



THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

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VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR STATEMENT ON SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS

The terrorist attacks on September 11 horrified and outraged people throughout this country and the world. Within hours, the World Trade Center's twin towers and part of the Pentagon lay in flaming ruins with many thousands injured, missing or killed. Firefighters, EMS workers, police and ordinary citizens mounted a heroic rescue effort but sadly, the death toll is now approaching 5000.

After the initial shock and disbelief wore off, angry voices began calling for retaliation and revenge. The president declared war against international terrorism and Congress quickly voted to give the White House unrestricted authority to respond. But who was responsible? Who are we going to war with?

Government spokesmen quickly pointed the finger at the Al Qaeda network and its leader, Osama bin Laden, living in Afghanistan. The president demanded that the Afghani government surrender bin Laden and his lieutenants or face attack while the Pentagon began deploying troops, aircraft and ships to the region.

Events are moving quickly and directly toward major U.S. military action against Afghanistan. It is time we take a look at the road our government is taking us down. Will war bring those responsible for these criminal acts to justice? Can massive military action protect us from further attacks?

We agree with Congresswoman Barbara Lee that "military action will not prevent further acts of international terrorism against the United States." The use of massive military power will only escalate the cycle of violence, spreading death and destruction to more innocent people with no end in sight.

Afghanistan has already been destroyed by twenty years of foreign occupation, civil war and religious repression. Both the British and Soviet armies failed to conquer that country. We see many



People flee collapse of the twin towers in downtown Manhattan. This photo was taken near City Hall, 2 blocks from the World Trade Center. It was taken by Per Odman, a disabled Marine Corps vet and VVAW member while he helped others to safety.

parallels between Vietnam and Afghanistan but the lessons we should have learned from the war in Vietnam are being ignored today.

We are an organization of veterans of the armed forces of this country. We have been to war and have seen what military power can and cannot accomplish. We know what war does to those who fight it and those who live where it is fought. We hear our government loudly pledge support for our servicemen and women as they are sent into battle but have seen it turn its back on many when they returned, suffering physical and mental wounds, from the Vietnam and Gulf wars.

We speak out of duty to our country and the world, solidarity with those serving in the military and love of our families and friends when we take this stand:

- We condemn the criminal attacks of September 11 and demand that those responsible be held accountable and brought to justice.

- We mourn for the victims and offer our heartfelt sorrow and sympathy to the families and friends of those we lost.

- We condemn bigotry and violence against Arabs, Muslims and immigrants which threaten these communities because of their race, nationality and religion.

- We oppose efforts to cur-

tail our basic civil liberties and democratic rights and must defend the Constitution from those who are undermining it.

- We do not believe that militarism and war will provide justice or security and oppose major U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan or other countries.

On a more fundamental level, our country has to address the reasons behind the violence that has now come to our shores. The seeds of this anger and hatred were sown over many years.

For over a century, Western corporations have dominated the Middle East to profit from its oil. For the last fifty years, the United States has supported Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands and helped prop up corrupt regimes in some Arab countries. The contin-

ued American troop presence in Saudi Arabia and the suffering of the Iraqi people under economic sanctions has added to this resentment.

As long as U.S. foreign policy continues to be based on corporate exploitation and military domination, we will continue to make more enemies in the poor, underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. We can achieve enduring security and lasting peace only through domestic and foreign policies based on social and economic justice. That will come about only when the American people demand it.

September 27, 2001



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From the National Office

BARRY ROMO

With the terrorist attacks of September 11, the notion of what is "normal" for us in the United States has been severely changed. We in VVAW lost friends and co-workers, and we all mourn the deaths of thousands from nearly eighty different countries in these attacks. We demand that the perpetrators of such carnage be brought to justice.

This single issue of *The Veteran* for 2001 reflects the social justice work we continue to do, after nearly 35 years in existence. Unfortunately, there always seems to be a new war, which produces new veterans, with many of the same problems we faced on coming home — a major reason we are still around after all these years. There is always an issue in which VVAW's voice and action has meaning. We've got to keep on going.

The Bob Kerrey story allowed us to once again present the real war in Vietnam rather than the "noble cause gone wrong" line, and showed why VVAW is still needed. Our opinions were aired in media around the country, including talk shows, radio, newspapers, and *TIME* magazine.

Even if we take Bob Kerrey's

side of the story completely from his own words, he is responsible for stabbing to death four male Vietnamese captives who were not doing anything wrong, but who might have made some noise and given away Kerrey's group's position.

The media and chorus of Kerrey supporters seem to think that the Vietnamese didn't have a right to live in their own country. They seem to think that "hooches" weren't homes and that dirt floors were a sign of subhumanity. They seem to think that Kerrey was somehow the victim rather than the Vietnamese he killed. Imagine, he had problems sleeping. Think about the fathers and mothers and children and grandchildren who witnessed their loved ones being slaughtered in front of them. I imagine they have had problems sleeping for the last thirty years. The true victims are the Vietnamese.

VVAW has been around for thirty-four years because of the dedicated people who work without pay. Our staffers and coordinators are all volunteers and we would not exist without them and their dedication to holding together this organization. This pa-

per comes out because of two of them.

Lisa Boucher takes the articles — some look like they were written in a bathroom on toilet paper without a dictionary — and makes them into something that you are hopefully able to read. It's mind-warping, and she must be thanked for her love for VVAW.

Jeff Machota does a lot more than layout. He collects the articles, calls the meetings to go over what's in each issue, and tries to stay on top of the schedule. He takes the paper in to be printed, brings it back and helps mail it. He also keeps the mailing list, does our books (such as they are), coordinates the website and e-mail network, and a whole lot more.

We're lucky in VVAW to have people like them. We don't have much money, but we do have a caliber of volunteers that makes the organization live and contribute to the fight for peace and justice.



BARRY ROMO IS A NATIONAL COORDINATOR OF VVAW AND A MEMBER OF VVAW'S CHICAGO 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> with "Attn: Veteran Editor" in the subject line or mail to:
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From VVAW's National Steering Committee 10/27/01

On October 7, military action began against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In the VVAW statement on the September 11 terrorist attacks, we argued against the use of "massive military power" as a response. While those who committed and supported the awful acts of terrorism in New York and Washington, DC, must be brought to justice, VVAW does not accept that US military intervention in Afghanistan will be the answer.

We must carve out space for dissent in this country, dissent that is now under threat with the passage of a sweeping anti-terrorism bill by the US Congress. It is time for all of us to stand up for justice and reason now, to really be "winter soldiers" in these times when our views are being marginalized and may be unpopular.

We call upon people to continue participation in demonstrations and rallies across the coun-

try. These are necessary to avoid the feeling of isolation in this dangerous time. These are important methods of coming together as citizens.

We also suggest the wider use of teach-ins and town meetings to connect with broader audiences, to help each other to learn about the reasons behind the violence of September 11 and to move toward the recognition of the US as one country in an international community, a country that must

learn to base its domestic and foreign policies on true economic and social justice.

Those who receive this paper should contact the individuals listed on page two to find out what is going on in your community and how you might help in this necessary effort. VVAW is assisting in efforts to forge a national progressive coalition in response to 9-11 and its aftermath.



In Memory of
Joshua Donovan Davis
Son of life long VVAW activists
Bill and Joan Davis and sister Rebecca
April 7, 1983
October 7, 2001

"The butterfly count
not months but moments
and has time enough."

Memorial Contributions may be made to:
Greenpeace or the World Wildlife Fund

Notes From the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

Joe Miller called me in May, to ask that I put together a column for what he said would be an August publication date. Realizing that Joe worked for the federal government for several years, I had no reason to believe that *The Veteran* would be out anytime before October, and planned accordingly to work on something with a Halloween theme. It then occurred to me that Lisa and Jeff, the paper's co-editors, had not been similarly traumatized by a military upbringing, so that the projected August date seemed more realistic.

This actually worked out well, assuming that my plan was to work on something appropriate for the season. As our readers know, there are few months of the year which feature more meaningful and joyous holidays than August.

Can't think of any? Try August 6 and 9.

As a very amateur history student, I have figured out over the years that there are some themes, or assumptions, in American history which are considered incontrovertible. One is that the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was a work of genius, which produced a document of near-Biblical proportions. This may be true.

A second is that it was a very good thing that the North won the Civil War, because this assured the preservation of the Union, the growth of democracy, and, if not the freedom of African-Americans, at least their official emancipation. At least two of these assumptions are probably true. A third is that the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan, in August of 1945, saved a million American lives, and kept the war in the Pacific from dragging on for at least several more months. (I ask you: how many people have you met in your lives who **don't** believe that?)

One reason that almost everyone believes it, I should caution, is that it may be true. *Newsweek* ran a cover story a couple of years ago on the subject, and went so far as to reproduce the War Department's elaborate plans for the invasion of Japan, *sans* the bomb, giving every indication that its editorial staff was in complete agreement with this proposition. One historian, however, doesn't see it that way, and I should like to share with you his thoughts on the subject.

Professor Howard Zinn, whom George W. Bush once described as "a man I admire as much as Jesus Christ" (okay, that's

a joke), touched on this subject in his "People's History of the United States." Zinn quotes a couple of liberal historians and journalists (always suspect), and then goes on to utilize another source: the United States Government.

Zinn writes that the Strategic Bombing Survey, an arm of the War Department (ours, not theirs), concluded after a very lengthy study that "in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped." This conclusion was based upon "a detailed investigation of all the facts, and supported by the testimony of surviving Japanese leaders." Zinn then asks, "Could American leaders have known this in August 1945? The answer is clearly yes. The Japanese code had been broken, and ... it was known the Japanese had instructed their ambassador in Moscow to work on peace negotiations with the Allies. ... On July 13, Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo wired his ambassador in Moscow: 'Unconditional surrender is the only obstacle to peace.' ... If only the Americans had not insisted on unconditional surrender — that is, if they were willing to accept one condition of the surrender, that the Emperor, a holy figure to the Japanese, re-

main in place — the Japanese would have agreed to stop the war."

Assuming that this were true, why did we go ahead with the bombing? (And why, a mere three days after Hiroshima, did we drop the second one?) Zinn floats a couple of ideas. His first suggestion is that "too much money and effort had been invested in the atomic bomb not to drop it." His second is that "the Russians had secretly agreed that they would come into the war (with Japan) ninety days after the end of the European war. That turned out to be May 8, and so, on August 8, the Russians were due to declare war on Japan. But by then the big bomb had been dropped, ... the Japanese would surrender to the United States, not the Russians, and the United States would be the occupier of postwar Japan." Welcome to the Cold War. You guys take Eastern Europe, and we'll take the Far East.

Unlike Professor Zinn, or Dr. Miller, I have no professional credentials as either a historian or a political scientist. (Hell, I majored in **medieval** history in college.) But I would offer my own ama-

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Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

Looking back, I think that Bill Clinton was my favorite president. Presidents are supposed to run the affairs of government and be heads of state, but Clinton brought more. He brought us entertainment. Sex. Money. Power. It was all there.

If you liked to watch the soaps, but were pressed for time, you just watched the evening news during the Clinton administration. I believe this soap was called *White Trash in the White House*. You had the presidential cronies from back home in Arkansas getting themselves indicted for various swindles. You had the presidential brother who started out as a bumbling alcoholic and finished as an influence peddler. You had the first lady who started out with a sleazy law firm and ended up a U.S. senator while doing a little insider trading along the way.

Then there's the main character, who never met a female he didn't like. Whether he was chasing interns through the halls of the White House or groping job applicants in the Oval Office or dropping trou before home girls in Little Rock, Bill Clinton played his role. Then, just when you thought his soap opera days were over he passed out a bunch of dubious presidential pardons.

It turned out that one or more of the pardons was given in return for major help in financing wife Hillary's campaign for New York senator. Sex, money and power, and he wasn't afraid to play his saxophone at a party.

Now we have George II, who is as dull as they come. Our only hope is those twin daughters of his.

Did you see when Fidel Castro collapsed half way through one of his four-hour speeches in the hot June sun? He should learn to take it easy. He's in his seventies now. Time to start limiting your speeches to an hour forty-five. Not to worry, said a Cuban government spokesman. After all, 665 members of his audience collapsed before he did. Presumably, if he had gone on for his usual four hours, over 1,300 people would have collapsed.

