

I'm also afraid that that might be a long time in coming, and that the process will not be speeded up by documentaries like **Vietnam: Soldiers' Stories**, however well-intentioned they might be.



PAUL WISOVATY IS A MEMBER OF  
VVAW'S C-U CHAPTER. HE LIVES  
IN TUSCOLA, IL WHERE HE WORKS  
FOR THE PROBATION DEPARTMENT.  
HE WAS IN VIETNAM WITH THE U.S.  
ARMY 9TH DIVISION IN 1968.



## Ringin' True

A REVIEW BY BARRY ROMO

**TDY**

**Douglas Valentine**

**iUniverse.com**

**September 2000**

**ISBN: 0-595-13366-5**

When I was asked to write a review of this book, I wanted to decline, especially so when I discovered that it was an online book.

I could not resist when I discovered that the author was Douglas Valentine and he kindly agreed to send me a hard copy.

This book is exciting, and politically and historically correct. I finished it in one reading. **TDY** is a fictional account of a VVAW member's military experience. Its characterizations ring true. Its

exposures of dirty dealing, drug cultivation and drug-running are familiar to most of us. There are some problems, as there will be with any fictionalized story. So don't get yourself in an uproar about a number of mistakes that are contained in this book, like when he talks about Jane Fonda being in Vietnam before 1972 or

some of the specific practices of different security agencies. The story in overall historical perspective rings true. This is a must-read.



BARRY ROMO IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER AND A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.

## Exposing Hypocrisy

A REVIEW BY SANFORD KELSON

**TDY**

**Douglas Valentine**

**iUniverse.com**

**September 2000**

**ISBN: 0-595-13366-5**

Sooner or later members of the armed forces learn not to volunteer.

Doug Valentine's new book, **TDY**, is a based-on-fact story about a US Air Force photojournalist who volunteers for what he believes is a relatively safe TDY (temporary duty) mission in the Philippines. But the mission is actually someplace else, and is full of violent death, and during the course of the mission the photojournalist nearly loses his life on several occasions. By the end of the mission, Pete (as he is known in **TDY**) also has lost forever the comfortable social blinders that so many of us wear.

Pete, a Vietnam veteran whose true identity will be revealed on Mike Levine's **Expert Witness** radio show (WBAI, NYC) later this year, remained silent about his experience for over thirty years. We are fortunate that

this individual trusted in Doug Valentine to convey his important story — a story every citizen, especially those preparing to join the armed forces, should read.

In 1965 Pete drops out of college due to bad grades, and to prevent being drafted into the US Army, joins the Air Force. After basic training he is assigned to a southwest airbase as a photojournalist. Boredom prompts him to put in a request for an overseas assignment, and in early 1967 one is offered. However, the assignment is shrouded in such secrecy (and, unknown to Pete, a web of lies) that he really has no understanding of what he is volunteering to do.

After their training for the mission and their travel to the Far East, Pete and the other members of the team realize, just when there is no turning back, that they have been deceived. The team soon finds itself not in the Philippines, but in the jungles of southeast Asia, photographing and recording on audiotape a clandestine transaction. If disclosed during the escalating Vietnam War, the

fact of this transaction may have caused American troops to turn their weapons on their own leaders. Had the US been a just society, public knowledge of the transaction certainly would have resulted in high government officials being tried for treason.

But none of that was to be.

There is, however, a blood-stained thread that Pete discovers in the jungles of Southeast Asia, and later in Saigon, that directly connects W.W.II with the Vietnam War and the Gulf War. That thread weaves together the fact that Standard Oil sold fuel to Germany during W.W.II, and only one US oil tanker was lost to the Germans in all of the war; and the fact that in Vietnam, Shell stations were never attacked and not one American oil truck was ever sabotaged.

That thread moves through the past two decades as well. With American blessings, Indonesia invaded East Timor, in substantial part for access to oil reserves which were granted to America's allies. But when Iraq invaded Kuwait, again in substantial part

for access to oil, the US said it could not allow a big country to occupy a small country, and thus we had the Gulf War.

Exposing the hypocrisy of American foreign policy is not in vogue these days, which is all the more reason to read **TDY**. Pete's sanguineous jungle experience and subsequent revelations about the amorality of our government is not only a thrilling combat story, it is the type of book that may help motivate Americans to take their country back from multinational corporations and the bought-and-paid-for politicians who cynically use our children's love of country to further their own financial interests.

**TDY** is a good read and an important book. Doug Valentine is also the author of *The Hotel Tacloban*, a widely-praised account of life and death in a Japanese POW camp, and *The Phoenix Program*, a shocking account of the CIA's most secret and deadly operation of the Vietnam War.



## Challenging Pop Culture on Vietnam

A REVIEW BY BARRY ROMO

**Vietnam and Other American Fantasies**

**H. Bruce Franklin**

**University of Massachusetts Press**

**Amherst, 2000**

After all these years since the American War in South Asia and the forests of trees that have been cut down to document that war, do we really need another book?

If it's as good as H. Bruce Franklin's latest book, the answer is a definite yes. This latest of his eighteen books contains science

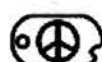
fiction, Star Trek, Reagan's "Star Wars," poetry, politics, POW/MIAs, anti-war activism, vets being spit upon, history, revision and, most importantly, analysis.

Those of us who lived through the war are reminded of the terrible destructiveness, outright lies and political campaigns it took to keep the war going and to fool the American public. Franklin reminds us of the role of the pro-peace forces in the population — including veterans and servicemen — in ending the war. He doesn't sidestep the truth.

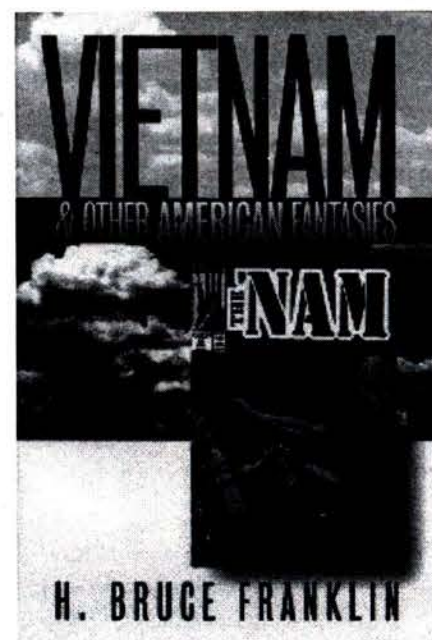
I do have one problem with

the book. He never mentions VVAW, although he does talk about our demonstrations and our impact. 'Nam vets in their tens of thousands (including thousands in 'Nam) were led by our organization, not by an abstraction. But this is a minor problem compared to the whole book.

I read it in three days, and you will too.



BARRY ROMO IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER AND A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.





# Waging War Against Children

BARRY ROMO

Colombia is set to receive 1.3 billion dollars in military aid. This makes it third in American aid largess, right behind Israel and Egypt. We have decided to take our stand with a corrupt government, corrupt military and death squad militias. Of course, it is not Vietnam. They speak Spanish, not Vietnamese. Even so, the constant input of funds, military equipment, advisors and special operations personnel makes Colombia look like Saigon in 1960.

According to international human rights organizations, there were 399 massacres last year. The guerrillas and their allies are responsible for only twelve of these massacres. Our aid money goes to pay for the other 377 massacres, by the Colombian authorities, against their own people.

Early this year, I was asked to go on a fact-finding mission to a small Colombian village in Arauca, called Santodomingo. There was confusion about the nature of a massacre which occurred on December 19, 1998. The villagers claimed that government helicopters bombed the village. This attack resulted in the deaths of nineteen people—seven of them were children—and the serious injury of twenty-five others. The government, backed by

the United States, discounted the victims' report and claimed that they were all injured by a single, homemade claymore mine, made by the guerrillas. I went to Colombia in June to investigate this atrocity and to interview the victims.

My trip was facilitated by Catholic human rights activists. People warned me about the danger, of which of course I was already aware. I also realized that these activists faced death and torture every day from US-backed thugs. I flew to Arauca, which is on the border of Venezuela. Arauca has a lot of oil pipelines and facilities. To get to Santodomingo we had to travel in extremely old and tired SUVs over roads that would make a farm tractor road look paved.

The village is typical of many third world agricultural areas. Tin roofs, open doors and dirt floors are normal there. The people are shaped by trying to survive off the land and raise their children to have an education and a better life. In fact, when the attacks occurred, the villagers in Santodomingo were having a fiesta to raise funds for a school. In the middle of the festivities, on December 13, 1998, the Colombian military, in US-provided Huey helicopters loaded with

American bombs and rockets, slaughtered villagers.

Children and grandchildren were killed in front of their parents. A mother was decapitated. When people tried to drive the survivors to a hospital, they were followed by the Hueys for three kilometers, under fire. Not only did the voices of the victims tell a story, the physical evidence proved that it was the government that was responsible for the attack, not the guerrillas. There was not one explosion, but four. The shrapnel was not the nuts and bolts of a homemade mine; it was aluminum from an AN-M41 fragmentation bomb.

Armed with this information, VVAW participated in a tribunal, together with the Center for International Human Rights located at Northwestern University Law School. The tribunal was organized by Professor Doug Cassel, who has dedicated his life to human rights issues. Besides VVAW's participation, we had an unexpected ally: the FBI. While I was examining Santodomingo, they were issuing a secret report that they found fragments and a fuse, as well as other bomb parts, directly pointing to the Colombian military.

One of the sad things about

Colombia today is that this massacre was only one of about 400 that occur every year. The level of violence is not diminishing. It is increasing. Priests, nuns, brothers, and lawyers are in the front lines of the struggle to defend the Colombian people from authorities who can act with total impunity with regard to murder and torture. It's not about the drugs. It is much more about the oil, the political location of the country, and the guerrillas. Everybody has a hand in the drug profits. The death squads, the guerrillas, the military, and the government all get a slice of this lucrative pie.

This situation calls for increased activity by those of us involved in the struggle for peace and justice. People said that I was brave for going to Colombia, but I was only a tourist sharing their pain and danger for a week. The poor people of Santodomingo and countless other villages across Colombia must live this nightmare every day. Our aid, both military and financial, does not contribute to a solution. It makes a settlement impossible.



BARRY ROMO IS A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO CHAPTER AND A VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.

## Los niños de Santo Domingo recuerdan...



**Un crimen de lesa humanidad se cometió con aeronaves donadas por USA, supuestamente para la lucha antidrogas.**

Comité Regional de DD-HH "Joel Sierra" - Corporación Jurídica "Humanidad Vigente"

*This poster is a reproduction of a picture made by children survivors of the massacre. The Colombian military was so afraid of it that they filed suit against the human rights group that produced it.*



## Three Days in Colombia

STANLEY CAMPBELL

Three days in Colombia. I didn't think it would be enough time, especially for the money — including a lot raised by friends and family and a small gift from VVAW. But after three days with the Chicago tribunal after which we released a report decrying the massacre of nineteen villagers by the US-supplied Colombian army, I was glad and ready to return home.

*Monday, December 11, 2000*

Bogota has eight million vehicles and they're all on the same road at the same time. We had five important meetings the first day, and we spent at least an hour in traffic between each one.

We were running around telling officials the verdict of the tribunal: an air force helicopter dropped at least two American-made cluster bombs on the village of Santo Domingo, fired on people attempting to help the injured, and tried to conceal it afterwards. We were releasing the thirty-page report to the press on Wednesday and we wanted to give some of the officials time to respond.

The American embassy said thanks, but no thanks; besides, they were too busy helping Colombia buy American weapons to worry about a two-year-old massacre. \$1.2 billion of approved tax dollars (and god knows how much through the CIA). Also, you should know that our tax dollars pay for the best fortress money can buy. The embassy is a beauti-

ful edifice of power in tan limestone.