Fidel has been giving speeches of four or more hours for many years. I never thought about it before, but all through the years thousands must have been collapsing. That's powerful speaking. Can you imagine listening to George II for four hours? People would collapse from boredom, if not from the heat.

I went to Cuba two years

ago. In spite of his over-long speeches, Fidel seems to remain popular at home. Ché Guevara, however, is more popular. That might have something to do with Ché being a dead hero of the revolution and Fidel being the live head of government and being held responsible for such things as the economic disaster of the early Nineties.

It also may have something to do with what you see when you visit, because Cuban policy is not to honor heroes until after they die. Thus you see pictures and posters of and signs about Ché everywhere, but nothing of Fidel.

I traveled to Cuba for a bicycle trip around Havana and the western part of the island. I went with the late Bruce Barnett and about fourteen Canadians. Going on that particular trip was Bruce's idea. It was partly because he was an avid bicyclist and partly because he was an admirer of a country that would actually provide decent health care and decent schooling and decent housing for all its citizens.

Bruce passed away earlier this year. He was a longtime VVAW member. He was active in the early Seventies in Chicago before he left for Elkhart, Indiana. At that time we were involved in

the "War on the VA," and one can remember Bruce's joy and anger during takeovers of the VA or harassing generals on the reviewing stand on Armed Forces Day.

On the Cuba trip Bruce would practice his Spanish on half the people we rolled by, often stopping to finish a conversation he started while on the bike. He was like that. Cuba or Elkhart. Ireland or Chicago. Bruce talked to everyone.

In Cuba we visited an elementary school where Bruce discussed politics with the children. Then there were the guys repairing cars in their garage and the ladies in the post office. And the young men who were the recipients of the baseballs and gloves that Bruce brought along to give away. And the hotel personnel and the women in the markets and the cab drivers.

Traveling with Bruce was something else. He wanted to hear everyone's life story. Half of them probably thought he was weird, and half of them thought he was their best friend. Which he was.

Lots of people will be missing you, Bruce. We salute you and the life you led.



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

600 Homeless Veterans Served with a Smile

BARRY ROMO

For the eighth consecutive year, VVAW joined with the VA, other veterans' groups and others to provide two days of food and services for homeless vets.

VVAW runs the kitchen: washing, scraping, cleaning, cursing and providing organization to what could be a chaotic event where different groups volunteer to provide food and cook it for the various meals.

This year was truly a regional event with members and friends coming from St. Louis, Wisconsin, Champaign-Urbana and northern Illinois.

It was a case of every single person being needed and everyone putting in extra effort to get the job done in a hot kitchen on hot July days and serving under a hot sun.

Bill Branson orchestrated the event. In the words of Dave up from St. Louis, "he delegated authority where necessary and took

control when needed."

Special mention must be made of Bob from Wisconsin and Janet from St. Louis who cleaned the hot table and stove respectively. And Aaron and Sarah from C-U, who kicked ass scrubbing and rinsing and, along with George, serving. We got out extra early because of their initiative and sweat.

A little story, not about the vets but about a volunteer who didn't serve. I spoke at a local community college about war and stuff. At the end a young woman came up to volunteer for the standdown. She had recently beat cancer and thought she knew something about life and death.

I called her up to give her directions on how to get to the National Guard Armory. She was coughing but she assured me she wasn't ill and would not get the homeless sick, just that she had had bone marrow transplants and



had trouble with allergies ever since.

Her car broke on Friday but she borrowed one to come on Saturday.

She came into the kitchen to find me. But the heat both inside and outside with the serving line was too much for her. Her sweat glands weren't working.

Almost in tears about letting VVAW and the homeless down, she could not stop apologizing.

She promised to come for the winter standdown and apologized once more.

Of course I thanked her, gave her a long handshake and was inspired by her. Most people try to find ways out of doing things and here she was in tears because her body would not let her help others. I know Christina will make a standdown and I know she gave me my third wind.



Standdown Thankyou

Here is the text of a letter we received from the VA. I want to especially thank the volunteers from Champaign-Urbana, St. Louis and Milwaukee, including those who I know tried hard to make it, but were defeated by circumstances. I also want to make sure that we all understand the role that the Vietnam Vets of America, Viet Now and Veterans of Foreign Wars play every year. They raise money, buy food and come in to cook and serve it. We have forged a mutual respect for each other founded on hard work and service to our fellow vets. Our politics on non-vet related issues may be far apart, but we are the same in our hearts. Please try to reserve a week-day for the winter Standdown. It is, in many respects, more of a necessity to homeless vets than the summer event. The homeless people who are stuck here in Chicago for a winter really need the clothing, services and those two hot dogs that we serve.

Bill Branson

Dear Bill:

Once again I need to thank you and other VVAW members for the tremendous job that you did managing the kitchen for Standdown. Each year the operation seems to go smoother

and this year was no exception. To feed hundreds of hungry veterans and volunteers three meals a day is no small feat and you make it look easy. I know that you are solving problems all day long as well as dealing with lots of personalities. I appreciate that when you are in charge in the kitchen, I just don't have to worry about it any more. I received a phone call on Monday morning from a vet who had been at Standdown. He had preregistered from my Vet Center and, interestingly enough, he called to tell me thank you. He talked about the things he got accomplished at Standdown, but he ended his thank you with "and I ate better than I have in months!" I am sure he is not alone. The quality and quantity of food that you send out of the kitchen is far better than most of the veterans that come to Standdown are used to having. Thank you for making this happen. We will be planning a Winter Standdown for sometime close to Veterans' Day. I will get back to you as soon as I have a date.

Warmest regards,

Jeanne A. Douglas, Ph.D.
Standdown Steering Comm.



On the Thursday before Memorial Day, veterans in New York City helped coordinate picket lines at the Regional Office and VA hospitals in Manhattan and Brooklyn to protest cuts in social services for disadvantaged vets. The demonstrations were organized by the Coalition of Veterans in Pain & Distress, which was initiated by Black Veterans for Social Justice and is made up of a number of veterans associations including the VVAW Clarence Fitch Chapter. These pictures show some of the picketers at the Manhattan VA Hospital, which included WWII, Korea, Vietnam and Gulf War ex-servicemen and women.



Two Fundraisers, Two Successes

BOB RIGGLE AND JOHN ZUTZ

The only things that really matter when putting on a benefit are whether it is profitable and whether those attending enjoy themselves. The Milwaukee chapter of VVAW was successful in both respects at two fundraising events. On February 10 the Sweetheart Concert at Milwaukee's Tasting Room featured some of the best of Milwaukee's blues musicians. On March 11 the annual Milwaukee Beer Festival presented a wide variety of beers for tasting and appreciation. Both events raised much-needed money for the My Lai projects. A portion of the proceeds from the beer festival was also sent to the Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago.

The My Lai projects are run by the Madison Friends and include revolving loan funds, the construction of a new elementary school and hospital in My Lai, and the Peace Park. We felt two fundraisers were appropriate since the Peace Park was due to be dedicated on March 16. We have seen the commitment of Vietnam veteran Mike Boehm and the Friends over a number of years. Through their various projects they have forged links of friendship and cooperation with the people of Vietnam. They have asked for help, and since we are a veterans' group based on peace and justice, we wanted to do whatever we could.

Boehm, who left for Viet-

nam within hours of the concert, made a brief presentation about the My Lai projects at the event. Titled a Sweetheart Concert for Valentine's Day, the bill featured music by Steve Cohen, who has played at a number of VVAW events, including campouts, in the past. He was backed by The RoCos and special guest Greg Koch. The band was cooking and everyone had a good time. After all the concert bills were paid, the Milwaukee VVAW chapter added a little money for a total contribution of \$850, which should build a classroom for the My Lai primary school.

One month later VVAW sponsored the Milwaukee Beer Festival featuring the 13th annual "Blessing of the Bock" at Milwaukee's Serb Memorial Hall. This is a unique religious experience. We invite brewers, including homebrewers and commercial breweries, to present their beers. We have a priest bless the beers, then we drink them. Since the festival is on a Sunday I like to tell Catholics it fulfills their obligation to attend church. The festival gives beer drinkers an opportunity to compare various beer styles and to taste a variety of different beers in one place. We also attempt to promote the art of homebrewing. Over sixty volunteers put in nearly a thousand man-hours at the festival. There were

over thirty-five display tables and over three hundred paid admissions. The profit of \$4,650 was divided evenly between My Lai projects and the Vietnam Veterans Art Museum in Chicago. Once again, a good time was had by all.



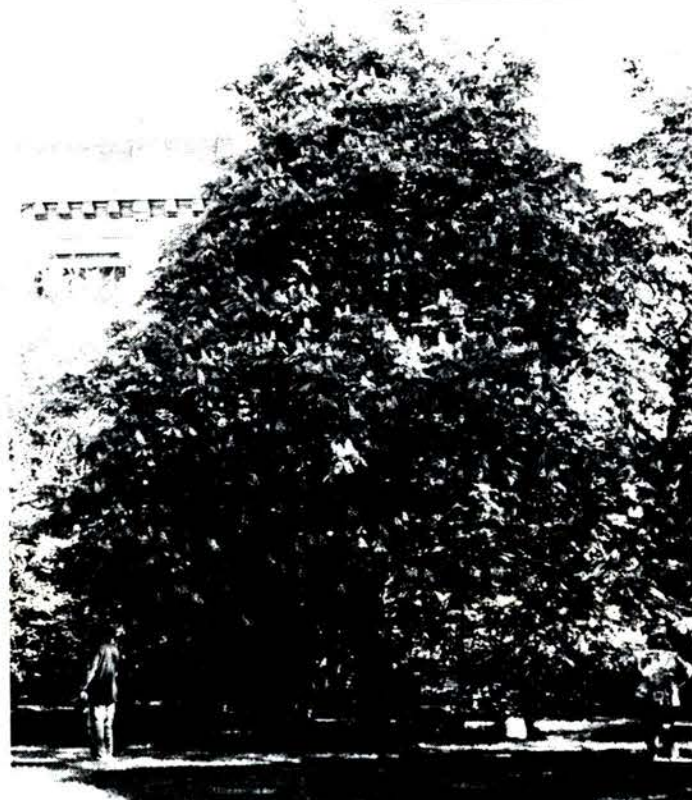
BOB RIGGLE AND JOHN ZUTZ ARE MEMBERS OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER OF VVAW.

More information:

My Lai Projects
c/o Madison Friends
1704 Roberts Court
Madison, WI 53711-2029
<www.mylaipeacepark.com>

Vietnam Veterans Art Museum
1801 S. Indiana
Chicago, IL
<www.nvvam.org>

Milwaukee Beer Festival
2922 N. Booth St.
Milwaukee, WI 53212
<www.milwaukeebeerfest.com>



The sapling planted in Milwaukee without permission by VVAW in 1971 is now a 40 foot tall Horse Chestnut

Notes From the Boonies

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teur suggestion in regard to our motivation.

Truman didn't drop those bombs on Japan; he dropped them on Moscow. Even if most Americans had never heard of the term "cold war," you can bet "Give 'Em Hell" Harry and John Foster Dulles knew what was coming. If several hundred thousand Japanese civilians had to die for us to get our point across, then it is possible that Washington thought that a small price to pay for the privilege of getting to make the first move on the chessboard. As we know, Truman didn't mind throwing a few million Vietnamese to the wolves that same year, and for the same reason.

So what is my point in bringing this up, fifty-six years later? My first priority is that, as with any columnist, I have a deadline to meet. VVAW pays me five hundred bucks for each of these

columns [Paul is kidding again. —Ed.], and I'll be damned if I'm giving up that kind of dough just because I don't have anything worthwhile to say. My second motivation may be less self-serving.

I have been speaking to high school history classes in Douglas County, about the Vietnam War, for the past four years. I've spoken to about three hundred students in that period of time, and there is always some malcontent who winds up asking me something like, "If you don't like it here, why don't you move to Russia?" I am accused — I would like to think falsely — of bashing my country, or of biting that hand that feeds me.

My answer has been substantially this. We have all known people who are never wrong. If by some slim chance they have ever done or said anything which was

not correct, then they have since more than atoned for it. (It was also someone else's fault for giving them misleading information in the first place.) We also know how much we enjoy the company of these people.

Nations are not that much different from people. All too often neither entity — individuals or mass societies — ever understands something which most people would find pretty basic. That is that when we make mistakes, however we came to make them, people do not respect us more once they have figured out that we're trying to cover them up. They respect us more when we admit them, and try to atone for them. Such admission, although initially painful, has one more benefit: it may make us less likely to do it again.

I do not look for an imminent admission from Washington that

Howard Zinn may have been right. I don't even look for an admission that somebody other than a couple of drunken PFCs was responsible for No Gun Ri. To tell you the truth, I'm afraid I've settled in to an acceptance of something even more dour: too many Americans still think that being an American means never having to say you're wrong.

And you know something even sadder? A lot of them honestly believe we never are.



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.

Memorial Day, Zablocki Medical Center

BOB RIGGLE

It was almost a no-go this year. After so many years of moving semi-ambulatory patients from the VA hospital, by bus, foot or otherwise, up the hill to the chapel for the annual Memorial Day ceremony, VVAW Milwaukee almost passed on doing it this year. With the addition of the D.A.V. minivans, and of course the VA's policy of cutting back on inpatient admissions and care, we've been on the verge of zero people to move for the past two years. Thank you!

There were mixed feelings as to whether we should continue to show up. We had almost nothing to do. Yes, we do love the ceremony, but we also came to work. But where the F\$@K are the patients?

We have seen less and less patients available for transport. In a hospital with maybe a 250-bed capacity, these days we are lucky to have about twenty or twenty-five patients capable of being

moved. It's not really that far, but it's F\$@KING MEMORIAL DAY!

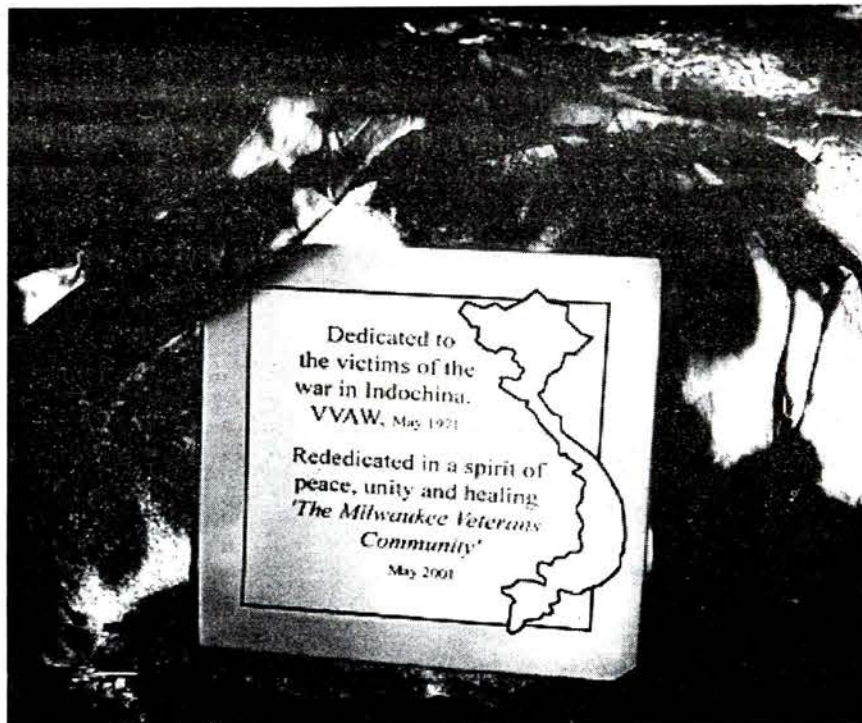
John Lindquist, bless his soul, reminded us of all the years we struggled to be accepted by the mainstream veterans' community. We finally obtained that goal many years in the past, and worked too hard to give it up to a few who would like to have our balls. So, we came, we saw, we did.

Fortunately we had good weather in our favor and many patients were willing and allowed to attend the ceremony. Thank goodness.

The highlight for us this year was the participation of some four hundred or so local Hmong veterans in their dress camos. They showed what it's all about—solidarity! We love you all, brothers. Peace to you.



BOB RIGGLE IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE CHAPTER OF VVAW.



A new marker placed near the tree planted by VVAW in Milwaukee to commemorate those killed during the war in Vietnam

Veterans Memorial Dedicated

DAVID CLINE

On Memorial Day 2001, over four hundred veterans and other concerned citizens joined in dedicating the Jersey City Vietnam Veterans Memorial in remembrance of the 64 local young men who lost their lives in that war as well as those who died from war-related causes after returning home.

Funds to build the memorial were raised over a fourteen-month period through contributions, T-shirt sales and a 24-hour softball marathon fundraiser. The memorial's design was developed by committee members working with artist June Svetlovsky, who contributed her talent and time.

Senator Jon Corzine and Jersey City mayor. Glenn Cunningham spoke, and a mes-

sage was read from New Jersey governor Marga Lyons. A school teacher whose father and cousin both died in Vietnam spoke on behalf of the families of the fallen, many of whom were present.

Reverend Mona Fitch, whose brother Clarence died after returning from Vietnam, led the gathering in prayer and in singing "Ain't Gonna Study War No More." Poet Marc Levy read from his writings and former city councilman Jaime Vazquez spoke about his Marine Corps sergeant who died while saving his life.

Greg Payton gave the keynote speech and reflected on the meaning of the loss of these young men. He asked, "What would their lives have been like if they were still here? Would they be home-



Committee president David Cline and artist June Svetlovsky stand beside the Jersey City Vietnam Veterans memorial that was dedicated on May 28, 2001.

less or unemployed and ignored like so many others? Would they be addicted to drugs or alcohol or sick with AIDS? Would they have been racially profiled while driving down the highways of the country they fought for?"

Color guards from VVA Chapters 151 and 800 and VFW Shelton Post 2294 stood on both sides of the Memorial as it was dedicated, and the Hudson County Korean War Veterans laid a wreath. Sixty-four veterans then laid red roses at the base on the memorial as each of the names was read. "Taps" was played to conclude the ceremony.

Afterwards, refreshments were served, and many took the time to touch the memorial stone,

remembering individuals they had known. A number of families and friends of those who died after their return asked Memorial Committee members to develop a program to individually memorialize those veterans as well. Plans are now being considered for an appropriate addition to remember these brothers.

VVAW members played an important part in this memorial's realization from start to finish and are proud to have lent a hand so our fallen comrades are NOT FORGOTTEN!



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



Navy veteran Russell Francis lays a red rose at the Vietnam Memorial as the names of the 64 young men from Jersey City who died were read during the dedication ceremony.

It's Good to be With Friends: Memorial Day in Chicago

JOE MILLER

On a bright May 28, not as hot as usual, around sixty members and supporters of VVAW gathered at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fountain to remember the fallen in wars and in struggles for social justice. We also gathered to remember comrades and friends who have passed on.

The construction on State and Wacker did not deter us. In fact, a couple of our members actually convinced the workers to stop until we completed our ceremony.

Barry Romo, national co-coordinator of VVAW, served as the MC for this event. He began by reminding us all of the Winter Soldier Investigation of thirty years ago, when VVAW members challenged the lie that My Lai was an aberration. Barry connected this with the recent revelations about former Senator Bob Kerrey and his SEAL team, who had murdered civilians in Vietnam. Kerrey claimed that this bothered him so much that he has had difficulty sleeping for the past thirty years.

'I don't care whether Bob Kerrey sleeps at night.' said Romo. "What about the relatives of those who were killed by Kerrey and his men, those who were considered less than human, because they lived in hooches and not real houses with windows and floors? What about the memories they have had to live with over the past thirty years? Why didn't Kerrey come home and try to end this horror as those of us in VVAW tried to do?"

"We must all remember the true lesson of the Vietnam war," according to Romo. "No unjust wars!"

But now the United States is

engaged in another effort to control a people's destiny in Colombia. We are spending \$1.3 billion to fight a war, not against drugs, but against the people of Colombia. This was the lead-in to Barry's introduction of the first speaker of the day, Luis Gilberto Murillo, an Afro-Colombian who had served as governor in a particular area. He is now applying for political asylum in the United States, due to threats against him that come from forces supported by the United States.

Luis thanked VVAW for inviting him to speak, and he described the struggle in Colombia as one against poverty and injustice. He spoke of the thousands of victims of political violence in Colombia: peasants, Afro-Colombians, indigenous peoples. He pointed out that the military aid given to the Colombian government by the United States is merely throwing oil onto the fire. Yes, Colombia needs aid, but not in weapons and military personnel, which only causes more bloodshed. He finally told the audience that Colombia needs their help in order to make sure that it does not become another Vietnam. Luis left the podium to loud applause and shouts of support.

Barry introduced the next speaker, Jack Surisook, a student from Oakton Community College in the Chicago suburbs who recently heard Barry speak in his class. To set the context for Jack's speech [see text in this issue], Barry reminded everyone how VVAW, though small in numbers, forced the 1972 Republican National Convention to be relocated from San Diego to Miami. This was the result of commit-

ment and organization. We are consistently working with new generations of political activists who need to know this history and learn the necessary lessons.

Jack's speech was also well-received, and the young people in the crowd should have felt the comradely connection between themselves and us older activists in VVAW. They are the reason we can continue the fight against social injustice.

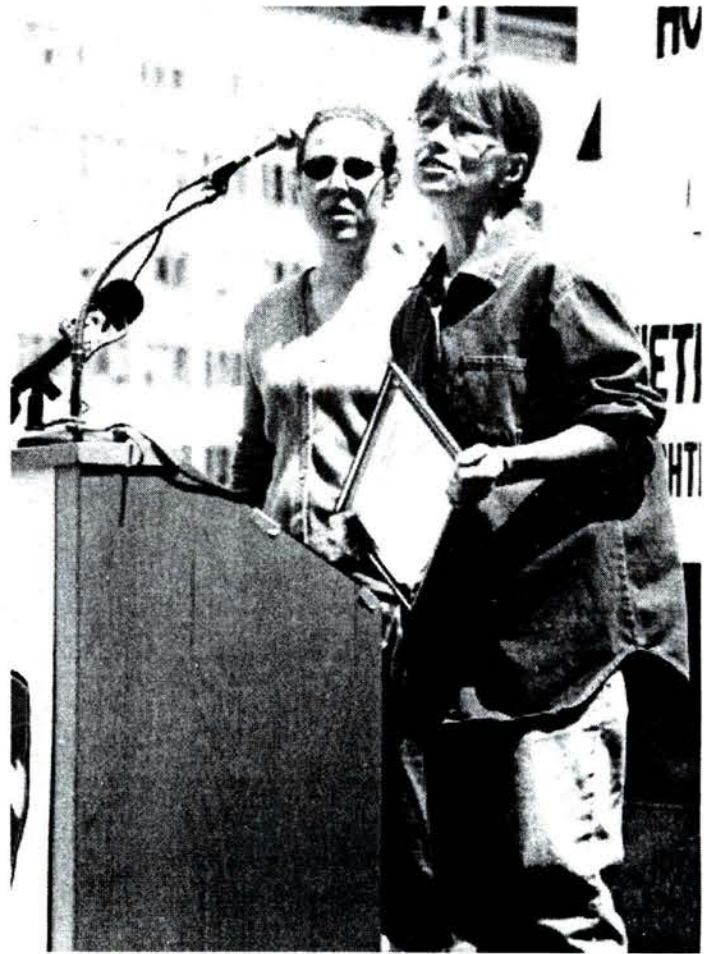
The next speaker was Leslie Coombs, an aide to Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky. Before she could speak, however, Alynne Romo stepped to the podium to present an award on behalf of the local organizers of the struggle to support the people of Colombia and to oppose U.S. intervention there. Congresswoman

Schakowsky has been a consistent opponent of this intervention, and she has seen the situation on the ground in Colombia, not from thousands of feet up in a plane like Illinois Senator Dick Durbin.

Ms. Coombs spoke about the need for aid to Colombia: aid for real needs of the people, not for the military. She pointed out how the much-touted fumigation efforts were not working, that in fact, coca production is on the increase. This is due to the fact that no money is being spent to actually assist in developing alternative production schemes. We in this country must continue to oppose military aid and push for true economic aid to the Colombian people.