Our next visit was to Colombia's version of a human rights office, the "public" defenders — four floors of them, and staffed by the most attractive of secretaries. They said they didn't know it was a cluster bomb, American-made, and dropped from an American-made helicopter. But they'd like to see the FBI report (yes there was one, and it was released in May) and will get right on it, don't you worry (which means "stop bothering me: you're taking my time away from my secretary").

The UN human rights office was much more supportive. They said they'd reached the same conclusion as our tribunal. They are appalled that the worst offenders in the Colombian military visit our country regularly (to go to the School of the Americas in Ft. Benning, Georgia?). Hey, why don't we make a stink every time one of those generals applies for a visa?

The attorney general of Colombia said he was indicting three helicopter crews and an army major. And, oh yeah, he was outta here in January, so good luck seeing any prosecutions. This guy had two human dobermans working the phones while he was talking to us in his 24th floor office overlooking congested Bogota. I liked him. He was the only one who served us anything: coffee in



*Stanley Campbell with translator in Colombia.*

fine china.

We had two more meetings with folks I just don't recall, but one was supportive. The other told us to investigate the guerrillas. (We would, but they don't get any American aid.)

I was pretty bushed. Most of the time I'd just sat, looked stern, and every now and then shaken my head in agreement with my twelve cohorts. Except at the American embassy. I just had to tell that smug employee that I have no chance of getting folks who want to quit into any recovery programs 'cause there's no money. I got a blank stare back.

*My cohorts:*

Two tribunal members out of the fifteen who ruled, one of whom, Bernadine Dohrn, might light a candle in your memory

cells. She'd fought the war in Vietnam so hard, she ended up wanted by the FBI. Now she defends children's rights at Northwestern U.

Doug Cassell, legal counsel to the tribunal and American brainchild of the whole affair. Rockford folks might remember him for leading the legal intervention against Com Ed's Byron nuke license.

Alberto Guzman, a Colombian journalist who hasn't been home since 1980. I kidded him about his name and said I was gonna be on the opposite side of the customs line from him. He met his two estranged children (from a previous marriage) in a tearful reunion.

*continued on page 18*

## Human Rights in Colombia

BRUCE DAVIDSON

If you thought it couldn't happen again, look closely at the situation in Colombia. The basic dynamic there is the same as in Southeast Asia forty years ago: multinational corporations want access to unexploited natural resources in a third-world country. The United States government creates a smokescreen for military intervention backed by billions of taxpayer dollars, and millions of civilians suffer the terrible consequences. But this is the new millennium and there is a new neoliberal world order. American citizens are much more skeptical about the machinations of our government, so it has learned how to dominate foreign resources without resorting to "domino theory" rhetoric or los-

ing many soldiers.

The new methodology is relatively simple. First, create an excuse that touches on a domestic problem (for example, the "war on drugs"). Then pay billions of dollars to train the foreign country's army commanders (such as at the School of the Americas, Fort Benning, Georgia). Next, exploit the country's existing civil war by giving billions of dollars in military aid and intelligence assistance to right-wing armies and paramilitary organizations (for example, the recently-approved "Plan Colombia"). US troops are replaced by that country's own army and their paramilitary allies, who effectively become mercenaries on their own soil. Rich elites in the impover-

ished country buy into the US plan out of self-interest. In the end, it is a recipe for human tragedy.

This coldly calculated foreign policy has been termed "low-intensity conflict" and has been implemented mercilessly throughout Latin America in the last decades. But in Colombia the stakes are raised to a new level. Colombia, whose army already has the worst human rights record of any in the Western hemisphere, boosted the stakes in the civil war when it accepted the US-designed "Plan Colombia" this year. Under the guise of the "war on drugs," almost a billion dollars a year — mostly military hardware and intelligence assistance — will be pumped into the Colombian mili-

tary. It is clear that the plan is only superficially intended to halt drug production in Colombia since the primary military focus is on the southern provinces (controlled by the leftist guerrillas of the FARC) whereas the majority of the narcotraffickers are known to be based in Medellin and Cali and farther north.

Some recent events have brought awareness of the grave human rights situation in Colombia. In September 2000, human rights workers and church members from Colombia who were witnesses to the massacre in Santo Domingo, Colombia on December 13, 1998 testified in tribunals

*continued on page 18*



# Kokan-Ri

WILSON M. POWELL

September 9, 2000

We sat together on a stone bench holding hands. She was all of four foot two, stocky, dressed in a pink tunic and flowered pants, tiny feet in black, rubber-soled shoes. Her hair is close-cropped and her skin fine-wrinkled and reddened by outdoor living. She was telling her story as the sole known survivor of a mass killing that happened fifty years ago in September 1950. Her name is Hwang Jum Soon

She squeezed my hand and rose to lead us through the rice paddy to an ancestral shrine. She said it had come under attack by two groups of American soldiers

ing, to meet Hwang Jum Soon and listen to her story and her plea for a "fact-finding." She wants to find her son, if he is still alive. Yeong Man says she has been here alone, without family, ever since the killing. He says her husband died just before the attack, but she doesn't know how. He assumes he was shot by someone.

She tells more of her story as we approach the shrine, a stone-walled area about one-third of an acre square, with a raised wood and plaster building in the center. We pass through a wide wood gate into the courtyard. The shrine roof is curved tile, typical of the old Korea. Wood frame doors with panels swing open to reveal a



after about one hundred old people and children took shelter from the war raging around them on that day.

She pointed to a grove of trees about 800 yards distant. "They were shooting from there." Then she pointed to a low wall, much closer, perhaps sixty yards off from the shrine, "They were shooting from there, also. Even though they could see we had a white cloth on the roof to say we were civilians."

She is speaking through our interpreter, who brought me, by bus, to Masan the night before to meet with Kim Yeong Man, a Vietnam war veteran of the ROK Marines. He is the only one of 300,000 ROK troops who has turned in his medals and publicly apologized for his part in attacks on civilian populations in that country. No one else spoke up — but no other veteran criticized him, either. He hopes he can someday form a contingent of Veterans For Peace in Korea.

Yeong Man brought us here, in the cool of an overcast morn-

ing, to meet Hwang Jum Soon and listen to her story and her plea for a "fact-finding." She wants to find her son, if he is still alive. Yeong Man says she has been here alone, without family, ever since the killing. He says her husband died just before the attack, but she doesn't know how. He assumes he was shot by someone.

how she, as a young mother, was holding her two-year-old son in her arms, trying to protect him as bullets entered her body. She pulls up a pant leg to reveal a puckered scar, very recognizable as a bullet wound. The other wounds were to her chest and arms, covered by the shirt. She said her baby was hit, but not dead, she thought.

Not only did they take ground fire, but they were hit from the air. Strafed, she said. She was the only one left alive, except, perhaps, for her son. She was taken away, unconscious, by villagers who came later, after the soldiers left. No one dared come back for fifteen more days. When they did, her son was not among the bodies removed for burial on the mountain behind the shrine. She hopes he was taken, perhaps even by a soldier, wounded as he was, and cared for. She hopes he is alive.

Before we leave, she stoops to pull a few weeds. This place is sacred to her, needs her care.

On the path back, she takes my hands in both of hers and looks

me in the eyes. Through our interpreter, she tells us all that I am the first American soldier ever to come here since the day of the killing. She is very glad that an American veteran cares to come and learn from her.

I can only say, "I am so sorry." I am speaking for myself, of course, but I am also speaking for all other veterans who feel as I do: that we need to make amends wherever we can, and to let people know that wars have very personal, very harmful, consequences, are certainly avoidable and unnecessary.

I promise to tell her story and join my voice with those who want to expose all such events and give our countries the chance to make official amends — starting, in her case, with an investigation that just might, against all odds, find out what happened to her son.



WILSON "WOODY" POWELL IS A KOREAN VET, ACTIVE IN VETERANS FOR PEACE.

## An Invitation to Celebrate Life! My Lai Peace Park Dedication Ceremony March 16, 2001

The two-storied gazebo is finished.  
The site is prepared for us to plant trees, shrubs and flowers.  
The My Lai Peace Park will be a green, growing living monument  
to peace  
and a celebration of life:  
a place for children to play under its trees  
without fear.  
a place to meditate about war and its cost,  
a place for hope.

*The Madison Friends (Quakers) and the people of My Lai, Viet Nam, invite all people of peace and goodwill to join them in My Lai on March 16, 2001, to help usher in a new millennium by dedicating the My Lai Peace Park.*

For more information contact:

Roy M. (Mike) Boehm

608-244-9505

email: vapp@igc.org



# Remembering: A Meditation

REV. JAMES B. HOLIMAN

August 9, 2000

Today, fifty-five years ago, at 11:01 a.m., an atomic bomb exploded over the city of Nagasaki, Japan. In a sudden flash, over 50,000 persons died. Three days earlier, Hiroshima had been the target of the first atom bomb used against humankind, killing over 100,000 people within the firestorm. Untold numbers would die from the radiation poison spreading out over the world.

In August 1945 I was ten years old, living not so innocently in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Hot Springs was the site of the largest US Army-Navy Hospital. During World War II it received and treated many of the most seriously wounded military personnel. Recuperating warriors would sometimes respond to the questions small boys asked about the war, combat and killing. These stories, broken bodies, magazine photographs, and movie newsreels had begun to sour the acquired taste for heroic battle stimulated by government propaganda, military recruiters, and patriotic school activities. The family, like millions of others in that terrible time, knew "up close and personal" the cost of infinite loss. The primal scream of a neighbor who had just read a telegram regretfully informing her of the death of her son, our cousin, at Normandy, France, still rings in my ears: "EURAAAAA!"

And I also knew some things about the Holocaust and what was happening to Jewish families throughout "Christian Europe." A significant portion of Hot Springs' population was Jewish. Some of my schoolmates were children of families within the Jewish community. At one elementary school assembly, a Jewish boy created quite a stir with a prayer uttered at the end of a story about his grand-

parents' disappearance after the US government refused asylum to Jewish refugees: "Here I am, O Lord God, Creator and Ruler of the Universe! But where are you?"

My two sisters' husbands served in the Pacific. Pearl Harbor, Bataan, Midway, Guadalcanal, Okinawa, Iwo Jima (especially Iwo Jima) traced trajectories forever through the dark space of unknowing in my soul.

**Little by little, the terrible tactics employed by both sides throughout the war hardened all of us to horrible human costs.**

Sometime shortly after 9 August 1945 the American public was informed that all the national radio broadcasting networks would air the tape recording of the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima by the B-29 Superfortress, *Enola Gay*. So it was that I heard the voices of the *Enola Gay* flight crew describing the exploding chaotic mass of flame and cloud blossoming into an immense mushroom ascending to 50,000 feet. The voice of Capt. Robert A. Lewis, co-pilot, blasted unforgettable words into my spirit: "My God! What have we done?"

On 2 September 1945, General Douglas MacArthur, standing on the deck of the USS Missouri, tried to answer the question: "A new era is upon us. Even the lesson of victory itself brings with it profound concern, both for our future security, and the survival of civilization. Military alliances, balances of power, leagues of nations, all in turn failed, leaving the only path to be by way of the crucible of war . . . The utter destructiveness of war now blots out this alternative. We have had

our last chance. If we do not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. . . ."

Given the loss of innocence, I remember thinking that *Some darn fool on the planet is gonna open that 'door'!* In that moment Enlightenment Christendom ended for me and the postmodern era was born. I gathered up my camping gear, called my dog

Mike, and headed off into the Ouachita Mountain National Forest. In those deep and dark woods, Mike and I began to try to understand what was happening.