Barry then introduced the final speaker for the day, disabled veteran Cesar Rullakava. Cesar is a veteran of the 10th Mountain Division and served in Haiti and Somalia. Now a student at Columbia College in Chicago, he was assigned to interview veterans as part of an oral history class. This is how he met Barry. According to Cesar, "We connected as veterans."

In his first public speech ever, Cesar challenged all the hype about the new Army, the so-called "Army of One." He pointed out that not much has changed in the military; there is still a lot of rac-



Leslie Coombs and Alynne Romo



Ray Parrish and James Gates

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Blessings and Responsibilities

JACK SURISOOK

Speech from VVAW Memorial Day event, May 28, 2001

I'd like to begin with a quote by Mr. Barry Romo.

"Someone once said, 'How could you change so quickly?' I said, 'Well, it wasn't a question of changing quickly; it was a question of being in shock over taking the blinders off. When you take sunglasses off, the sun shines in: it doesn't trickle in, it doesn't take time, it all becomes bright.' That's the same thing that happens once you get rid of the mythology that chains you down. You can see things because you're free."

About two years ago I was sitting on a street in Bangkok flipping through the *Bangkok Post* when I came across the story of Rachel Goldwyn, a 28-year-old pro-democracy activist who had been arrested, tried, and convicted in Rangoon, Burma for chaining herself to a lamppost and shouting out pro-democracy slogans. The judge sentenced her to seven years in prison with labor. There was a picture of her, smiling, blond curly locks, wearing a shirt that had the face of the sun on it. She was the daughter of a London TV producer and had told her parents she was going on holiday to Germany. Staring at her photo I became haunted and disturbed, picturing her next seven years in prison. It seemed an alien proposal to me. What had caused her to fly thousands of miles to speak out for the rights of the people of a poor, distant country? Some might question her method, but no one could question her sacrifice.

I have kept that article since that day and the two years since then her actions have informed my life. Her sacrifice highlights the blessings and responsibilities we have as Americans to exercise the tools of our democracy. I also learned from the selfless way she must have viewed the world. Her vision transcended national boundaries and she realized that oppression in Burma was a blot on all of us. They weren't just poor distant Burmese, but people who deserve the rights that we here often take for granted. That selflessness is also seen in someone like Sister Carolina, a Franciscan nun who works tirelessly to educate people around the world about the tragedy that is occurring in Colombia, to en-

lighten Americans about the atrocities, the forced displacement from homes, that are occurring as a result of our "drug war."

What's going on in Colombia needs to be known. Under the moral umbrella of this drug war, the United States is sending a billion dollars of military aid into a country that has had a recent history of violence and human rights violations. The issue of Colombia is a difficult one to understand and calls for a measure of vigor and patience. Its strategic geography and wealth in natural resources makes it valuable to U.S. and corporate interests.

The suggestion has been broached that Colombia has all the earmarks of another Vietnam. One doesn't want to jump to hasty conclusions, but the ripple effect of Plan Colombia is already being felt. In Wednesday's *Wall Street Journal* there was a story about the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez's interest in purchasing Cobra attack helicopters from Bell Helicopters, the same makers of the Huey II helicopters being provided as a part of Plan Colombia. This interest in offensive military hardware by Venezuela is in direct response to the military buildup in Colombia as a result of Plan Colombia.

In last Sunday's *Chicago Tribune* one U.S. official was quoted as describing the fumigation of coca plants in the province of Putumayo as being a "war of attrition," acknowledging that the farmers would simply return to plant the highly resistant and highly profitable coca plants amidst the wasteland of dead foliage. The words "war of attrition" being used to describe the entanglement in a tropical developing country has an eerie, *déjà vu* quality.

The crops of farmers in the Putumayo region are also being

destroyed: 3000 acres of bananas, 9000 acres of pasture and 1300 acres of yucca, according to a police report filed by farmers. Hunger in that region has also become a growing problem. There has been movement across the border into Ecuador, perhaps the least-equipped country to deal with refugees, itself being in turmoil and suffering from the worst inflation in the Western hemisphere. It has been said that if Colombia is Vietnam, then Ecuador is Cambodia.

In the past week there have been bombings in Bogota and Medellin leaving twelve dead and over 150 injured, causing fear that the fighting between the paramilitaries and the guerrillas is moving into the urban areas. This has happened as Colombia's Senate is debating measures that would be tantamount to declaring a state of war by allowing broad power to the military to arrest people without warrants and to

suspend already weak human rights requirements.

With the new Andean Aid package proposed by Bush, military aid in the guise of drug war funding would be extended into the whole region, including Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and Bolivia, broadening the reach of U.S. military influence.

So what we have here is a developing country with difficult tropical terrain that has seen many years of fighting between the military, paramilitary, and guerrilla forces. To that mix the United States has sent military advisors to train the government troops and an infusion of a billion in military hardware including Blackhawk and Huey helicopters.

We are seeing the outsourcing of military functions to private military corporations.

We have seen the establishment of strategic military loca-

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Jack Surisook



The Afro-Colombian Community: Caught in the Middle of the Armed Conflict in Colombia

LUIS G. MURILLO

Colombia has undergone forty years of armed conflict brought about by social injustice and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. Some five thousand victims of political violence (mainly peasants, unionists, community leaders, academics, students, human rights workers and independent political leaders) die every year in Colombia. Colombia is the third largest Latin American country, with 42 million inhabitants. About 40% of the population is Afro-Colombian. The Afro-Colombian community has traditionally lived on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, and in the middle and lower Magdalena River Valley, although recent migrations have led many to large cities like Bogota, Pereira and Villavicencio.

The Afro-Colombian population faces widespread poverty, social exclusion, racial discrimination, institutionalized racism and a state of invisibility. It is still socially acceptable for the Colombian mass media to commonly refer to Afro-Colombians using racist and stereotypical language. 85% live in poverty. There is one doctor per 10,000 Afro-Colombians; the national average is 1 per 1000. Per capita income is only \$500 per year, while the average in Colombia is \$1700. Due in large part to the colonial heritage of racism, the social and economic conditions of Afro-Colombians differ from those of Colombians of non-African descent. Like the vast majority of Colombians, we are affected by the exclusionary and repressive political system that characterizes modern Colombia.

The Armed Conflict

Most of the armed conflict in Colombia occurs in areas traditionally inhabited by Afro-Colombians. The armed actors — be they the government army or their paramilitary allies, or the guerrillas — are all guilty of grave human rights violations. Afro-Colombians have fallen victim to hundreds of selective assassinations and massacres. This violence is related to a round of Afro-Colombian victories based in the 1991 Colombian Constitution, which recognized Afro-Colombian ethnic and cultural rights, as

well as their collective right of land ownership in Colombian Pacific coast river valleys. These lands contain tremendous natural and mineral resources (timber, gold, copper, oil, gas, etc.) and are among the most biodiverse lands in the world. This area is also of geostrategic importance, being at the entry point from Central to South America.

In the early 1990s, at the same time that Afro-Colombians were receiving collective titles to their land, a wave of military and paramilitary violence was unleashed on their communities, with bombings and massacres leaving hundreds dead and thousands displaced. This violence continues unabated today. In Colombia, there are two million displaced people (i.e. internal refugees), 60% of whom are Afro-Colombian. Nevertheless, public debate on the conflict in Colombia invariably ignores the Afro-Colombian perspective.

The Colombian conflict goes far beyond a simple drug problem. U.S. policy towards Colombia has erroneously focused on an unsuccessful drug war, which has tremendous social costs as well as destructive environmental impacts. The Clinton administration approved the \$1.3 billion Plan Colombia, 80% of which consists of military aid to the Colombian army, which has the worst human rights record in the Western hemisphere. Paramilitary forces, closely allied to the Colombian military, commit 80% of the massacres and human rights violations affecting Afro-Colombians. As in the United States, the poorly-named "war on drugs" has a markedly racial nature. U.S. policy toward Colombia is throwing oil on the fire of the armed conflict. Colombia does not need U.S. helicopter gunships, it needs support for peace and reconciliation.

You Can Help

We call on citizens of this country — especially African-Americans — to raise awareness, visit Colombia to see the situation first-hand, support Afro-Colombian organizations, and/or sponsor material aid campaigns to assist those displaced by the violence. We call on you to contact

your congresspeople and senators and educate them, to reorient U.S. policy on Colombia toward the promotion of peace and reconciliation, especially with respect to human rights and the rights of Afro-Colombians.



Luis G. Murillo is the ex-governor of Chocó, a predominantly Afro-Colombian province. He is one of several brilliant, independent leaders to lead the fight for land rights: a fight in which Afro-Colombians have legitimately won collective title to Chocó. Although relatively unknown in the United States, this struggle is an important inspiration in South America among those who support development that is autonomous to the influence of wanna-be exploiters, such as multinational corporations looking for oil, or Colombian financiers looking to make a buck off infrastructure development.

People like this come under attack. The well-financed opposition uses its money and endemic corruption to whittle away at the people's victories and wear the people down. When that fails, the paramilitaries chase the people off the land. It makes it quite a bit harder to fight for your land rights when half your family has been killed and the other half is trying to stay alive in some filthy refugee camp. Luis was an outspoken

critic of the paramilitaries and tried to have the entire state of Chocó declared a peace zone that's off-limits to all the armed groups. So he was abducted by the death squads who showed him photographs of his family as they undertook their daily routines. Luis was given the choice of paying the paras off or having his entire family killed.

Like many other grassroots leaders, Luis had to take his family out of the country. But unlike most, he came to the United States instead of Europe. Thanks to the support he has received here, he has been granted asylum! Luis has been studying English and has begun to speak out publicly. He spoke eloquently against U.S. policy at VVAW's Memorial Day ceremony in Chicago this past May.

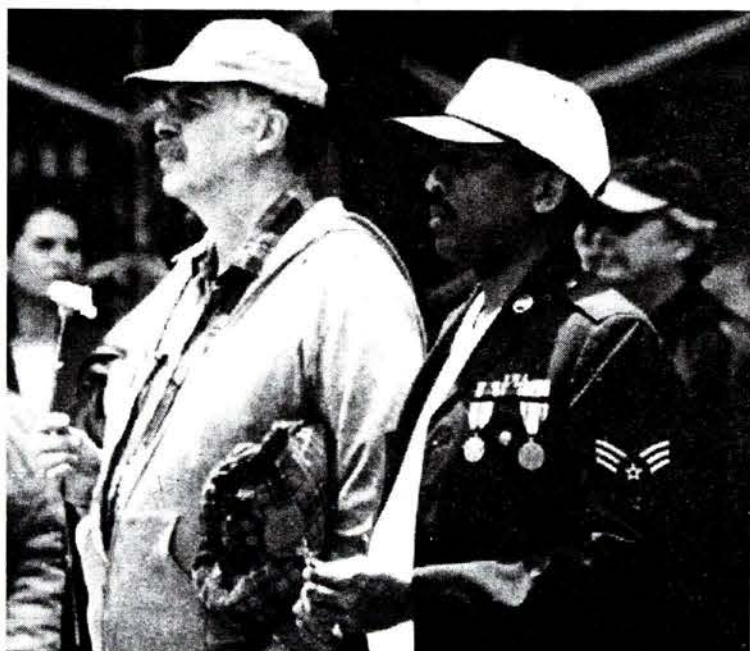
Luis is passionate about returning to Colombia to continue the struggle, but in the meantime, we can help here! If you want to sponsor him at your university or other function, or if you are willing to help with badly-needed financial support, contact: Colombia Human Rights Committee, P.O. Box 3130, Washington, DC 20010, telephone 202-232-8148, e-mail <colhrc@igc.org>. Checks should be made out to the Colombia Human Rights Committee with Luis Gilberto Murillo written in the item line.

Alynn Romo



Blessings and Responsibilities

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tions surrounding Colombia: Curaçao in the Caribbean, Manta off the coast of Ecuador, and Iquitos in the Peruvian Amazon.

We are seeing the repeated spraying of a broad spectrum herbicide, a herbicide that the United States insists is safe, but is the third leading complaint of farm workers in California, a herbicide so corrosive that it cannot be stored in galvanized steel containers, a herbicide doing a good job of denuding everything except the coca plants.

We are seeing the violence spill over into poor neighboring countries which are, to say the least, politically unstable, and we are beginning to see a desire for an offensive military buildup in neighboring countries as a response to Plan Colombia.

The parallels are obvious to any student of history. The question now before us is whether we as Americans have learned anything from Vietnam. If we as a

country have only learned counterinsurgency tactics, press bans by the military, and the outsourcing of military functions to private companies as a way of washing our hands, then my contention is that we've failed. We've failed to advance our country toward any notion of a more humane future, but rather have only developed more surreptitious and deviant ways to wage war.

But if we choose to learn from the men and women of VVAW, if we have gained a voice that matches our conviction, if we are not resigned to apathetic impotence, if we are engaged in curious and critical questioning of what our government is doing in the name of the American people, if we have the courage to remove the blinders and stare directly into the sun then I feel we would most honor the sacrifices of the veterans of this country, we would honor the memory of men like Jack McCloskey, we would do

justice to the work of Sister Carolina and Ignacio Gomez and Jineth Bedoya. Men and women with the courage to have compassion. Men and women who believe in the power of choices and actions.

When history is viewed as a collection of choices which define action, that empowers our present. When Agent Orange was finally somewhat acknowledged by our government and brought out into the public consciousness, it wasn't because it was a preordained excerpt from some all-encompassing historical tome. Rather it was the struggle of men and women of the VVAW who saw the truth of what was happening to the combat veterans who had returned home. The fight was fought measure by measure by people dedicated to social justice, dedicated to the rights of the veterans who had sacrificed so much of themselves for this country.

VVAW has shown us the power of educating, has shown us that to actively pursue change, people need to inform others of the truth of what is going on. One month ago some of the students of Richard Stacewicz's class organized a forum, a teach-in to inform others about the truth of what is happening in Colombia. The

speakers included Barry Romo, Leslie Coombs, and Pastor Andrew Ullmann from Witness for Peace. The discussion lasted for almost two hours and was attended by approximately 120 people. We didn't move mountains, but what we did was create a little ripple, a brick in the foundation for change. Hopefully dedicated people across the country will have the conviction to transform the multitude of ripples into a wave.

The voice for change and social justice is not limited to separate struggles, but is like gossamer that transcends space and time. A continuum of people who refuse to live on blind faith alone and who challenge humans to embrace their humanity. The memory of veterans is not honored by glossed-over and contrived blockbuster movies that cloak themselves in vicarious patriotism. The memory of those men and women deserve more. They deserve that posterity will work to spare their sons and daughters the terrible toll extracted from them.



JACK SURISOOK IS A STUDENT AT OAKTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE.



Memorial Day in Chicago

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ism. You are still a number, not a human being. That is the true meaning behind the phony "Army of One" campaign. Cesar then elaborated on this with a personal story about the death of his first child. Cesar was not allowed to be with his wife during this, her first birth experience, since Army duties took priority. He asked, "Where was the Army of One when I needed to be with my wife at this time?" He reminded all of us that we need to stop and think about the truth of life in the military. "Do not be fooled by new slogans and slick hype. It is still the same old military that many of us have experienced." Cesar walked away from the podium to

shouts of support and appreciation. Perhaps he has found new comrades in VVAW.

Barry closed the 2001 Memorial Day event with an extended discussion of heroism and courage. "People like Bob Kerrey are called heroes and given medals for killing civilians. What is heroic about this? VVAW members, thirty years ago, demonstrated how we felt about such medals when we threw them back at the Capitol Building," Barry said. "The medals they give you don't have any value.

"Real heroes," he went on, "are those who have stood up and continue to stand up for social justice. They don't have govern-



Cesar Rullakava

ment or military forces behind them. Yet, they continue to fight for the betterment of all." Barry identified some of the young people in the audience who have helped to organize the annual Take Back the Night march in Champaign-Urbana. He named Brooke Anderson, Tara

McCauley, and Jessie Baugher, and he pointed out that these folks are his heroes.

Finally, the crowd was asked to place flowers at the fountain in remembrance of fallen comrades, and another VVAW Memorial Day ceremony ended.



Twin fates on a towering day *Thoughts on September 11th 2001 on September 12th*

I fall asleep watching the late news:
The mews of a teenage girl with 10 pairs
of low-riding jeans and the means to buy thong panties.
I wake to scenes seen around all the clocks:
fluttering, heavy, human leaves
and stacks of unbalanced blocks
that used to be floors in buildings
toppling in unseasonable falls.
And, Pentagon puzzles being spilled.

I, you, we, see packs of staggering, fleeing, and
rescuing people powdered with dust, blood and screams
intercut with four (count 'em, 4!) views of
planes plunging into the skyline.
Sure enough reality TV for survivors now.
A headline says: War has come home

Whip that National Missile Defense on those suicides
swinging knives and box cutters and making sighs.
"I can't believe it," people keep saying. Meaning,
"My mind won't accept it until the T-shirts come out."

It'll take a little while for easy and vacuous smiles
to reappear like spring flowers or frivolous weeds
and to build new towers of smugness.

Timothy McVeigh's been outdone.
Some foreign scum won the trashing championship.
But the stock market will open tomorrow
so we can get back to business as usual.
And, we're gonna get 'em 'cause
We're #1 and too good to die!!

But you can't win playing defense . . .
Or, without knowing the real rules of
the game called Empire.

And Boy George,
with training wheels on his boots,
staggers toward more war.

Horace Coleman



A Coast Guard vessel with plenty of firepower patrols a 500-yard perimeter set up around a large portion of Manhattan after the attacks.

Reflecting on My Lai and Thanh Phong

STEPHEN SINSLEY

As I listen to, and read about the current revelations(?) and controversy regarding Bob Kerry's wartime experiences, I ask myself: is it true? There is a good chance it is, given Gerhard Klann's version of the events, confirmed by an almost identical independent Vietnamese account, and the almost immediate rebuttal by the other five members of the squad. I feel that Gerhard has struggled with and is trying to deal with his personal ghosts, accepting responsibility for what he had participated in. The others clearly haven't yet, be that for political or personal reasons.

The supreme issue here is not the question of whether or not he did it on purpose. Do not forget that the true victims here are the villagers at Thanh Phong. Attempts at atonement and reparations should be made to them. The other issue here is the healing of the psyche of a nation. Vietnam vets have been struggling with their personal ghosts since the first grunt in 'Nam first questioned the war. Pundits of late have been decrying the accuracy of thirty-year-old memories, and for this reason I suggest they go back and review the "Winter Soldier Investigation" sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc., assembled in Detroit, Michigan to give testimony on January 31 and February 1 and 2, 1971. One hundred twenty-five Vietnam veterans testified, and another hundred and fifty Vietnam veterans participated in this solemn act. [See end of article for website URL. —Ed]

These memories were not "thirty-year-old memories". They were quite fresh in these veterans' minds and souls. This testimony was also published in the Congressional Record, "Extensions and Remarks" (April 7, 1971: 2825-2900, 2903-2936).

Following this testimony, the demonstration Operation Dewey Canyon III was held in Washington, DC from April 18 to 23, 1971. As Dewey Canyon I & II were "limited incursions" into "the country of Laos," Dewey Canyon was to be a "limited incursion" into the "country of Congress." Twenty-two hundred Vietnam vets participated (with tens of thousands of supporters) by holding memorials, meeting with anti-war senators, testifying before the Foreign Relations Committee,

lobbying Congress against the war, and culminating on Friday, April 23 when twelve hundred Vietnam veterans cast down their medals and decorations on the steps of the Capitol.

Neither My Lai nor Thanh Phong were anomalies. These incidents occurred to some degree thousands of times between 1962 and 1973. What we Americans have yet to accept is the fact that we lost the war, a war in which we shouldn't have been involved in the first place, and against a people

To keep things in better perspective:

We lost sixty thousand men and women in the Vietnam conflict. Vietnam lost three million, and more every day due to Agent Orange.

We claim 1,340 Americans MIAs. Vietnam has over three hundred thousand.

The total tonnage of bombs dropped on Vietnam was eight million more than was used in all of World War II.

Our government learned

Do not forget that the true victims here are the villagers at Thanh Phong.

whose country was artificially divided into north and south by the United States in violation of the Geneva Accords of 1954. Win the war? Sure, we could have, but the means necessary would classify as genocide. And we came damn close.

War is dirty, war is nasty, and sometimes people do immoral things out of fear, personal hatred over the loss of a buddy, and some, those odious few, out of pure bloodlust. But hey, there was a draft on at the time, bringing into the military a cross-section of American society, which includes our psychopaths who in peacetime would end up spending their lives in prison or on death row. In war, these individuals are rewarded for the same tendencies that would make them pariahs in a peacetime society. Today they become CIA "contract employees" (read: mercenaries) in Central America, South America, or wherever "Black Ops" are needed with "deniability".

Between 1962 and 1973 three million of our finest (and some not-so-finest) were sent to Southeast Asia to fight in our cold war escapade. Atrocities in any war are inevitable. What we as a people must do is get off our moral pedestal and do what we expect other countries to do: atone for our indiscretions and atrocities, and move on, hopefully having learned something. To investigate if need be, and prosecute major war crimes practitioners and responsible government leaders, as we do to Serbian, Croatian, Rwandan, and Nazi war criminals to this day.

many lessons in Vietnam. One was that our ground troops would only take so much BS. Lying and rabid jingoism in 'Nam only got the word "fragging" added to "Webster's Dictionary." Ground troops started to refuse to fight. At a certain stage, Vietnam became a one-sided air war because our elite "top gun" pilots weren't subject to the sights, smells, and sounds of what they had done, of what war really is. As the Vietnam era anti-war poster proclaimed, "War is good business, invest your son." This has never been truer than under the present corporate-controlled administration. At least part of war is good business. Public reaction to loss of U.S. lives is a hot button issue today. The Pentagon must cover up losses, or exploit them to the max for congressional backing. This brings us to computer game warfare, to cruise missiles, smart bombs, and pilotless fighter planes. We can then wag the dog and show the public what we want them to see: 100% accuracy and a "clean" kill. No collateral damage — today's cutesy euphemism for women, children, civilians, schools, and hospitals — is ever shown. We are comfortably able to rain death and destruction upon a designated enemy of the day, from the comfort of our air-conditioned command and control centers at home. The end result is the same, but the public won't see it and be repulsed by it. And of course, our brothers and sisters in uniform today won't have to hear it, smell it, feel it, or see it, like our generation did.

I reflect on the cowardice

and utter lack of professionalism and integrity the mainstream press has shown in kowtowing to the Pentagon's and State Department's spin doctors. Our government learned a lot from the Vietnam experience, but unfortunately not enough. It did learn that control of the news media is of primary importance to avoid the public's questioning of its actions. Starting with Granada we had total muzzling and spoon-feeding of the media so the folks back home wouldn't see or know what really went down. The destruction in Panama with over eight thousand civilian casualties was not reported by our compliant press. Nicaragua is a suspect chapter in our foreign policy hall of shame, where far too many of the nitty gritty details were hidden by the Iran/Contra pardons issued by Reagan/Bush. People who should rightfully be in federal prison today now hold elected or appointed positions in and around the beltway. That's democracy at work, I guess.

As an attempt at a catharsis of its national soul, the United States ought to at least follow the example of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Let it out into the light, and move on. It is unlikely we will ever get off our high horses and admit we screwed up. It's unlikely we will offer Vietnam reparations or reconstruction aid as we did for Germany and Japan. It's unlikely we will spend as much time removing the millions of U.S. landmines that continue to kill. It's unlikely we will send in massive medical assistance and chemical warfare cleanup personnel to limit or eliminate the genetic damage caused by the dioxin-laden Agent Orange with which we soaked their forests and rice paddies, still causing deformities and cancer at a greater scale than after Hiroshima. Highly unlikely. The boomer generation is then destined and condemned to live out its last thirty years like Lady MacBeth crying, "Out, out, damned spot." But nobody will be listening.

<lists.village.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_entry.html>



STEPHEN SINSLEY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW.

Dewey Canyon III

MARK HARTFORD

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis shrink from the service of his country, but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

By 1971 many young men's souls were tried to the limit. We chose to stand with our brothers and sisters still on active duty and those in America struggling against imperialism represented best by the U.S. war in Southeast Asia.