But it was a time when humankind tried either to rationalize or to forget "unforgivable atrocities." Some said: "The bomb saved American lives by ending the war before the pending allied invasion of the Japanese mainland;" others argued that "It's just another weapon and should be used to end the war." Early Cold Warriors emphasized "We have to show the Soviet Union what we are capable of doing so that it will submit to the US postwar plan." The racists advocated that "The Japanese deserve to die!" From academia we heard such things as: "This marks the end of history," "the end of ideology," "the end of art," "the end of politics," "the end of God."

*Some darn fool is gonna open that door!* And we did. As the cartoonist Walt Kelly summed up in his *I Go Pogo*: "We have met the enemy, and he is us!" The planet will never again be free of the radiation poison leaking from our stored nuclear weapons waste sites.

One of my seminary professors warned, "There are great dangers in psychoanalyzing the clinically depressed." So this meditation isn't about the melancholy into which the "angry young generation" descended during the postwar years. But I would point out that in Joseph Heller's novel on W.W.II, *Catch 22*, Yossarian suffers from what a medical man calls "a paranoid fear" that someone is trying to kill him; it's im-

portant to know that Yossarian is also flying bombing raids over Germany where thousands of German fighter pilots and anti-aircraft CREs are trying to do just that every time he comes over — kill him!

Death is not something postmoderns like to think about, especially our own annihilation. Perhaps that's why it's easy either to "fictionalize" our lives or to repress and divert attention away from our social and historical place with rhetorical and dramatic gestures toward some other world.

The fifty-fifth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki confronts us with historic tragedy that reaches far beyond the grasp of any rationalization. The decision to use atomic weapons against Japanese cities reveals much about the moral coarsening that had by the end of the war affected almost everyone in the American chain of command. Little by little, the terrible tactics employed by both sides throughout the war hardened all of us to horrible human costs. And now we all know just what human beings are capable of doing.

It seems to me that Howard Zinn points us toward the challenge of these days "of infamy:" "It is a problem of the corruption of human intelligence, enabling our leaders to create plausible reasons for monstrous acts, and to exhort citizens to accept those reasons, and train soldiers to follow orders. So long as that continues, we will need to refute those reasons, resist those exhortations."

This is not an easy path to walk in the dark wood. To walk it is to learn dependence upon the hospitality of the faithful few who offer sanctuary to disciples of peace with justice. It also is a path on which these same disciples must learn the strategy and tactics of resistance, the art of placing a spoke in the wheels of the engines of death (Mark 6:7-11).



JAMES B. HOLIMAN IS ORDAINED CLERGY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA (RET.). HE IS A MEMBER OF THE URBANA-CHAMPAIGN CHAPTER OF VVAW.

The Milwaukee Chapter of VVAW  
presents a  
**Benefit Sweetheart Concert**  
featuring Steve Cohen & the RoCos  
with special guest Greg Koch

*A benefit for the My Lai Peace Park Project*

8:30-Midnight  
Saturday, Feb. 10, 2001  
The Tasting Room  
1100 E. Kane Pl.  
Milwaukee, WI

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# Dewey Canyon III

ED DAMATO

I was one of those people who actually went to the Woodstock music festival in August 1969. I mention this because the experience was an important influence on me at the time. The idea of a three-day rock concert in the rolling hills of sunny, upstate New York instead of the ugly confines of Fillmore East and Madison Square Garden was very appealing. That it turned out to be a watershed moment of the times was lost on us as we began the drive that Friday morning. After three days of great delays, torrential downpours, mud, scarcity of food, cut feet, and loss of socks, shoes, shirt and wallet, I returned home.

The music, however, was, to use a Sixties term, "mindblowing." The indescribable bonding of the tens of thousands of us bogged down in traffic, shoehorned on a sloping hillside, sharing food, and smiling, smiling, smiling at our discomfort took on a life equal to or surpassing that on the stage. Woodstock showed the possibilities of the new culture and politics, born out of the tumultuous Sixties with the civil rights struggles, assassinations, the Beatles and the interminable war in Vietnam from which I had returned in February 1968. I felt like a pioneer of a new age of politics and power. Did my life peak just turning age 23?

One year later, in August 1970, I saw Jane Fonda on a late night show talking about a march to Valley Forge by a group called Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Is it possible, I thought, that there could be such a group?

(Let me digress. It's not often that I offer an article for publication in *The Veteran* so I am hoping that the kind editor will allow me a short paragraph. Jane Fonda is merely one of us who spoke out against the war, and she has suffered for it dearly at the hands of a conservative campaign to denigrate anti-Vietnam War activism in general.)

I tracked the group down and joined immediately. I marched to Valley Forge and began a life of fighting against the war that I thought was wrong. Up to this point my big anti-war statement was giving the finger to President Richard Nixon while he rounded 50th Street in his limousine on his way to an event held at the Americana Hotel on 7th Avenue in New

York City.

Somehow I became VVAW's coordinator for New York and Vermont. At its first National Steering Committee Meeting held in New York in February 1971, the group voted to go to Washington DC for Operation Dewey Canyon III in April, not leaving much time to organize such a massive event.

I remember indexing names of upstate veterans who expressed an interest in joining the group. I toured from Burlington, near the Canadian border in the northwestern part of Vermont to western New York. I hooked up with the Vets Club at the University of Buffalo through Gail Graham in Jamestown close to the Ohio border. Soon after DCIII they officially joined VVAW as a chapter, one of the very nice things that resulted from Dewey Canyon III.

In the meantime the chapters in Queens, Brooklyn and Long Island were out asking veterans to enlist one more time. Come dawn of the day we set out for the bus trip down to DC; our eager veterans and friends boarded the two buses awaiting us. The enthusiasm was palpable. The possibilities were ripe.

The days in Washington flew by. As at the Woodstock concert the events blur in my head in a sort of haze with certain pictures frozen in my memory.

I remember the first day as I was helping myself to a cup of coffee, one hand full, bumping into a vet also with one hand full. He held the cups and I poured the

sugar. As we looked up at each other I recognized my friend Tim Donahue, with whom I trained at Fort Ord and Fort Gordon!

I remember looking through a crowd filled with fatigue-clad veterans and spotting a soon-to-be great friend and political cohort, Barry Romo. We had met once before in February in New York where, among other things, we participated in the rolling of a cot on the sidewalks of the upper West Side. It was like meeting an old friend.

I remember getting ready to go on a march of some kind and having the distinct and humbling pleasure of meeting and escorting Anne Pine, a gold star mother. I remember being overwhelmed by her courage.

I remember seeing Jacob Javits, our US senator visiting the campsite. Javits visiting us? I remember the secret thrill of not going to meet or introduce him to

*continued on next page*



*Ed Damato leads Ann Pine, a Gold Star mother, to the Capitol at Dewey Canyon III.*



*Medals being tossed at the Capitol at Dewey Canyon III.*



## "You guys damn well better be protesting this!"

Ten years ago, members of VVAW, along with their allies, were actively protesting the war in the Persian Gulf. Those of us located in the University towns of Champaign-Urbana in east central Illinois worked in a local anti-war coalition called the Committee Against the War in the Gulf (CAWG). Beginning in October 1990, we helped organize demonstrations against Desert Shield and then Desert Storm twice each week. We brought out thousands

of students and community members, no matter what the weather, to call for the removal of US troops from harm's way and the end of the horrible bombing of the Iraqi people.

I work as an academic advisor to all political science majors at the University of Illinois, and sometime during the fall, one of our students (Steve) received notification that his reserve unit was being called up. Steve already knew of my involvement with

VVAW and with the local anti-war coalition, but we had no problem communicating with each other on the issues involved. As one connected with medical service, Steve felt no real reason to try to avoid going. On the contrary, as I recall, he felt he would actually be doing some good. He knew he would be going somewhere close to the "action," and he was apprehensive about it, but off he went.

I heard nothing from him

after he left until this handwritten letter, received a week or two after the start of the ground offensive. The letter is reproduced here as he wrote it. Steve never returned to the University of Illinois at the end of the war, and I have no idea where he may be right now. I am hopeful he is well and will not be going through too much with this tenth anniversary of his war.

Joe Miller

24 Feb 91  
8:00 A.M.

Dear Joe,

How could it possibly have gone this far? I sit here in my tent numb and trying so very hard to think about what has happened this morning — not to rationalize and internally legitimize these recent events, but simply to understand why.

At 4:00 A.M. we escalated the US-Iraq conflict to include massive use of ground forces. This whole episode, or rather series of episodes, has been a travesty of legal, political, and moral justice, and in my opinion, has been uncalled for. If only a percentage of the effort that went into the rhetoric and spewing out of clichés had gone into communications with the Baathist regime, I am sure this insanity would have ended long

ago.

Instead, I have to be satisfied with keeping a running body count of civilian casualties on the front of our pretty tan tent in big red letters with an indelible marker. Shit, they are probably going to make me bury this thing by the time this is over.

Joe, I, like any other political scientist, with the exception of Cohen (S) and his little entourage, am astounded this has gone so far. Is that a testament of my naivete? Anyone who has that deep-rooted mistrust of our "institutions" resulting from the Vietnam era would readily say it certainly is. However, I am a fairly cynical bastard myself. So, why did I fail to see the series of events that I have been protesting against that we now face?

Over the past few weeks, I have taken up the "banner" of speaking out against the war. I

have argued with the first sergeant at length, but only after he explained to me why the Israelis were threatened by the Palestinians, therefore having a right to shoot them. Jesus, I used to like this guy.

Well, I got a discussion group going almost on a daily basis, and by the end, everyone is singing the same tune: "War is wrong!" My question is, does that mean they are rational or easily manipulated? The black community here is wholeheartedly against the war, but the whites a just a bit different. It seems that the white community only reacts when they realize they have been betrayed.

Well, now that it is going, let's hope it ends quickly, and most importantly, with a minimal loss of life.

I was angry there, but now I'm numb again, so I'm outta here.

Sorry it took so long to write.

You know how I am about getting things on paper.

Hey, I don't want to be a pest, but could you send some clippings and let me know how things are going on campus? You guys damn well better be protesting this! Believe it or not we don't get that sort of news here.

Well, take care of yourself and Lynn. Give her my love and don't the two of you worry too much. I'm too much of a jerk to let anything happen to me. Hope to see you soon — glad you are not here.

Love,  
Steve

Operation Desert Shield  
1702 Contingency Hospital/  
AREFW  
APO, NY 09854



### Dewey Canyon III

*continued from previous page*

our contingent and sensing the rising power of our presence as a major political force in the anti-war movement.

I remember dozens of New York veterans visiting the office of James Buckley (brother of William), our carpetbagger senator from Connecticut. (We have a long history of welcoming "foreign-

ers" to our state.) It was believed that to avoid us he sneaked out a back door, leaving his staff to answer to the angry veterans waiting to lobby our elected representative.

But most of all, I remember the discussion at a steering committee meeting as we debated how to end the demonstration on its

last day. Should we take all our medals we wanted to return to the federal government and put them in a body bag, or should we allow the vets to physically throw them at the foot of the statue of John Marshall that sits at the rear of the Capitol Building? It is to our everlasting credit and to the democracy of our organization that we chose the latter.

Returning our medals as we did allowed for two things. It gave each and every veteran the center stage to express his sadness and anger at having taken part in the Vietnam War. It helped cleanse our consciences, and most importantly, it made for a great, historic action of veterans standing tall and true and expressing our deepest sentiments at a war we believed to be unjust.

We aren't given a choice of wars to be called upon to fight. We can't choose to be at Gettysburg to fight for the union. We can't choose to be at Normandy to fight against fascism and annihilation.

Our time came during the Vietnam War. At Dewey Canyon III we expressed ourselves in just as honest and heartfelt a way as they did when raising the flag at Iwo Jima. We were just as courageous and patriotic as all our fellow veterans from all the wars we are made to fight in.