I believe I was involved in Dewey Canyon III for a slightly different reason than most who were there. I was there to remember and speak for the youngest of our men who had died, not in Southeast Asia, but in the DMZ in Korea. Many of us in the DMZ in 1966 to '67 were there because we were too young to be in Vietnam. I was a squad leader at 18, with many in my squad still 17 years old. Most of the combat squads I led into the zone were understaffed by 50% or more due to the continuing huge buildup in Southeast Asia during that time. The equipment we were issued was outdated so that modern supplies could feed the bigger war.

We lost approximately 15 brothers in combat from our division (2nd Infantry) in the "zone" that 13 months I was there. We

received no combat pay or recognition for our services. Their names showed up only in the back pages of the *Stars and Stripes*. This was a time when forty or more men died every day in Southeast Asia, so you can see we were of little consequence to anyone but ourselves and our families.

At home and back in school, I reunited with my closest friend, Barry, to organize veterans for VVAW to oppose the continuing U.S. war in Southeast Asia. We had enlisted together, why not organize together? Many thousands of miles and local chapters later, we began to mobilize our California chapters for Dewey Canyon III.

We arrived in the DC area and were picked up in a van for transport to the first night's campsite. Rifles and pistols hung from various hooks inside the van. Like ourselves the van driver and his partner riding shotgun were still too close to combat not to have weapons around them, just in case. Those of us in the van from California had taken the position long ago that we would remain armed, but nonviolent. We would defend ourselves if need be.

The brother that picked us up was saying that many of the active duty military moved into the area to be used against us by the Nixon White House had sent



On the Mall in Washington, DC 1971.

a letter to VVAW saying they would not raise their weapons against us if ordered to do so; in fact, they would turn their guns around. Remember, this was years after grunts began to "frag" their officers. Anything was possible.

The first day in DC, contingents of VVAW members arrived continuously; sometimes one, sometimes ten, sometimes hundreds made their way into camp. All were welcomed with cheers and hugs all around. We were mostly young, but some were old. We were all angry. We were black, white, brown, gay, straight, Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, long-haired and short-haired, all with a common mission: to stand in the service of our country once again against a government that refused to acknowledge the people's demand to stop their imperialist war in Southeast Asia. We were our country's "favorite sons" come home to roost.

That night, the national monuments showed through the trees as planes took off and landed over our heads. The sky was clear and the stars bright. The struggle for unity on action and political line raged fiercely among the young national coordinators from different political perspectives. It was not easy, but unity emerged late in the night.

The next day saw a march to Arlington led by "gold star" mothers who had lost their sons. The anger rose to fever pitch when entrance was denied these brave women who wished only to lay flowers at the graves of their children. Some tried to scale the gate, others pulled them down and counseled patience. The incursion was to last a week.

Later, time in the halls of Congress to meet with those who claimed to represent us — to demand they honor the memories of our fallen comrades by moving to bring the war to an end. On our

way back to camp, a "suit" yelled, "Get a job and make something of yourself!" to a one-armed combat vet who chased the coward into the rotunda and behind the safety of the guards there.

Later on the mall, we set up camp. We were told that the White House said we were not veterans, but impostors, besmirching the good name of veterans. Within an hour, more than a thousand DD214s and discharge papers were collected from those in camp. We knew who we were.

We learned that the White House had gone to court to have our camp declared illegal and they wanted the DC police to "evict" us. We voted to stay.

The next day, we captured the Supreme Court for failing in its duty to declare the U.S. war illegal. Vets were arrested, hands on heads as prisoners of war; other vets and supporters hit the streets of DC and the halls of Congress raising more than enough money in just a few hours to make bail for all those arrested.

Individual encounters with school children on field trips, congressional reps on the public dole, young people from all over the United States coming to shut the government down on May Day. We clarified our stand that the war must end.

Finally, the return of our medals. A moment both solemn and emotional, simmering with potential violence for the "lumpen pigs" behind the walls of the capital who we knew were the real criminals. We remembered our fallen brothers and sisters, the innocent Vietnamese, and all others affected badly by this government's war. We wept for our friends, our families and ourselves.

Our medals were for personal acts of heroism and commitment to country and to our comrades in



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John Kerry on Angry Young Men, and War Criminals

JOE MILLER

On May 6, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press." Tim Russert, the moderator, played back an audiotape of Kerry's appearance on the show in 1971, when Kerry was a spokesperson for VVAW. It is interesting to note Kerry's response to the tape, especially in light of his possible presidential bid for 2004.

(Audiotape, April 18, 1971)

MR. CROSBY NOYES (*Washington Evening Star*): Mr. Kerry, you said at one time or another that you think our policies in Vietnam are tantamount to genocide and that the responsibility lies at all chains of command over there. Do you consider that you personally as a naval officer committed atrocities in Vietnam or crimes punishable by law in this country?

KERRY: There are all kinds of atrocities, and I would have to say that, yes, yes, I committed the same kind of atrocities as thousands of other soldiers have committed in that I took part in shootings in free fire zones. I conducted harassment and interdiction fire. I used .50-caliber machine guns, which we were granted and ordered to use, which were our only weapon against people. I took part in search-and-destroy missions, in the burning of villages. All of this is contrary to the laws of warfare, all of this is contrary to the Geneva Conventions and all of this is ordered as a matter of written established policy by the government of the United States from the top down. And I believe that the men who designed these, the men who designed the free fire zone, the men who ordered us, the men who signed off the air raid strike areas,

I think these men, by the letter of the law, the same letter of the law that tried Lieutenant Calley, are war criminals. (*End audiotape*)

Russert then asked him, "Thirty years later, you stand by that?"

Kerry responded, "I don't stand by the genocide. I think those were the words of an angry young man. We did not try to do that. But I do stand by the description — I don't even believe there is a purpose served in the word "war criminal." I really don't."

He went on to say, "We've got to put this war in its right perspective and time helps us do that. I believe very deeply that it was a noble effort to begin with. I signed up. I volunteered. I wanted to go over there and I wanted to win. It was a noble effort to try to make a country democratic; to try to carry our principles and values to another part of the world."

Later in the interview, Kerry mentions the successes of the veterans' movement. "Everything that the veteran gained in the ensuing years, Agent Orange recognition, post-Vietnam stress syndrome recognition, the extension of the G.I. Bill, you know, improvement of the V.A. hospitals, all came from Vietnam veterans themselves fighting for it. Indeed, even the memorial in Washington came from that."

In response to Russert's question about whether government leaders and policymakers were war criminals, Kerry said, "No, I think we did things that were tantamount that certainly violated the laws of war, but I think it was the natural consequence of the Cold War itself. People made decisions based on their perceptions of the world at that time. They were in error. They



were judgments of error. But I think no purpose is served now by going down that road."

How should we in VVAW view this series of comments? Are we all still the "angry young men" (now not so young) who Kerry so cavalierly pushes into the dustbin of history? Should we just get over it, as he seems to be saying?

Ten years ago, the last time that VVAW members and friends gathered in Washington, DC to commemorate the anniversary of Dewey Canyon III, we invited John Kerry to join us. His office said he could not be there, but promised us a statement from Kerry on the event. It never came. Many of us were angered, though not really surprised, at Kerry's denial of VVAW and his connection with us.

I decided to make a personal statement by sending him my medals and calling him out on his

weak response to the Persian Gulf War. Here is the letter I sent out to him:

April 22, 1991
Champaign, IL

Senator John F. Kerry (ex-VVAW member):

Well, John, we missed you last Saturday at the rededication of the tree VVAW planted on the Mall in 1971. And, you did not show up for the speeches in front of the Capitol. Nor did we ever receive that statement your office promised us. Was this one of those the check is in the mail sort of promises? Of course, after all this, we didn't expect you to show for the reception that evening... and, you didn't.

As I stood among my brothers and sisters in VVAW and Vet-

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VVAW Statement on Robert Kerrey

Recent news reports and the admissions of former U.S. senator and Medal of Honor recipient Robert Kerrey that in 1969, he led a six-man SEAL team that killed twenty-one women, children and old men in the village of Thanh Phong have once again focused public attention on the ugly realities of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

Knowledge of atrocities is not news to many Vietnam veterans. When returning GIs began telling people what was happen-

ing, many Americans didn't want to believe it. In January 1971, the Winter Soldier Investigation was organized by Vietnam Veterans Against the War and held in Detroit. Over one hundred combat vets testified there about atrocities they had been involved in or witnessed as a direct result of the U.S. military policy of free fire zones, search and destroy missions and body count as the measure of success.

The government's response

was denial. They tried to discredit the Winter Soldier hearings, calling the veterans who testified impostors and liars. In those cases they couldn't cover up, like the notorious My Lai massacre, they put the blame on a few "bad apples" while protecting those higher up the chain of command and in Washington.

The hard truth is that what happened that night in Thanh Phong was approved in advance by the U.S. military's rules of

engagement. Much of the Mekong Delta had been designated as a free fire zone. The peasants who lived there were considered the enemy, and dead Vietnamese became "VC killed" whether they were armed guerrillas or unarmed civilians. Although Kerrey's Raiders failed in their mission to take out a village leader, the Pentagon considered it successful. Kerrey was even awarded a Bronze Star

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John Kerry

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erans for Peace, waiting to give my short speech to the gathering, I wondered what I would do with the medals I brought along to the ceremony. As I was unable to participate in Dewey Canyon III, I have waited a long time for some opportunity to make these bits of metal and colored ribbon count for something. This commemoration of DCIII was to be that opportunity, but I couldn't see just leaving the medals for any tourist to walk off with — what would be the point? So, as I walked to the microphone, I decided to mail them to you. When I announced this intention to the crowd, they cheered and applauded with their support and appreciation. You should have been there, John!

Everyone standing there on that cloudy and chilly Saturday morning clearly understood why these medals should be directed at you. All of us have changed over the past twenty years. Some of us have less hair and/or graying hair; or, we have put on a little weight; our eyes may not be as clear as they were in our twenties. Many have families we didn't have then, or, like me, have sons and daughters in their teens and twenties. My son, by the way, is nineteen and student in a university in Massachusetts, your backyard so to speak.

For that group standing there on the grass in front of the Capitol (and, for the thousands we represented who could not be with us), many things have not changed. We still oppose U.S. intervention-

ist policies overseas, in El Salvador, the Philippines, etc. We still support the right of self-determination for all oppressed peoples, such as the Palestinians. From our Vietnam experiences, we remain always skeptical about the motives of successive U.S. governments in situations like the recent war in the Middle East.

Many of us have remained critics and activists for more than twenty years; some were brought back into activism over the last seven months. For example, there were 2,000 of us veterans (from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Grenada) leading the march of 200,000 in Washington, D.C., on January 26. We did this to express our suspicion, our anger, our frustration with people such as yourself who so quickly lined up behind Bush's warmaking. Where were you that day, John?

You should have been on the floor of the Senate every day since August and after January 16, demanding an end to the bloodshed caused by our government. Your voice should have been heard in every newscast as a veteran who was not going to allow this carnage to go on.

More than 300 U.S. troops and probably more than 200,000 Iraqis died in the war to kick the Vietnam syndrome. Was it worth it, John? Did your posture in support of the war improve your chances for a future presidential bid? Not with your former brothers and sisters in VVAW. That's for sure! Once again the politics



of expediency rears its ugly head, and so-called liberals such as yourself and our Illinois Senator Paul Simon line up with the warmakers.

Do you recall how we veterans felt about that during the Vietnam War, when our so-called friends in Congress just kept voting for the continuation of that horror? This is exactly how most of us anti-war veterans feel about your actions (or, inaction) this time around. Of course, you probably don't really give a damn. So, with that expectation, you can take these medals and shove them — they don't mean a thing! I don't want them; they don't bring any lost lives back.

Twenty years ago today, you asked members of Congress: how do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake? Now I am asking you: how can you, as a former anti-war veteran, ask men and women to continue to fight and die for profits and U.S. control over the world's resources? My, how some can change! Or,

were you always just a fortunate son?

We shall not forget!

Joseph T. Miller
(VVAW member, 1970-present)

Well, I never received any sort of response to this letter. I often wonder what he actually did with the medals and papers I sent to him. It does seem, however, that he would rather put those days up to youthful indiscretion. His comments of May 6, 2001, on "Meet the Press" show that he has lost any connection with what VVAW was and is. While many of us might actually vote for him in 2004, given the potential other choices out there, we must not assume anything about him or his policies. Let's not be fooled by another politician.