I mention Woodstock and DCIII at the same time because, as a young man coming of age in the 1960s, I was most influenced by music and war. At each event I felt a part of something much larger, something so important that they created sea changes in the way America thinks and grows. That events are always so defining is something I continue to hope for.



ED DAMATO IS A 31 YEAR MEMBER AND LEADER OF VVAW WHO SERVED AS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR, EAST COAST COORDINATOR. HE SERVED WITH THE ARMY IN VIETNAM.



A Gold Star mother at Dewey Canyon III.



# Iraq Water Project

FREDY CHAMPAGNE

In October 2000 I took part in the Iraq Water Project, an undertaking of Veterans For Peace. Team One achieved the goal of beginning the renovation of a water treatment plant in the village of Labanni, southeast of Basra in the Abul Khasib valley of Iraq.

Our delegation of seventeen people gathered in Amman, Jordan, on October 4. We were met by representatives of our host organization, LIFE for Relief and Development, Ms. Vicki Robb and Dr. Yarub Al-Shiarida. We took part in an orientation meeting, and then piled into four rented vehicles for the long drive across the deserts of Jordan and Iraq, arriving safely in Baghdad.

Our first day's program in Baghdad included a visit to the Iraqi Museum of History, with an informative briefing with the president of the Peace and Friendship Society, Dr. Abdul Razak. Dr. Razak described how United Nations Committee 661 had blocked nearly 300 different contracts that would allow the Iraqi government to procure useful and needed items for its infrastructure. These contracts are blocked due to their characterization as "dual use" items.

In the afternoon, we toured the Amiriya Bomb Shelter. This is the infamous shelter next to a school in Baghdad that was deliberately bombed by Allied planes in February of 1991. There are conflicting reports of the number of dead and injured, but it was clear that the number of women and children killed or injured were in the hundreds.

The next day, our delegation visited the University of Baghdad for a lecture on the environmental damages of bombings and sanctions by Dr. Souad Naji Al-Azzawi. We followed this lecture with a tour of the Al-Mansour Children's Hospital. Dr. Mahmoud Mkai was very gracious, under the circumstances. The suffering at this hospital was heartbreaking, and it was difficult for us to observe the situation.

On the 9th we departed in a tour bus for Basra, where we checked into our hotel, which looked out over the Shatt-al-Arab waterway. The next day we traveled south of Basra to the Abul Khasib valley. The Labanni water treatment plant that we were to renovate appeared much larger than we had anticipated. The plant

was functioning only semi-adequately, sending untreated water to households in the valley. Since being bombed early by the Allies in the air war in 1991, the plant has been largely inoperable.

Our job was to put the plant back into operating order. Besides repairing the roof over the main pump house, we were to begin the work of rebuilding one of the four pumps, repairing the water filtration tanks, and getting the chlorinator working and mixing properly again. With a budget of only \$35,000, we were amazed at this ambitious plan for renovation. In the States, such a plant remodel

served. We were not permitted to visit these sites due to unexploded ordnance, or so we were told. It turned out that the governor-general was commander of the forces that had fought against one of our Gulf vets. It was a memorable meeting, and the governor was polite and warm.

The next day we again went to the Labanni work site. As it was our last day, we arranged our Veterans For Peace banners in several spots and took photos. We left four people on the site who wished to continue working. The rest of us visited the Basra Maternity and Children's Hospital and

three plants Team Two is contracted to renovate. We walked through the village and observed some damage from a bombing attack in 1998 that killed seventeen people and wounded numerous others. At the grammar school, we were somewhat shocked to have four children presented to us and partially disrobed for photographs — a situation I will personally make sure does not occur again. We also visited another one of the three plants we will be rebuilding at Hamden Bridge. In the evening, we attended a meeting with three veterans, the brothers of our host, Dr. Yarub. These discussions were quite informative and gave a glimpse of what life is like for the ordinary veteran in service to his country.

We headed for Baghdad on the 13th. Along the way, we had a chance to visit Qurna, a village located at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and the beginning of the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway. This is the famous location of the "Garden of Eden," one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. We asked Dr. Yarub to make a preliminary inquiry into the status of an inoperable water plant there.

The next day we visited a training school set up by LIFE for Relief and Development. This school boasts three computer labs and a room containing sewing machines. Next we drove outside of Baghdad for a visit to the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon. We were impressed with the museum and the quality of the restoration work being undertaken. Though we only saw a glimpse of old Babylon, the city must have been impressive in its heyday.

Later we visited the town of Kerbala, a major city south of Baghdad. Some of us were not fully informed of the significance of this city in relation to the uprising of the Shia population. We noticed our security had been tripled, and we were escorted by armed police everywhere we went. The bombing of the Cole and the Palestinian uprising had increased security concerns, and the Iraqis were not going to let anything happen to our delegation. We visited one of the holiest mosques in Islam there. Most of us were not allowed inside initially, as we were

**We observed a room with more than a hundred large color photographs of babies born at the hospital with severe birth defects.**

would cost upwards of a quarter million dollars.

Our team worked very hard in the heat of the first day and impressed the authorities of the government, our LIFE representatives, and the contractor and workmen on the site. Not all of them fully realized that we were serious in wanting to do actual physical work, but working alongside the Iraqis was an experience we had wanted to share. At sunset, we were treated to a boat ride, departing the dock near the hotel and traveling upriver four or five miles. We observed several ships lying in ruins along the banks of the Shatt-al-Arab waterway.

On October 11 our team again went to work at the Labanni site. About half of our delegation stayed on the job at Labanni and continued working in the hot sun. The other half visited three grammar schools in Basra with representatives of LIFE and participated in the distribution of school knapsacks filled with books, pencils and writing tablets.

In the evening, we were summoned for a private visit and briefing by the Basra governor-general, General Ahmad Ibraheem Hammash. Three members of our delegation were seeking permission to visit the war zone where two of the Gulf War veterans had

were briefed by a Dr. Faisel and another obstetrician on the many birth defects in the region. We observed a room with more than a hundred large color photographs of babies born at the hospital with severe birth defects. Though the hospital administrators were careful in their statements about the causes of these birth defects, which included depleted uranium and malnutrition, it was clear that there were many more of them than in other areas of Iraq. We delivered ten boxes of donated medical supplies gathered by our friends at MEDIC of Illinois. These supplies were greatly appreciated. (Many thanks to Jeanne Lang and MEDIC for their support.) We also delivered supplies donated by Phelps Community Hospital in Garberville, California.

We then returned to the work site, where team member Barry Riesch presided over a quiet and moving ceremony to bless the water treatment plant and to protect the people in the area. We left with the knowledge that the work we started would be completed within sixty days and that there would be clean water upon our return. Team Two will visit this plant for a dedication and opening inspection.

Later we visited the water plant at Abu Floos, one of the

*continued on page 16*



# Not One More Bomb

DAVE CLINE

Puerto Rico's recent elections outcome has set a new stage in the struggle to end the US Navy's continued bombing of the small island municipality of Vieques. Unlike the American presidential election, the vote there was an important victory for the people.

A popular movement to get the Navy out began in April 1999 after the death of a civilian guard by two errant 500-pound bombs during a training exercise. Local residents, fed up with years of the naval bombardment that threatens their health, land and livelihood, occupied the target ranges in protest. They set up a dozen camps that physically stopped the bombing and shelling for over a year. Support quickly became organized throughout Puerto Rico with all sectors of society mobilizing in defense of Isla Nena (the "little girl island").

Initially, Puerto Rico's governor voiced support and demanded an immediate end to the bombing. Then last January he changed course, agreeing to an executive order from President Clinton that allowed the Navy to continue bombing until 2003 and called for a referendum to determine whether the Navy would leave after that. This agreement was broadly viewed as a betrayal, and three weeks later 150,000 people flooded San Juan to demand *Not One More Bomb — Peace For Vieques* in the largest demonstration ever held in Puerto Rico's history.

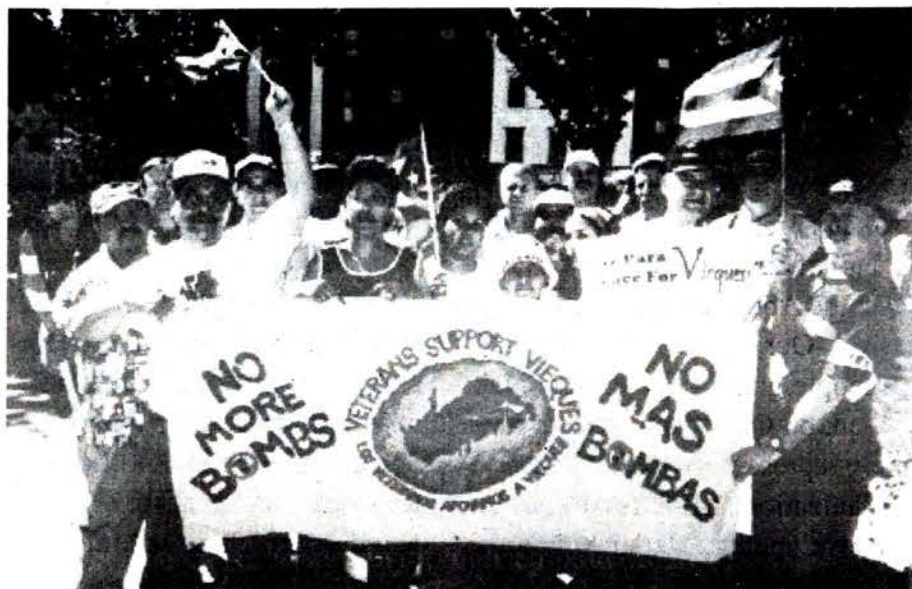
Last May, federal marshals launched predawn raids, destroying the resistance camps and arresting several hundred occupants. Since then, the Navy has resumed maneuvers, recently bombing the

area two days before Christmas and on the day after New Year's. Every naval operation has been met with non-violent civil disobedience and hundreds more people have been arrested.

In November, elections were held throughout Puerto Rico, and an important advance was made with the selection of Sila Calderon as governor and Damaso Serrano as mayor of Vieques. Both ran as candidates of the Popular Democratic (commonwealth) Party which now controls the majority in the legislature as well.

Sila Calderon is the first woman to be elected governor. She ran on a platform of greater autonomy for the island and peace for Vieques. Her election is a popular rejection of the previous governor's efforts to make Puerto Rico the 51st state, and she has repeatedly said that ending the Navy's bombing is an election mandate. At her inauguration, she declared, "The people of Puerto Rico want an immediate halt to the naval exercises. Sixty years of menace to the health and security of our countrymen is unacceptable for any civilized and peaceful society." She has pledged that during her first ninety days in office, she will remove the Fianza de Choque, an elite police unit assigned to guard the gates of Camp Garcia, the base on Vieques, and will take legal action against the Navy for violations of the Environmental Protection Act.

In the Vieques race for mayor, Damaso Serrano won 63.8% of the vote: an almost 2-to-1 defeat of the pro-Navy candidate. As he put it, "My campaign focused on achieving the immediate cease and desist of all military



Part of the veterans' contingent that marched in the August 2000 Jersey City Puerto Rican Parade to support peace for Vieques

activities in Vieques, which is the primary goal and demand of our people." He is a respected community activist and was one of the people arrested when the protest camps were raided by federal agents. Many say that his election was the real referendum on whether the Navy should leave. His administration is expected to advance grassroots organization throughout the barrios of Vieques.

These elections have set a new stage in the struggle. A broad political consensus has been reestablished to deal with Washington, but with the pro-Pentagon Bush gang occupying the White House, it will not be an easy victory. Navy spokesmen have begun demanding that Sila honor the discredited settlement, even though congressional changes last fall provoked Clinton to state, in a November 7, 2000 interview with Amy Goodman on Pacifica Radio, "The Republicans in Congress broke the agreement, and instead of giving the western part of the island to Puerto Rico, gave it to the Interior Department to manage. If I can't find a way to give that island, the western part

of the island back to the people of Puerto Rico, and to honor the agreement that the government of Puerto Rico itself made with the support of the local leaders, including the mayor of Vieques, then the people of Puerto Rico I think have a right to say the federal government broke its word, and the training has to stop right now."