JOE MILLER IS A NATIONAL
COORDINATOR OF VVAW.

VVAW 1970

JAMES MAY

The silence in America about what was going on at our war in Vietnam was loud enough to smother a person. We early members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War helped to break through the censorship and spin control, though it was sometimes costly to do it. We ourselves didn't know just what it was that had made us so angry about our longest war, then still in full swing. Few knew then that the North Vietnamese attack on USS Maddox, which the president said had provoked U.S. involvement, was mostly a lie. We didn't know that America had secretly been the force behind the "French" Indochina War, and didn't have much of a clue what colonialism had done to the "coo-

lies." Most Americans today still don't know about the holocaust of a man-made famine in 1944 to '45 that killed off about 20% of the population "in the affected areas" and caused Vietnam's stoically enduring peasants to embark in desperation on a revolution against terrible odds. Most Americans still do not know that we killed five million Vietnamese trying to stop it.

We early members of VVAW did not know these things then either. We spoke simply of what we did know, of what had gone on around us personally. In doing so we suggested that something had gone wrong with our war in Vietnam to save the people from being taken over by the com-

munists, to save South Vietnam from North Vietnam. We ruffled America's unofficial blanket of censorship and spin control and fabrication.

It was dangerous, and some of us suffered greatly for speaking out. What we had to say prodded dangerously at a political fault line in America that was already quaking under stress. Americans are often undecided as to where to map this fault line, where to draw the political line between "left" and "right," so for our silent majority a security blanket of censorship might have been a comfort. But most people here do make some line between "right" and "wrong," and when our American wars get dirty enough, even some

of those who fight them will stand up against the wrong.

We could state the fundamental mystery about Vietnam, but we could not fully explain it. The mystery was that despite being the world's most powerful nation, the harder we Americans fought our war in Southeast Asia, the more we were certainly losing it. We hammered at shadowy targets with a sledge, expending more ordnance than had all the combined armies during World War II. Our methods made our country infamous. We caused over ten thousand dioxin birth defects, targeted tens of thousands of civilian "subversives" for assassination,

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'Hanoi Jane' and 'Thanh Phong Bob'

JOE BANGERT

Why does *The Cape Cod Times* see fit to stir up the Viet quagmire by giving "Attaboys" to nutso misogynistic veterans, obsessed with harassing Jane Fonda? In one recent editorial (*CCT* April 10, 2001), the *Cape Cod Times* piled on top of the pillory Jane Fonda gang. It editorialized yet another futile campaign in which "the veterans network kicked in, calling for a cancellation and a picket line" of a Texas event in which Jane Fonda was a guest speaker for a truly noble cause — teenage pregnancy prevention. Such brave men you join!

Next comes the issue of "Thanh Phong Bob" Kerrey and the killing of women and children back in 1969. In this instance the *CCT* editorial (May 5th) mentions its "profound exhaustion of emotional turmoil of the Vietnam experience." What cheek! Maybe your fingers got tired typing your vituperative venom against an Academy award winning actress who emotionally and correctly spoke out against the insanity of the U.S. war against Vietnam and all its people, north, central and south. She traveled under its falling bombs carrying letters and packages to the POWs in Hanoi back in 1972, don't forget.

I remember back in 1969 the attitude of many of the half million plus of us initially was: "Kill them all now and sort it out later." Fonda was not alone as she protested the late ugly war; there were, in fact, veterans by her side as well as many active duty GIs, other famous actors and actresses, many women, youth and workers.

Indeed more than half the nation favored giving peace a chance.

For the record, it was the American Nazi Party that first demonstrated against Jane Fonda during the Republican National Convention. I was there, too, when the Nazis attempted to interrupt Miss Fonda's speech to the thousands gathered at Flamingo Park, Florida. Jane's goose-stepping enemies were routed by both VVAW and old Jewish retirees who lived nearby as Nixon prepared to receive his second nomination in 1972. The uniformed stormtroopers attempted to interrupt her powerful speech, I recall, but were thwarted by a grand coalition of hirsute combat Vietnam vets and old folks throwing hot chicken soup on these fascists bent on silencing Miss Fonda, including yours truly. Nixon had begun to bomb the dike system of the Red River Delta.

She was a heroine to visit Vietnam under B-52 bombardment in July, 1972, and this needs to be said aloud. It was during this vicious bitter period that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI ran the counterintelligence program codenamed *COINTELPRO* which sought to demonize anti-war activists. It was this program that first uttered and connected the words *traitor* and *Hanoi* to Miss Fonda's name. And hey, how is it that this same FBI can be home to the biggest spies of the century and only release now what they knew all the time, from their own surveillance files of the KKK mad bombers of children?

The *Times* seems not to have

carried the Fonda flap to its own attic yet. The *Times* exculpated "Kerrey's Raiders" of atrocity in a spot called Thanh Phong by mentioning gunfire in a "fetid foreign world where no one spoke the language." How fucking arrogant. Did **any** of your editorial writers ever step foot into a Vietnamese village during the late war? I think not. Had they done so, then they would know that some of us were trained to speak the language; *chung toi co the noi tieng Viet* (we could speak Vietnamese).

The *Times* also referred to Kerrey's age of 24 as being a kid. He was the commanding officer, and assumed "command responsibility," period. What he admits to doing was clearly in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Justice demands further investigation.

The *Times* called the slaughter at Thanh Phong "one mistake" when sixteen to twenty bodies were left behind. That is an interesting choice of words. Glad you don't count my pay. And you state there is silence at the heart of this matter. You are the one who is letting Kerrey off easy. Your stretch for amnesiac exculpatory relief for Kerrey's Raiders is transparent.

I have yet to see one member of any organized religion speak out in print on this issue. They have remained silent, just as they did for many years during the beginning of **our** war in Vietnam.

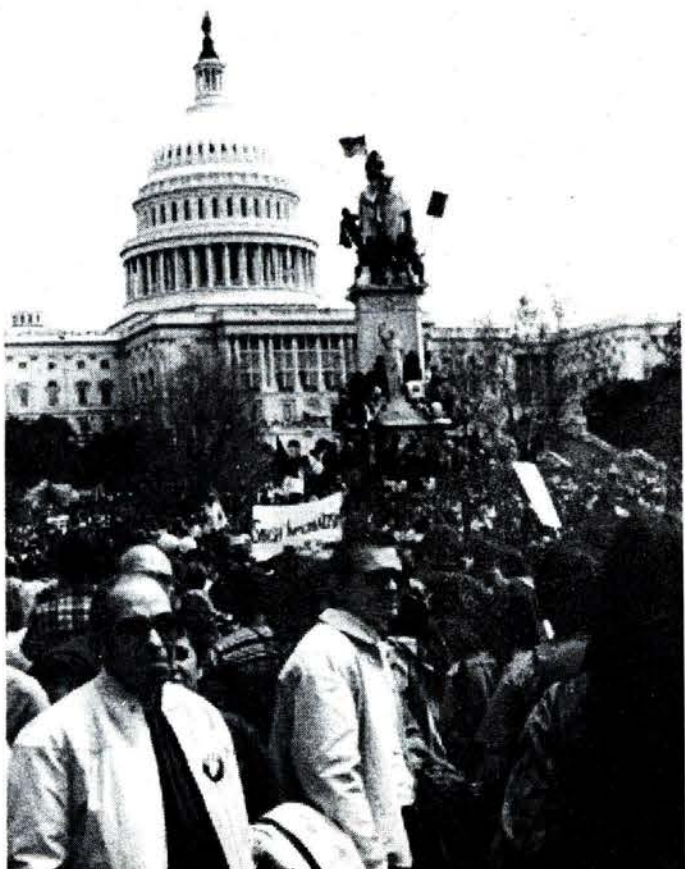
I personally turned against the war while still in uniform in 1969. As my vessel, the USS Bexar, entered San Diego harbor, I proudly displayed a hastily painted peace sign off the starboard side along with hundreds of cheering Marines and sailors flashing peace signs. Within a year, Lieutenant "Rusty" Calley was charged and court-martialed for the My Lai (Pinkville) Massacre. The Pentagon at the time said that My Lai was "an isolated incident of aberrant behavior." We knew better. So some of us returned home and in disgust of what we witnessed, saw, smelled, felt, heard and did in Vietnam. *War... what is it good for? Absolutely nothing!* went the lyrics of a song at the time. I couldn't wait to get home to bear witness to my own truth about Vietnam.

After sailing home on the Pacific, I was warmly welcomed

home to Philadelphia, and my family even had flags and bunting around our windows and doors. I was never spit on, nor do I believe many other Vietnam veterans were. I admit that I was one of the "few good men" who volunteered testimony in the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit in 1971 about atrocities I personally witnessed in Vietnam. In fact, during *Operation Dewey Canyon III* I turned myself in along with two other vets from Philadelphia to make a report and even face possible arrest at the front gate of the Pentagon. The military intelligence types in civilian suits took us inside and recorded our statements in a room not far from the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Rules are rules! Was Moses not commanded by God in the Sinai that all of the children of Abraham were to abide by ten good rules? Number Five being *Thou shall not kill*! It doesn't say that this rule can be suspended when it is in our "national interest" to do so, or even when it would be *tactically more convenient* to slit innocent throats of Vietnamese to escape detection during a clandestine SEAL or SOG (special operations group) mission. The Geneva conventions on land warfare was taught to most of us in boot camp.

My Memorial Day memories pour out of being in the same world as all of you, but just on the other side of it, in Quang Tri, where all the bombs and firepower exacted against little Vietnam fell. Machine gunning from the air gives one a unique perspective on the war and so did medevac'ing the dead and wounded; the smells of gas and hydraulic fluid mixing with the ear-piercing thwacking of the rotors and the movement of liquid human viscera at my feet while under enemy fire can never leave me; seeing and hearing "Puff, the Magic Dragon" spew its deadly automatic free-fire-zone saturation bulleting and covering the area of a football field at home in one minute; hearing the battleship USS New Jersey salute the Viet Cong and Pathet Lao and anyone in between with 16-inch rounds over our heads, all the while being shaken by the TPQs of B-52s conducting carpet bombings



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'Hanoi Jane' and 'Thanh Phong Bob'

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near or very near our base camp areas and landing zones in 1969.

We were half a million, and when I was there we certainly knew we weren't winning any more hearts and minds. To be honest, in 1969, half of us Marines were getting loaded on marijuana every night to escape our terrible realities; those who couldn't or wouldn't get high got drunk. All we wanted to do is get home alive. And so that is why I joined up with Vietnam Veterans Against the War: to stop more My Lai and Thanh Phongs from happening. To end the slaughter on both sides.

We marched in Boston and Hyannis on the 4th of July in 1972 and in Philly and Harrisburg and Valley Forge — demanding to stop the bombing and stop the war, bring our brothers and sisters home. Are these the acts of traitors and cowards? On April 23, 1971 we marched to the foot of the Capitol, our number less than fifteen hundred. Our comrade, and today our "junior" senator of Massachusetts, John F. Kerry addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and said:

"I would like to talk about the feelings these men carry with them after coming back from Vietnam. The country doesn't realize it yet but it has created a monster in the form of thousands of men who have been taught to deal and trade in violence and who are given

the chance to die for the biggest nothing in history — men who have returned with a sense of anger and betrayal that no one so far has been able to grasp. We are angry because we feel we have been used in the worst fashion by the administration of this country.

"We are probably angriest about all that we were told about Vietnam and about the mystical war against communism. We found that not only was it a civil war, an effort by people who had for years been seeking their liberation from any colonial influence whatsoever, but also we found that the Vietnamese whom we had enthusiastically molded after our own image were hard put to take up the fight against the threat we were supposedly saving them from. We found most people didn't even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. They practiced the art of survival by siding with whichever military force was present at a particular time, be it Viet Cong, North Vietnamese, or American.