The Navy brass are still hoping to stay on Vieques despite the expressed will of the Puerto Rican people. To them, Vieques is the crown jewel of their training program. Although they claim to be defending freedom and democracy, the Navy's actions make a mockery of their words. It would be more accurate to say that their actions are rooted in colonial control and imperial arrogance. The people of Vieques should be supported by all who want justice and peace.



DAVE CLINE IS A MEMBER OF THE CLARENCE FITCH CHAPTER OF VVAW AND A NATIONAL COORDINATOR.

## Poisoned by the Navy?

DAVE CLINE

Three years ago, 28-year-old Rolando Garcia worked briefly at the Camp Garcia Naval Station on Vieques, replacing windows at the observation post in the live fire impact area. Sometimes while he worked, bombing exercises were taking place less than a mile away, causing clouds of dust to blow over him.

Within several months, his health started to deteriorate. First he experienced constant fatigue, pain in his limbs and intestinal problems. Then all the hair on his

head and body fell out. Swollen areas appeared on his legs. A test done in Puerto Rico detected uranium in his stool.

In November, supporters brought Rolando, 31, to the New York City area for testing to determine the cause of his illness. Examinations were conducted at hospitals in Newark, NJ and Bronx, NY and at the Center for Occupational & Environmental Medicine in Manhattan. Results are not known at the time of this

*continued on page 18*



Rolando Garcia (center) at Montefiore Hospital with president of Collectivo Cayo La Yaya Hector Olivieri (left) and Tito Kayak, who was recently arrested for putting a "Peace For Vieques" banner and a Puerto Rican flag on the Statue of Liberty's crown in New York Harbor



## Peter Newcomer (1939-2000)

DAVE ALPER

Along with many others, I mourn the loss of a dear friend, Vietnam vet (USAID, Saigon, 1966-68) and longtime VVAW member, Peter Newcomer, of Woodstock, Connecticut. Peter passed away suddenly in May 2000 at the age of 61 of heart failure.

Peter was born and raised in Storrs, Connecticut. After graduating from school, he traveled around the South Pacific. Peter ended up in Saigon, where he found work dealing cards in an all-night card game. After his tourist visa expired, in order to avoid being deported, he took a job with the USAID. He worked on the "civilian" side of the war, in the "agrarian reform" program, meant to capture the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese. His experiences of the genocidal nature of the war transformed him from a self-de-

scribed "cynical, naive liberal," to someone who maintained a lifelong commitment to radical social change.

Peter was a rare individual, someone who excelled at both physical and intellectual labor. He held a PhD in Anthropology and was also a master carpenter. He taught in numerous universities, but he was not the staid, academic type. He had boundless energy and was passionate about his politics. His fiery denunciations of the US role in Vietnam, and his challenge to students to fight injustices in their own communities, were a source of inspiration for many, but drew the ire of his bosses, who were loathe to renew his teaching contracts. Peter led a key role in an organizing drive among part-time faculty at Concordia University, Montreal.

Peter was fearless. When liv-

ing in Edmonton, Alberta, he went to hear Alexander Haig speak at a gala sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce. During the question period, he went up to the microphone and began talking about his experiences in Vietnam. As the crowd quickly became very hostile, Peter likened Haig and US imperialism to a rat on a sinking ship, and asked the general when he was going to jump off.

In the 1980s, Peter traveled to Nicaragua on a solidarity construction brigade and helped build a school. He was a well-known and well-respected community activist in eastern Connecticut. For many years, he hosted a radio show on the University of Connecticut community station, *Between Rock and a Hard Place: a rock 'n' roll radio show for revolutionary social change*. In the last years of his life, Peter worked

in construction and renovated a 19th century farmhouse.

Peter's connection to Vietnam was also very personal. In the late 1980s, he was reunited with his Vietnamese daughter, after a nineteen-year absence, when she came to live in the US. He would frequently visit her in California, and even began learning Vietnamese.

Peter's funeral in Connecticut was attended by over 300 people, friends and foes alike. He is survived by his partner of many years, Ayla Kardestuncer. We will sorely miss him.



DAVE ALPER IS A LONG TIME PEACE ACTIVIST WHO NOW WORKS FOR PEACE IN COLOMBIA. HE MADE A GENEROUS DONATION TO VVAW IN MEMORY OF PETER NEWCOMER.

## Iraq Water Project

*continued from page 14*

not Muslim, and it was the time of evening prayer; nevertheless, it was an awesome experience.

On our last day in Baghdad, we rested and shopped for last-minute souvenirs and gifts for supporters. The evening was punctuated by the sounds and sights of fireworks over the Tigris River, the celebratory kind, as the day was the anniversary of Saddam's reelection in 1995.

The next day we loaded up for the long trip through the desert back to Amman. Due to plane schedules, we had another full day there. Many of us traveled to the Dead Sea for an afternoon of relaxation. The next day was a last chance to see the sights of Jordan. Many of our delegation visited the ancient city of Petra; the others just rested and reflected on the

trip we had just experienced. By midnight, we were all out of Amman and on our way home.

The Iraq Water Project is committed to the renovation of three other small water treatment plants in the same area. A second team is organizing now for early 2001. Please contact us if you are interested in going. Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to the address below. Thank you for your support.

VFP IWP  
P.O. Box 532  
Bayside, CA 95524



FREDY CHAMPAGNE IS A VIETNAM VET FROM CALIFORNIA, AND MEMBER OF VVAW AND VETS FOR PEACE.

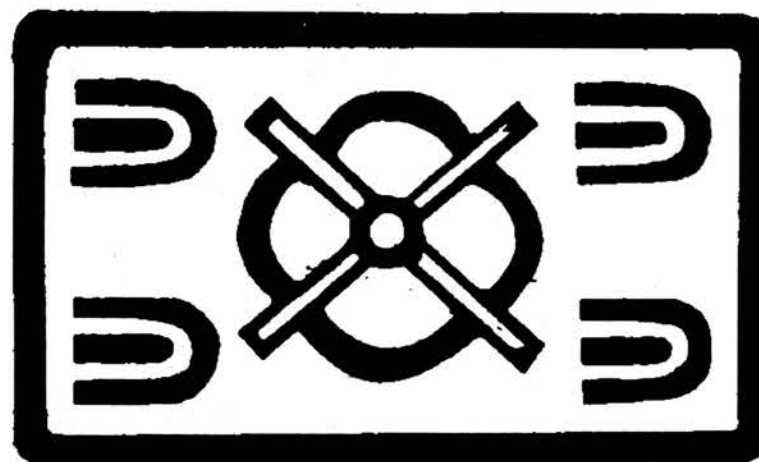
## What Better Way to Begin

You can just keep your rockets' red glare.  
And as for the bombs bursting in air,  
with all that noise and fire and smoke  
there has to be plenty of jagged steel  
looking for someone to hit.  
Ask Gaffney with his shattered knee.  
Ask Ski with a hole behind his ear  
the size of a fist.  
So I'm not too keen on fireworks.  
Call it ghosts from the past.

But it's Millennium Eve  
and my daughter wants to see the biggest  
fireworks show the City of Philadelphia  
has ever put on — or ever will —  
in my lifetime or hers.  
So off we go to join the crowd  
on the banks of the Delaware River.

When midnight arrives, the crowd explodes,  
and the barges moored in the river  
open fire in a steadily rising rumble  
of thumps and sparks like four-deuce mortars.  
But before the first bomb bursts in air,  
Leela silently takes my hand  
and holds it tight through the rockets' red glare  
till the last bomb's blunt concussion  
fades away as if it never were.

William D. Ehrhart





# Chaplains

JAMES MAY

Once, while acting as a company first sergeant, I gave myself the collateral duty of chaplain's driver and assistant, during one of the wargames in the desert as part of the 11th Armored Cavalry, Blackhorse. Now, the chaplain can go all over this little pretend battlefield, roughly a sixty by sixty mile box, and he can't be killed, so it was a wonderful way for someone below the rank of general to see the whole shebang.

The desert at Fort Irwin is very much like Iraq, with a slight difference in flora and fauna, as there is no tchemma or camelthorn, and the scorpions are a somewhat flatter species, but there was a heat wave and the 140 degree temp made it exactly like Iraq.

Being a spiritual person I have sometimes taken up the role of chaplain — when that overpaid, underworked person was off slacking too much to hold services for them what wanted it, which was frequently.

In one case I came upon a kid who was nervous and depressed, with that certain lack of self-worth that sometimes afflicts Arab Americans in this country, perhaps akin to some Native Americans, I don't know. Not doing too well. So I question the soldier, ostensibly about a misplaced feeling of guilt that his track commander (an amiable and really tough Jewish mechanic from Chicago and a good pal) tells me the kid was suffering over a recent training accident involving fatalities. Hell, this kid is really a Palestinian American, I discover, but one whose parents did not pass on quite enough about language or religion, which is quite common. So I conduct a class in Islamic prayer, with the real chaplains looking on somewhat stony-faced from their \*HMMM\*. I demonstrate something called tayummim, substituting the finest

film of desert dust for the water of ritual ablution, and taught the kid the Fatiha (prayer verse of the Koran), and how to use an assault rifle for the qibla (facing direction) desert warrior fashion, and made Arab culture something honorable and acceptable, and afterwards linked him up with other Muslims. After a couple of repeat doses, the patient had about 80 or 90% more balance and self confidence. Track commander

like for "negroes" was well known, too. That gentleman must have had a fun war, slept when he wanted, plenty of chow and no danger ever, except when four black troops beat the stuffings outta him once.

One Sunday he got some very senior guy to order everyone to attend his famous fire and brimstone sermon. There were these clean, starched officers sitting all prissy in the front row. My two

"Yeah!" I was quaking like a spastic. The preacher's head turned purple and he started spitting like a cat. "Get these mmm — mmmm — pffft out of here!"

\* \* \*

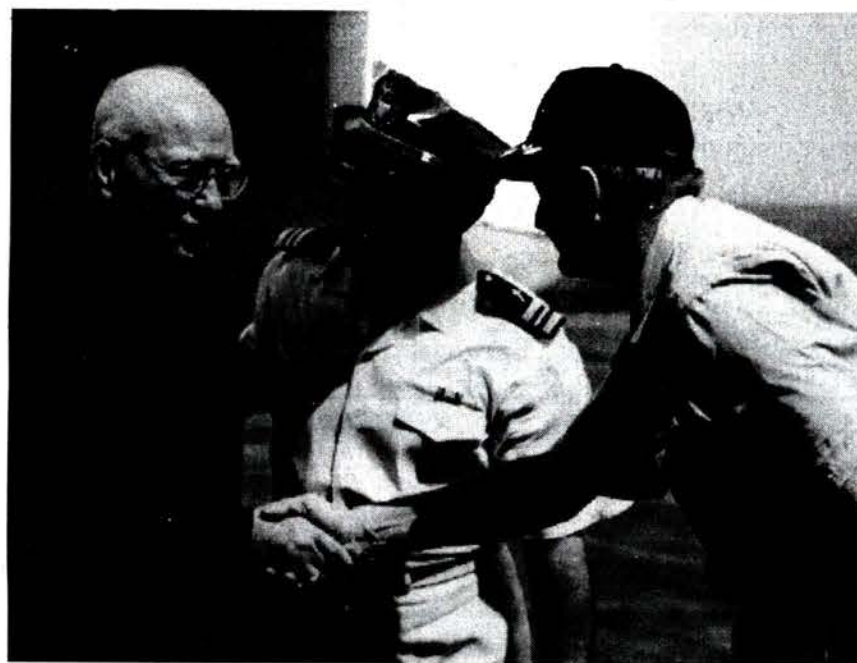
Recently I heard on the short-wave some seminary student proudly read his magnum opus in praise of some Vietnam combat chaplain. Between the lines, however, the knowing listener could pick up a disclaimer that the man had ministered only to known, practicing Catholics, even on the battlefield.

Our Catholic chaplain had been like that: he dealt with the war by strictly limiting his activities to the conduct of ritual for card-carrying Catholics only, a tiny group of groupies. Sundry lost souls had sometimes wished to speak to him, I have no doubt, as he seemed intelligent and aware. But no way any of us accursed heretics could get him to violate his SOP. One would have to be a very lost soul indeed to approach "Little Yellow Motherfuckers," and at least one who tried committed suicide. I thought of looking up that reticent priest now on the Internet and berating him for having been one damned useless individual, or maybe really dumping on the young seminarian. But why beat one's head against the stone wall of closed minds, or rail against hypocrites who will only hate you the more for it?

I don't blame the Protestant. Perhaps he couldn't help being only a goddamned idiot, but I think that young priest knew better. So at last, after enough years, I figured I myself might minister to the troops just about as well, in the absence of anything better.



JIM MAY IS A VIETNAM VET.



Cardinal Spellman, war supporter, being welcomed aboard Navy ship by chaplain and CO.

and crew members liked that.

\* \* \*

Chaplains.

During the war I remember two, a somber young Catholic priest and a large, fat, loud-mouthed Everything-else, who prated about being on a crusade against the "Chicom" while chomping a cigar. Most of the troops hated him, and I actually saw them stuffing helmets and jackets into the loudspeaker once when the evening prayer came on. In a vain appeal to the troops his prayer was often obscene; one I remember was "Please, God, let the bombs fall straight on the little yellow motherfuckers." His dis-

best friends happened to be a couple of arrogant, swashbuckling Puertoriquenos, and they halted the chaplain's braying just as he was really getting in stride, as if seriously disturbed about a doctrinal matter.

"Question! Is man made in the image of God?" one yelled in his heavy accent. Well, yes. Suspicious.

"Is God, according to the Law of Moses, circumcised?" The bosses up front all twist around.

"If so, what happened to the foreskin?" And the other joined in, screaming angrily in a blind passion, "Yeah! Yeah, what happened to the foreskin?!"

Other guys started bawling,

during the Gulf War — over 340 tons of such shells were fired. (Recently, European governments — investigating following complaints from their veterans — have confirmed widespread radiation contamination in Kosovo as a result of the use of DU shells by US forces there.)

Ten years of embargo have accomplished little except visiting unnecessary suffering on the Iraqi people. It is long past time for the US government to bring its

policy towards Iraq into compliance with its obligation to protect the rights of Iraqi children to live. The economic siege against the Iraqi people must be lifted.



ROBERT NAIMAN, FORMER BOARD AND STAFF MEMBER OF THE ILLINOIS DISCIPLES FOUNDATION, IS A SENIOR POLICY ANALYST AT THE CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND POLICY RESEARCH IN WASHINGTON <WWW.CEPR.NET>.

## The Toll of US Policy Toward Iraq

continued from page 1





## Three Days In Colombia

*continued from page 9*

Dorothy, a young Catholic Worker from "Su Casa," along with a delightful nun from the 8th Day Center, two Franciscan priests, and a reporter from the Chicago Tribune (did anyone see a story?). We were shepherded and hosted by an assortment of young Franciscan brothers and sisters. And could they party!

*Tuesday, December 12*

Up at five a.m. to catch a charter flight to Saravena, the capital of Arauca (a *departamento* in northwest Colombia) and forty miles from Santo Domingo. Did I mention the civil war? The army had been fighting the ELN rebels (often called "Cuban-inspired" but now making cash from kidnapping) since the Sixties. It was this group the army'd been fighting outside Santo Domingo when they dropped the bomb.

VVAW's Barry Romo had

gone to Santo Domingo last year to retrieve evidence that proved that it wasn't a truck bomb and that the shrapnel was the same in the ground as in the victims. Barry'd come up with a campaign to fund a flak jacket for one of the nuns, sweet Sister Carolina, the same nun who was now telling us where to go and how to get there.

So here I was, representing VVAW on this trip (thanks, guys!). When we landed in Saravena, we were met by Colombia's finest military forces, armed with our finest weaponry. We were ushered into an outdoor auditorium that held a thousand *compasinos*, people from neighborhood groups, and human rights activists. We were seated at a panel on the stage overlooking the whole stadium. On the floor of the stadium, sitting in chairs formed in the shape of a heart, were twenty-

two of the survivors of the massacre in Santo Domingo. In the middle of the heart were nineteen empty chairs representing the victims. I cried.

What a wonderful program! A teacher from the local high school gave a talk on human rights, then came a performance of traditional music of the area, including harp, guitar, maracas and a vocalist belting out verses. A number of different musicians, young and old, complemented the program. We were introduced one by one, and I got to say something. I had struggled with the Spanish translation for hours.

My speech: I'm Stanley Campbell, representing Vietnam Veterans Against the War. As former soldiers in an unjust war, we wish to stand with the victims instead of the perpetrators of war and say "never again."

I wimped out and had someone translate it. We got very strong applause.

Afterwards we were treated to a traditional feast of baked potatoes, jucca plant, and slabs of beef. No utensils. No napkins. "Because this is our way." Vegetarians beware!

*Thé final day: the press conference*

In the richest downtown private club we hosted six television stations, four newspapers, a radio station, and two wire services. Good job on the press!

So I arrived home after only three full days in Colombia, South America. But I'd return at the drop of another cluster bomb. It'll either be peace groups or our drafted sons and daughters.



STANLEY CAMPBELL IS A LONG-TIME PEACE ACTIVIST AND A MEMBER OF VVAW SINCE 1971. HE IS THE DIRECTOR OF ROCKFORD URBAN MINISTRIES AND "THE ONLY PAID ACTIVIST IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS."

## Human Rights In Colombia

*continued from page 9*

in Toronto and Chicago. These tribunals, organized by solidarity groups from the US and Canada, were evaluating evidence in the massacre, in which seven children and nine adults died and twenty-five others were wounded. The Colombian government continues to deny responsibility, claiming that leftist guerrillas from the FARC were to blame.

The Chicago tribunal was held at Northwestern University on September 22 and 23. Among the Colombians that testified were two Dominican clergy members, Sister Carolina and Brother Omar, who also spoke at events in Chicago and Champaign-Urbana prior to the Chicago tribunal. The evidence presented by eyewitnesses was consistent and unequivocal: on December 13, 1998, US-trained and funded Colombian army units bombed unarmed Santo Domingo residents using

US-manufactured munitions. Analysis by American and Canadian forensic munitions experts, including Barry Romo from the Chicago VVAW chapter, confirm the accounts of survivors that no exchange between the FARC and the army occurred, and that the munitions used were precisely the type supplied to the army by the US.

The event on September 20 at the Illinois Disciples Foundation in Champaign-Urbana was a great success, with more than sixty people in attendance. Later that evening, folks were treated to the first local screening of a new video detailing the situation in Barrancabermeja, where union organizers have suffered some of the most serious repression in recent years at the hands of the Colombian army and right-wing paramilitaries.

More Colombians came to

Chicago on the weekend of November 3-4, 2000 to attend a conference titled, "US Policy and Human Rights in Colombia," sponsored by the Chicago Colombia Committee, Amnesty International, Global Exchange, the US/Colombia Coordinating Office (Washington, DC), the Colombia Labor Monitor, VVAW and other national and Chicago-area groups. At the DePaul University campus, over a hundred attendees listened to the former governor of Choco, Luis Gilberto Murillo, and several union, human rights and indigenous rights activists speaking about the consequences of "Plan Colombia" for the majority of the population. At present, half of all Colombians live below the absolute poverty level, and their insecurity will only increase as the militarization increases. Following the presentations, the attendees split into working groups

to coordinate efforts amongst the various cities and share organizing strategies aimed at educating folks here in the US and influencing congress members who recently voted for "Plan Colombia."

It is heartening to see that, even when there is a complete lack of debate in the mainstream American media about "Plan Colombia," hundreds of activists from around the country and in Chicago are up to speed on their analysis and ready to work harder in their communities to educate and organize around Colombia. We recognize that we cannot afford another Vietnam in Colombia, from neither the Colombian perspective nor that of the United States.



BRUCE DAVIDSON IS A MEMBER OF THE PROGRESSIVE RESOURCE/ ACTION COOPERATIVE.

## Poisoned by the Navy?

*continued from page 15*

writing but more toxicology tests are expected.

Rolando is one of many Viequenses who suffer serious health problems believed to be caused by toxic contamination resulting from the Navy's sixty years of bombing and shelling. The cancer rate is 27% higher than the rest

of Puerto Rico. Scientific studies have found elevated levels of arsenic, barium, cadmium, zinc, cobalt, mercury, lead and other metals. The 9,700 people who live there are being poisoned by the military in the name of "national defense." NAVY OUT OF VIEQUES NOW!

Contributions to help with medical expenses can be sent directly to:

Rolando Garcia  
Account #512059790  
Banco Popular  
Vieques, PR 00765

Message of support can be sent to:

Rolando Garcia  
Buzon E-61  
Bo. Le Guillow  
Vieques, PR 00765





# I'll Never Forget My Friend

PAMELA PETERSON

reprinted from the Fall 1996  
issue of *The Veteran*

Did you ever have a person in your unit who at first was just another person in your section, until circumstances changed everything and you became good friends? Well, thanks to the military action in the Middle East in '90-'91, I found and lost not just a fellow soldier, but a good friend and brother. If you don't mind, I would like to share my memories of him with you and maybe you will do the same for me sometime.

Everyone, including myself, called him "Brown." He was short and skinny, but he was by no means a weakling! I will never forget his "turtle shell" shaped nose. He used to tape the bottoms of his BDU's to keep them in his boots - you know, two sides pulled back tightly, not "bloused" as the platoon sergeant wanted them. He was a little argumentative sometimes, but one of the most hardworking people I've ever seen in my life.

Before we were deployed in the desert, somewhere in Saudi, I knew very little about him. This was mostly because I was new to the unit. I knew he was a "short-timer" who had put in his time and was very much looking forward to getting out. He was one of the motor pool's mechanics (I was the motor pool's PLL/TAMS clerk for our Halk Missile unit). I also knew he was married, only because I overheard him talking about her one day. But once we were deployed to Saudi and the fear, unknowing, depression, lack of sleep, and the rest of the miseries of combat situations arose, I found a friend.

I suppose any type of military action where you don't know if you are going to die in the next few minutes or ever get to see your family again causes people to develop a strong common bond with others who are there experiencing the depression and anxiety along with you. Brown and I developed our friendship mostly because we were both motor pool and we were almost always "bunker partners" when it came to guard duty. We had to pull anywhere from two to six hours on-off day and night shifts. We also performed the basic courtesy of protecting one another's back when it became necessary to relieve oneself. We even nudged

one another when the other one dozed off. Outside of guard duty, it seemed as though I always had to place an order and get supplies. The motor pool was always in need of fuel. This, of course, made it convenient to send me as the shotgun for Brown while making mo-gas runs and picking up supplies. Of course, that meant we spent a considerable amount of time together.

Like other soldiers, we talked and became good friends. Our conversations helped to relieve

thinking about home and our loved ones whom we might never see again.

As if life wasn't bad enough, on January 5th, 1990, a terrible thing happened. Brown and a sergeant went on a diesel fuel run. After they got fuel, they went to the phones and called home. It was late at night when they started back to our battery's site. It was also raining, and the desert road and sands didn't react well to the rain. No one knows exactly what happened for sure, but Brown

was bent. The pods of diesel fuel were almost thrown off the back of the truck and were leaking. We all worked into the early morning hours in the rain just to get the truck upright and the pods back into their places. I felt like I had to push myself until I couldn't anymore. I had to try and save something. I wanted to save my friend!

The next morning, formation was called a little earlier than usual. Our captain told the platoon what had happened to Brown and the sergeant. Every word the captain spoke brought tears quietly streaming down my cheeks. My tears continued flowing while he tried to give us all hope that Brown would make it.

A few weeks passed. Every once in a while we were told that Brown was doing well, but he was paralyzed from the neck down. One day we were told that Brown could move his fingers. Eventually I felt relieved that he would live.

Tuesday, January 22nd. My depressing world grew worse. I was swinging a pickaxe to make foxholes in the hard desert terrain when my motor pool sergeant slowly approached me. He told me that he needed to talk to me and took me into the males' tent. He proceeded to tell me that Brown had died on January 21st. I asked for details as my eyes swelled and the tears flowed down my face. Either he didn't know any details regarding Brown's death or he wouldn't tell me. I was so angry! How could he die when they told me he was getting better?! What about his plans for the future? He was to E.T.S as soon as we got back. He was supposed to go back to Indiana with his wife and start a family! What happened? Why did he die? Why the hell weren't we told the truth if he was so bad that he was dying and wasn't actually getting better? Why did I lose my friend? Was I going to have to die alone? Why couldn't I have saved him somehow? I cried and cried for the rest of the day.

The next day, our battery held a memorial service for Brown. The chaplain arrived with our sergeant major and lieutenant colonel. About 100 yards from site, there was a camouflaged area. Under the camouflage there was a



much of the stress and misery of a soldier's life in an isolated desert compound. We talked about missing our families, where we were from, past remembrances, and what we had planned when we got out of the army. We never really talked about dying. Not even after or while we were crunched up in our scud bunkers wondering whether we were about to die. I suppose everyone thinks about death constantly and wants to try to forget it. That was especially true during the hardest time, the holidays.

I believe it was Thanksgiving when the mess tent actually served "real" food. As if the holiday depression wasn't enough to deal with, Brown and I also had guard duty during the time the food was being served. Luckily we didn't have to wait until after our shift to eat because a private brought us our holiday dinner. Trying to make the best of things, we turned a milk crate upside down to make a table in the bunker. We acted like we were on a picnic, enjoying a delightful meal while watching the countryside. Our mission at the time was just making it through that day without

somehow lost control of the diesel truck. It hit the sand and rolled three times. Brown and the sergeant were taken to the closest medical unit. Brown had broken his neck and was quickly medivac'd to Germany.

Later that night -- I think it was about 2300 hours -- my motor pool sergeant came to my tent and told me what had happened. He also said that the rest of the motor pool and some "hawkers" were going to clean up the accident area. I was gathering my M-16, kevlar, flak jacket, etc., when he said that I wasn't going. I didn't understand why I was not allowed to go. Most importantly, he didn't understand that I had to go! Brown was my friend! I had to help him in any way possible, even if that only meant cleaning up the truck that had almost killed him. I begged and pleaded until he gave in and let me go.

We arrived at the accident site at around 2330 hours. It was dark and wet. The diesel truck was completely totaled. The dented driver's side of the truck rested on top of the sand. The cab's canvas top was ripped completely off and the steering wheel

*continued on page 20*



## One Black Mark

At 14, I delivered groceries to the neighborhood;  
It was a real job, in the retail clerk's union  
And I did a good job for them and my neighbors,  
proud of being a union man.

At 16, I was hired as a regular in the store, throwing stock,  
a member of the same union, got a letter of commendation  
for crashing through the front door  
with the escaping thief I tackled.

At 18, the phone company hired me  
To climb poles and string wire  
for Ma Bell, my neighbors and the IBEW.  
My brothers on the job voted me their union steward.

At 48, I left the company to retirement  
To look back on a life spent as a working man,  
mostly in the city of my birth,  
and found just one black mark.

See, when I was 19 and 20, I had a non-union job.  
The only one I ever had,  
In the infantry of the US Army,  
and my job, killing Vietnamese, I did well.

But the medals and badges they gave me  
didn't make what I did right,  
and without a union card in my pocket,  
I should have known better.

*Dave Connolly*

## I'll Never Forget My Friend

*continued from page 19*

typical soldier's memorial: one M-16 A-1 with the bayonet attached stuck in the ground, a pair of shined combat boots, a kevilar, and an American flag. Everyone in motor pool and our captain wore part of a black leather bootlace tied around our left arms to signify we were in mourning. My tears flowed like a river and so did everyone else's.

Now that I am out of the army, I try very hard not to remember what I experienced over there. But to this day, there isn't a day that goes by when I don't think about my friend who didn't get to come home alive. I am so

sorry that he had to die and never got to have his dreams come true. Brown made the holidays a little easier to deal with for me, and hopefully I did the same for him. I was and am still very thankful that Brown helped me during a very emotionally trying time in my life. I will always remember him.



*PAM PETERSON IS A VVAW MEMBER FROM ILLINOIS, WHO SERVED IN THE PERSIAN GULF (SAUDI AND IRAQ) WITH B BATTERY 2/I ADA (HAWK MISSILE UNIT) FROM OCTOBER 1990 TO APRIL 1991.*



## Saigon Warrior

So my fatigues don't get muddy or bloody or even too sweaty (the air conditioning's for the equipment — not me).

That doesn't mean I don't fight my necessary way or feel for the grunts or get shot at in the streets.

Or that I don't feel disgusted the one time I go to the Caravelle Hotel (where they still make tablecloths and flatware and a Vietnamese imitation of a rock band isn't bad (after the third gin and tonic) until I look out over the river, see tracers and know they're dying out there.

I figure you could have two lines — like a weekend showing at a theater with popular movies — and one would be those I've helped kill and one those I've help save and there might be more women, children and old people in one but they can take you out of here too and someone else is going to have to see if all the napalm and white phosphorous that make "Crispy Critters" or turns flesh into puddles and cluster bomb units (like round aerial shotguns loaded with plastic buckshot that don't show up on X-rays) or simple high explosives, ground or air bursts (or jettisoned fuel tanks that hit Co Nguyen in the head while she's fixing dinner) and the ghosts they made equal the living bones from the times I played junior guardian angel.

So now it's time to go to The Wall and say "Hello" or look a Vietnamese in the face and smile and someone else can see which way my scales tilt.

*Horace Coleman*





## Fraggin'

*continued from page 3*

the bottom of all states in many areas of importance, including delivery of social services and money spent for the environment, for police protection, for the arts, for parks and recreation, and for child support collection. Yet Texas rated near the top for states experiencing food shortages. "Where?" asked Bush when challenged with this fact. "You'd think the governor would have heard if there were pockets of hunger in Texas." So

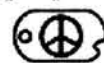
this is who we have for the next four years.

While the events of the election month brought some excitement and feelings of involvement, it should be noted that many people did not participate on election day. Bush and Gore each received 24% of the vote of those eligible to vote. Minority candidates received 3%. The majority of votes went to "none of the above" — most people didn't vote.

Most people who don't vote are of middle or lower economic status. Those who make less than \$50,000 a year are 80% of the population. More than half of these people did not participate in voting for president. Make what you will out of this statistic, but I think it suggests that those without wealth simply see themselves without a candidate to represent their wishes.

I think one other thing needs to be pointed out. Meaningful changes only come about when

citizens in great numbers demand it. The greatest social programs Congress ever passed came during the Roosevelt years. These came to pass after — as even FDR admitted — a lot of angry people took to the streets. Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, makes no difference. You need 43,000 angry people outside the White House.



*BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN AND AUTHOR. HE'S A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHICAGO CHAPTER.*

## Clinton Visits Vietnam

*continued from page 1*

tured who remained unaccounted for. These were combined with the names of those listed as "missing in action" or "killed in action/body not recovered" to convince the American public that there were hundreds, even thousands of GIs still being held captive in Indochina. (For a thorough look at the POW-MIA issue, read the book *MIA: Mythmaking In America* by H. Bruce Franklin.)

An angry Congress voted to bar aid and imposed a trade embargo. This became the pattern for the next twenty years. The US insisted that Vietnam was responsible for all those still unaccounted for and demanded the government provide information and allow searches. 300,000 Vietnamese soldiers are still missing, but Vietnam agreed to help. Joint search teams have dug up numerous crash sites. The remains of hundreds of American MIAs have been located and returned to their families for burial. These searches continue to this day.

Then other issues clouded the water. When the war ended, Vietnam was a poor country devastated by years of conflict. Post-

war economic policies brought little improvement. "Boat people" began fleeing to other countries, and some accused Vietnam of provoking this flood of unwanted refugees.

In 1979, after Khmer Rouge border raids took thousands of lives, Vietnam invaded Cambodia. In response, China attacked Vietnam and the two former allies fought a short, bloody war. Vietnam was criticized internationally even though it overthrew the genocidal Pol Pot regime whose three-year rule cost a million Cambodian lives. Vietnamese troops withdrew ten years later, but relations with the US remained frozen. Things began to change during the Clinton administration. In 1994, economic sanctions were lifted followed by the reestablishment of diplomatic relations the next year. In 1997, Pete Petersen, a former POW, was appointed ambassador and an embassy was opened in Hanoi, capitol of the reunified Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Then there were trade talks, followed by President Clinton's trip.

While in Vietnam, Clinton

announced that the United States would provide training and equipment to locate and defuse bombs, shells and landmines that still litter some parts of the countryside. Newspapers regularly report people being maimed or killed by unexploded ordnance, often uncovered while plowing fields. With this assistance, Vietnam will be able to overcome a deadly legacy of the war.

Another outstanding issue is the continuing human and environmental damage associated with Agent Orange. From 1962 to 1971, at least 14% of South Vietnam was heavily sprayed with 11 million gallons of chemical defoliants. Agent Orange has caused long-term health problems among an estimated one million Vietnamese including cancer, miscarriages and birth defects among children born after the war.

During Clinton's visit, he agreed to provide a computer system with information about where Agent Orange was stored and sprayed, and several days later, the first official meeting between the two countries to discuss joint research on Agent Orange's effect on people and the environment took place.

It has taken many years to get our government to accept responsibility for the illnesses caused by Agent Orange to American veterans. The Vietnamese victims still have not been helped. Their government provides some assistance with limited resources. The US

has a moral and political responsibility to help all those suffering from Agent Orange.

Despite years of official hostility, many Vietnam veterans have worked to promote reconciliation and friendship. In the early 80s, both VVAW and Vietnam Veterans of America began sending delegations. Back then, many vets could not understand why anyone would want to go back, seeing Vietnam only as a past experience of pain and death. Over the years that has begun to change. Now thousands go back each year on humanitarian missions, to heal emotional wounds, to visit the country in peace, even to live there.

Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation has several programs, including workshops to make artificial limbs. The Veterans Vietnam Restoration Project has built medical clinics and schools. Peace Village, near Hanoi, cares for a hundred veterans and children sick from Agent Orange. Project Hearts & Minds sends medical supplies. A Peace Park has been built at the site of the 1968 My Lai massacre. Numerous other projects have been organized to heal the wounds of war and make amends for the past.

Today we are beginning to see the fruits of that work in improved relations between our two countries. There are many things for which Clinton should be criticized, but his trip to Vietnam is not one of them. For that he should be saluted.



*DAVE CLINE IS A MEMBER OF THE CLARENCE FITCH CHAPTER OF VVAW AND A NATIONAL COORDINATOR.*



*Agent Orange demo in Milwaukee, 1981.*



## Delivering Death Like Mail

continued from page 24

ter bomb units (CBUs) and high explosive bombs. Irony: many American servicemen are alive because of the authorized and unauthorized air strikes (ad hoc missions not ordered by the chain of command) I coordinated. Many VC died — along with countless Vietnamese civilians who weren't engaged in acts of war but were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There's a photograph I took way down in the Delta. In it you can see an intense young Vietnamese man, an infant (his son), and a US army doctor. The child had been given penicillin for an infection. No one knows it but he

is allergic to the drug. He will die shortly. You can't see that his father is missing an arm above the elbow.

He lost it in combat. He used to be a soldier in the ARVN (the Army of the Republic of Vietnam). You can't see that the amputee is a widower. The family rice paddy was in a "free fire zone." Anyone found there could be killed on sight. His wife was working there when killed by fire from an American helicopter. Xin loi.

I don't know exactly who I helped kill. The citation accompanying the low-ranking Bronze Star medal I received (Meritorious Service) says I'm credited with

99 aircraft saves and rescues. That's not right.

There were more. Hanna Arendt was right, though — evil is banal. And very human. Israeli troops and settlers gunning down Arab rock-throwers or Arab suicide bombers, Africans hacking off the lips or arms of people from "enemy tribes," Boston Irish mobsters "taking out" someone for \$\$\$, Latino gang-bangers killing for the right to sell dope on certain corners, Crips and Bloods "putting in work" or cops "fearing for" their lives all have something in common. Some drunken yahoo decides to drag someone to death behind a pick-up truck. Any excuse will do. Maybe that's why the phrase "wasting" someone came about.

We've evolved into using

"better" tools, but we haven't evolved much morally. Leaving work the other day, some smartass saw me closing my backpack.

"You don't have a gun in there do you?" he said in a smarmy tone.

"Not today," I said.

The fool kept at it. "Oh, too scared to use one?"

"Nope: too smart to."

I didn't tell him what I really thought, which was: *Some people aren't worth the trouble to kill them.*



HORACE COLEMAN IS A VETERAN, POET AND WRITER LIVING IN CALIFORNIA.

## Civilian Issue

MARC LEVY

Dear Katha,

Your review in *The Nation* of the Vietnam documentary, **Regret to Inform**, about widows on both sides of a distant war, immediately caught my eye, stung my heart. Quote: "US soldiers, by and large, did not revolt, throw down their guns, refuse orders that violated the Geneva conventions, nor do we honor the ones who did, who fragged their officers or deserted." You're a smart gal behind the keyboard, I like your writing, respect you much; but when it comes to war, you are way out of line.

So here's the real deal, Katha: how I tried to kill one Capt. Peter L. Krucinski III, battalion surgeon, First Cavalry Division, Vietnam, Class of '70.

On a firebase near An Loc, Moon and me, we're infantry medics, regular grunts you understand, we're getting stoned on good Thai dope and warm beer. But we are not happy campers. Not when you drag in casualties and find the doctor sloppy drunk. Captain Krucinski, pushing thirty, bright-eyed, handsome and slick-hair young, liked his Johnny Walker straight up, his Pabst Blue Ribbon icy cold. It's thirty years, mind you. Some things are hard to forget.

"Locklear," I yell to the man inside, "Get out, the bunker's gonna blow!" There's a case of frags on top, the bunker is on fire. Concussed and wounded, he can't hear me. A sergeant drowns the fire. I reach in and drag Locklear out. Inside the Aid Station, the casualties twist and turn; the Cap-

tain staggers drunk. "Hey, how... how ya use a morphine syrette?" he splutters in the awful heat. "You push the plunger down, Sir. Then pull it back. Then squeeze." "Ohhhh..." he says, missing twice before he jabs Locklear good. Up top, I hear moaning; someone being carried down dirt steps. It's Klaber, second platoon. His back is slashed, face gone white; he calls my name, then crumples. The wounded outside, I hear them screaming. Crying, I rush back out.

That evening Moon, sucking a fat joint, nods his head toward the doctor's hooch. "We ought to frag that fuck," he says.

"Fuckin' A, man. You know how to do it? I never fragged no one before."

Moon says, "You take a baseball grenade, twist rubber bands around it nice and tight, push the safety off, pull the pin, put her nice and easy in diesel oil, that shit eats the elastic bands, KA-BOOM!"

So we do it, Katha, cause we're regular grunts, infantry, only we're medics, too. We hump bandages and morphine, aspirin, antibiotics, fungal creams. We take good care of our men. And I've got my .45, my M-16, three bandoleers of ammo, and four grenades. Frags to you civvies.

Moon pulls the pin. Christ, I am scared. Katha, you ever seen a baseball grenade explode? The killing radius is five yards. It blows up like a cloud on fire. "Here you go, Moon." I'm holding a Coke can with the top cut off. He drops the frag in, we shove that little Easter bunny under Battalion Sur-

geon Capt. Peter L. Krucinski III's cot, make sure no one sees us, then move out.

Moon whispers, "Takes about eight hours for the diesel to work." I clip the grenade ring to my boonie hat. But nothing happened, Katha, nothing, not a goddamn thing. The diesel ate through the rubber bands but the spoon — the grenade handle to you civvies — had nowhere to fly. We should have used a big glass jar, a soup can or some such thing. The Coke can was too damn small. I'll bet when Captain Krucinski found our season's greetings he said, "Those assholes. They forgot the goddamn ice

cubes."

That was a long time ago, Katha, but I loved my men. I still do. I think about them every day. And you, smart gal behind the podium or printed word, I like your writing, respect you much. But when it comes to war and why we tried or killed our own, you are way, way out of line.

Yours sincerely,

Marc "Doc" Levy  
D 1/7 Cav '70



### CELEBRATE SPRING AT THE



Sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War

**Sunday, March 11, 2001**

**Noon - 4:30 p.m.**

SERB MEMORIAL HALL  
5101 OKLAHOMA AV.  
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PROCEEDS DONATED TO: "MY LAI PEACE PARK PROJECT"  
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Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

VVAW Membership  
PO Box 2065, Station A  
Champaign, IL 61825-2065  
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 annual membership fee is \$20.00 (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 individuals calling themselves "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist." Though few in number, they are highly mobile and may show up at meetings or demonstrations representing themselves as VVAW. "VVAW AI" is not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAW AI" is actually the creation of an obscure ultra-left sect known as the Revolutionary

Communist Party and is designed to pimp off VVAW's long history of struggle. 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 and to make donations:
- VVAW, PO Box 408594, Chicago , IL 60640
  - 773-327-5756
  - vvaw@prairienet.org
  - <http://www.prairienet.org/vvaw/>



# RECOLLECTIONS

## Fort Polk, 1967

ROY GILBERT

1967 was not a good year for "wine and roses," nor were any years that followed. As a gay person, my military experience was not just difficult, it was traumatic. I managed to repress the physical homosexual reactions through a form of mental self-aversion, though the term was unknown to me at the time. Exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides over a period of two years, while stationed with the 255th Transportation Detachment in Vietnam, resulted in sexual impotence. My one and only homosexual experience consisted of an older man having oral sex with me.

Not all of my experiences were bad ones, nor were all of the people I met while in the Army total assholes—just most of them. At the time, I entered the military, I was a frightened, confused young man and as of my separation on May 1, 1969, I was even more so. To this day a great deal of that **confusion remains with me and in a very real sense prevents me from obtaining and holding gainful employment, and isolates me from the gay world and much of society.**

Even now, I sometimes find it difficult to put into words the impressions and emotions I experienced at that time. Those I asso-

ciated with contributed as much as the Army experiences did to my current state of living. Most of the men, with whom I lived, trained and worked were assholes who fortunately have become dimmed in memory.

Those who served with me and do remember me will most likely remember me as a person with low intelligence, who bummed cigarettes, wore perpetually wrinkled fatigues. Someone with whom they would definitely not wish to go into battle.

As previously mentioned, exposure to Agent Orange resulted in my sexual dysfunction. Some other illnesses I attribute to exposure are lung disease, nervousness, neurological damage, panic attacks, depression, and broken, rotten teeth.

After basic I was assigned for two months to Ft. Rucker, Alabama and trained as an aviation mechanic. My platoon squad leader was a gung-ho national guardsman whose last name was Zimmerman. In short, I hated him, and he hated me. Although I do not now feel hate, I do not remember Zimmerman with kindness because of his domineering nature and because of a GI shower that he instructed the rest of the men to give me. That incident will

remain with me for the rest of my life, as will the humiliation that I felt at that time.

It was at this duty station that I had my only gay experience. I was more than slightly attracted to the man and the sexual desire was still fresh with me, so I did not have trouble in achieving and maintaining an erection; that is one of the few happy experiences that remain with me from the Army.

Upon completing AIT, I was then assigned to Ft. Stewart, Georgia. Although I have no memory of the installation, my orders state that I was there for seven days. Neither the Army nor the Department of Veterans Affairs can or will account for those seven missing days.

Hunter Army Airfield, on the outskirts of Savannah, with its mild days, warm nights, Spanish moss and full Southern flavor followed Ft. Stewart. While I was eating lunch in the mess hall at Hunter one afternoon, Donald, a true red-blooded all-American male hunk, came into my life by way of a passing introduction. Unfortunately, my overriding fear of being discovered prevented me from feeling completely at ease with him. The two of us were separated soon after arriving in Vietnam,

and I often reflect on how things might have been had circumstances been different.

I arrived in-country on October 7, 1968. After intake, briefing and orientation at Cameroon Bay, I traveled by air to Vung Tai and was assigned to the 54th Utility Airplane Company, 255th Trans. Det (Acft Rep), call sign Big Daddy Vung Tai. Thus began the final active duty portion of my two-year Army obligation. I was assigned to work as a crewmember on light transport fixed-wing aircraft and a few months later transferred to work in the mess hall. Because of another's incompetence, I sustained a very nasty cut to my left forefinger.



## Delivering Death Like Mail: Confessions of a REMF

HORACE COLEMAN

Recently I saw an interesting e-mail on the VVAW list. Someone was doing a dissertation and wondered if anyone would comment on the correlation between the "brutalization" of basic training and atrocities in 'Nam. I told her why I thought atrocities happen:

\* Defense/expansion of "the American way of life"

\* Desire to accomplish the mission

\* Desire to create and maintain a positive image with peers, and to meet norms and the expectations of superiors

\* Education / interpretation of history & recent events

\* Emotional coarsening and

the deadening of feelings

\* Fear

\* Frustration

\* Ideology

\* Ignorance

\* Individual and group psychopathology

\* Patriotism (chauvinism) / indoctrination

\* Professionalism (military type)

\* Rabid anti-communism (even if you didn't really know what that was or that it might actually and temporarily be better than what someone currently had)

\* Racism

\* Religion

\* Revenge

\* Self-preservation; exagger-

ated definition of threats to personal and national security

\* Xenophobia

Of course the basic reason is lack of control, and insufficient leadership and character. After all, you're supposed to "kill clean"; that's the moral, mentally efficient and professional thing to do. . . .

The very existence of war is an atrocity. "Brutalization" begins with childhood acculturation into society.

Whatever reasons and justifications a society has for using physical force are expanded and amplified in wartime. Violence is only lastly physical, though. Mental preparation comes first.

Ignorance fuels abstraction.

Fear, xenophobia, racism, ethnocentrism, the desire to avenge fallen buddies, not letting "the other guys" down and "keeping the faith" cause terrible things. Young men in groups, with or without weapons and official authorization, are capable of terrible things anyway. Think skinheads, soccer hooligans, and the NYC groups that harassed young women at a street fair.

Aircraft temporarily under my "control" as an intercept director / air traffic controller routinely used napalm, .50 caliber machine guns, the notorious clus-

*continued on page 22*