"We found that all too often American men were dying in those rice paddies for want of support from their allies. We saw firsthand how monies from American taxes were used for a corrupt dic-

tatorial regime. We saw that many people in this country had a one-sided idea of who was kept free by our flag, and blacks provided the highest percentage of casualties. We saw Vietnam ravaged equally by American bombs and search-and-destroy missions, as well as by Viet Cong terrorism, and yet we listened while this country tried to blame all of the havoc on the Viet Cong. We rationalized destroying villages in order to save them. We saw America lose her sense of morality as she accepted very coolly a My Lai and refused to give up the image of American soldiers who hand out chocolate bars and chewing gum. We learned the meaning of free-fire zones, shooting anything that moves, and we watched while America placed a cheapness on the lives of Orientals."

"That was then, and this is now, Dad," says my teenaged son. Yet this bears repeating today.

There is no doubt that the racism of "our war" in Vietnam turned me sour to its instinctual inhumanity. On this Memorial Day, 2001 — as Old Glory goes waving by — how can I ever forget a place called Quang Tri, it was there too she waved, some 13,000 miles from my native Philadelphia, and next to her flew a body count flag showing three digits!

And so I too tossed my medals over Nixon/McNamara/Laird Line — the offending wire fence blocking our access to Congress — with fresh memories of Vietnam in '68 and 1969. My veteran's

burden was lightened immeasurably by that action, and I will **never** ever forget the camaraderie found within the exclusive fraternal VVAW compound on the Mall, not far from where the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is located. Come to think of it, who ever heard of Viet vets ever demonstrating for the war?

In Vietnam, it was often said: "Kill them all now, sort it out later." So now 2001 is later and the *Cape Cod Times* should not place either the burden of Kerrey in Thanh Phong or any other horrible yet-to-be-discovered hamlet horrors solely on the backs of their combatants, but on all of American society, including its editorial writers. Bob Kerrey would do well to unburden himself of his Bronze and blood-caked Star now. Been there, done that, with a terrible mighty joy.



JOE BANGERT SERVED WITH VMO-6 (MARINE OBSERVATION SQUADRON 6) IN QUANG TRI, VIETNAM, 1968-1969. BANGERT JOINED VVAW DURING THE SUMMER OF 1970, PARTICIPATED IN OPERATION RAW, WSI AND OPERATION DEWEY CANYON III IN WASHINGTON, D.C. HE WORKED WITH GATOR MAY DAY AND WAS NOT ARRESTED. HE WAS INDUCTED INTO THE OGLALA SIOUX WARRIOR SOCIETY AT WOUNDED KNEE, PINE RIDGE RESERVATION, IN LAKOTA TERRITORY IN 1973. BANGERT ALSO WORKED IN HANOI, VIETNAM FROM 1992 TO 1997.



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and tried to dry up the sea in which the (communist revolutionary) fish swam by forcing a large percent of the population into "protected hamlets." The social costs to the Vietnamese we were trying to save were enormous. How baffling that all these methods failed to pound democracy and free enterprise into the hearts and minds of the "gooks," "slants," "dinks," "gomers," "slopes" and "zipperheads" that we had come to defend from a ruthless foreign invasion.

But that "don't mean nothin'," according to the cynical philosophy of the time. "Grab 'em by the balls, and their hearts and minds will follow." We couldn't explain why it wasn't working, except that there was something increasingly unacceptable to our own hearts and minds in all this.

We Vietnam Veterans Against the War formed at the grassroots. In my hometown, a bunch of guys met one frosty morning in response to flyers announcing a first meeting, made and posted by a young ex-Green Beret sergeant. Without much discussion, we organized to tell our experiences at small venues and

on local TV, and linked up with the national organization through its publications.

Opposition to the Vietnam War in our town centered around a Vietnam Studies Center at the university funded by Aid for International Development (AID). Many people considered AID to be a synonym for CIA, particularly in South Vietnam. The official purpose of this center was to aid research useful to the war effort, and to train Vietnamese in industrial arts for a postwar reconstruction of Vietnam. Most students knew little about the center, however, other than that it was somehow connected to the CIA and the war.

We VVAW guys had a different focus: in our experience what was going on and what the government said were two different things. How this was so was our simple message. Our Special Forces veteran told of an incident in which he had needed to race through the jungle to warn the crew of a river patrol boat not to shoot at or offend his tribal mercenary troops, who were on the way with a gift of human hearts. After the boat's machine guns

had managed to kill a couple of Liberation Front soldiers, the tribesmen decided that it was the sailors who were entitled to eat the hearts. The sergeant had only just arrived with his warning, that failure to eat these hearts might have serious consequences, when the tribesmen showed up to present the award. One sailor bravely accepted this honor, but soon felt nauseous. He dove into the river in an attempt to vomit underwater.

My Navy stories were tame in comparison to that. I told about a fast mover pilot crowing about spearing a little old man on a bicycle "right through the back with a 2.75 cm rocket," and of joyous elephant shooting contests with the same rockets. I spoke of an ancient little old man shot down by a seventeen-year-old squid with an M1 carbine, for charging at us with a homemade bomb in a shoe box, which EOD said wouldn't have gone off anyway. He fell forward on his thin chest and died. What had made him do it? The shooter was so small that his white helmet made him look like a little mushroom. I spoke about a cop who killed a little boy in a muddy street, firing pop after pop with a .45, the little body jerking in a mud puddle as the rounds hit, all for pickpocketing a wallet from a

marine on his way to a whorehouse, a wallet containing forty dollars in MPC. Odd how the blood spreading into the puddle congealed right away. One might have expected a riot, but the local people stood silent and impassive.

The first local student protests amounted to little more than a few dozen people shouting slogans in front of the Vietnam Studies Center, and seemed comic. These protests soon evolved into frequent mass meetings, then swelled into conflicts with uniformed police. Some faculty organized a conference of Concerned Asian Scholars to strip the veneer of academia from our CIA Vietnam Studies Center. Student organizations put together bus trips to demonstrations in Washington and elsewhere.

Locally, we VVAW guys continued to testify. A Marine veteran told about his interview and practical exam for a job as gunner when arriving as a new guy on an M48 tank crew.

"See that dink bitch plowing with the water buffalo out in the paddy? Think you can hit her with the first shot?" It was a test of attitude as well as of skill with

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Home from the War

Pilot training ain't as hard as nursing school.
Flew a hearse in Vietnam.
Tactical airlift over a strategic bombing zone.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
coming for to carry them
home from the war.

Refuse duty. Hit the street.
My black brother got beat
by the police in Miami Beach,
down to the ground.
With one arm and one leg,
he stood up again,
tall and proud like he was before.
Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

World War One flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker
never knew the Blue Rider artists who died
down below in the German trenches:
Macke, Marc, Morgner.
They died in the trenches
along with their sketches
and he came home from the war.

Jim Willingham

For DC Corporal, D Company, 41st Infantry Operation Desert Storm

Look; it doesn't matter, Dave,
if the war lasted four years
like my old man's
or four days like yours.

The Beast is in you now
and will live and breathe
as long as you do,
sometimes full-blown in your head,
its breath, foul with flash and flesh,
addling your senses.

And the people,
friends and enemies alike,
will once again
have lungs and limbs shredded,
lose heads and hearts and hands.
Their blood and brains
will once again mist
the bunkers and the fighting holes
and the cabins of ACAVs
and still they won't stay dead.

And you'll wake and shake
as we all do,
wondering if for you
the war will ever end.

Dave Connolly

China Is Right About the Spy Plane Incident

DAVID EWING

I was in China the day that the spy plane incident occurred. I returned home on April 12, 2001, the same day that the spy crew left China for Guam for their first debriefing by American military intelligence specialists.

I spoke to dozens of Chinese people about the incident just after it happened: business people, local political leaders, workers, family and friends. There was no hostility toward the American people, but everyone was concerned about the fate of the Chinese pilot, Wang Wei, and people were clearly angry about the unprovoked aggressive military posture the United States takes toward China. In my view, China is right to blame the United States for the loss of life and the violation of China's sovereignty.

When I returned home, I was frankly surprised by the hostile spin the American press has put on the incident. The view from Asia is very different. In an article in the *The Straits Times*, April 10, 2001, an American writer, Llewellyn Rockwell Jr., made the following points:

1. The collision between the U.S. spy plane and the Chinese jet occurred along China's border. The United States claims it was in 'international airspace,' but backs up this claim with a rule arrived at

unilaterally by the U.S. government and accepted by no one else. The United States makes up rules to justify its behavior—rules that it does not accept if they are applied against its territory.

2. The U.S. plane was a spy plane. It was not a commercial airliner. It is preposterous for the United States to say that a spy plane landing in Chinese territory is somehow sovereign property.

entangled with American jets and then landed at a U.S. base. The United States would not say: "Sorry, guys, about interrupting your spy mission. Thanks for visiting our military base and come back soon."

4. The Chinese pilot is presumably dead. The U.S. crew is not. Also dead are the three Chinese journalists who were killed when the United States bombed

If it turns out that the United States is wholly to blame, it would not be the first time. In 1998, a U.S. military jet severed the cable of a ski-resort gondola in Italy, causing it to plunge 90 meters to the ground and killing all 20 people inside.

And just recently, showoffs cruising the world in a submarine sank a Japanese boat, killing nine, four of whom were 17-year-olds.

7. The United States has fulminated for years about supposed spying by China against the United States. The Cox Report never went so far as to accuse China of flying spy planes around U.S. borders. But it turns out that the United States regards such activity as routine and justifiable, if directed against other countries.

The message is obvious: the United States can do whatever it wants with its military, but believes itself exempt from the very laws it wants to apply to others. This attitude engenders hatred around the world.

I think China has shown enormous restraint over what really amounts to an attack on its territory. The spy flights must end now. And the United States must stop arming Taiwan. The Shanghai Accord between the United States and the People's Republic of China recognizes Taiwan as a part of China. It is a violation of this treaty for the United States to ship any arms to Taiwan.

In the negotiations over the spy plane incident, the United States has used the threat of a big new shipment of Aegis Destroyers to Taiwan as a bargaining chip. This is the wrong time for the United States to threaten China. The people I spoke to in China seemed willing to accept any kind of sanction that the United States cares to impose in order to protect their freedom and independence. I doubt that future military threats along their border, or in Taiwan, are likely to shake China's resolve.



DAVE EWING IS A LAWYER FROM SAN FRANCISCO WHO WORKS WITH THE US-CHINA PEOPLES' FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION (USCPFA).

**The message is obvious:
the United States can do
whatever it wants with its
military, but believes itself
exempt from the very laws it
wants to apply to others.
This attitude engenders
hatred around the world.**

The international law on this subject applies to civil aviation.

3. The U.S. spy plane landed at a Chinese military airport. The U.S. crew did not ask for permission to do so. Imagine what the United States would do if a Chinese spy plane were zipping around outside Virginia, became

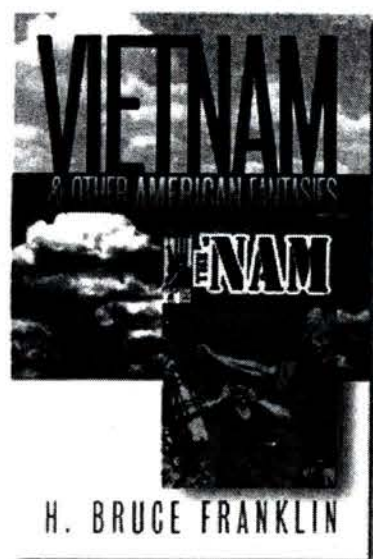
the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999. No American soldiers died in that incident either.

The body count is beginning to mount and it is no surprise that at some point the Chinese will decide they are not going to take it any more. How long can one country be subjected to murderous attacks from the United States before it begins to complain? But if China does complain, the United States decries this as 'nationalism.'

5. There is no mystery about how the United States treats such cases. In 1976, a Soviet MiG carrying a defector landed in Japan. The Soviets demanded the plane back. The United States complied after taking the entire jet apart. It was sent back to Moscow in packing crates. On another occasion in the 70s, the United States tried secretly to raise a Soviet submarine from the ocean.

Washington uses any means possible to obtain military equipment from potentially hostile nations. Turnabout is fair play.

6. The U.S. spy plane was not an innocent victim. No one can say for sure how the collision occurred, but it seems obvious that the American version of events—a spy plane minding its own business gets bumped by a Chinese jet—is not true.



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U.S. Military Wages War Against Itself And Against The World

ROBERT RABIN

[From a Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques mailing, September 2, 2001]

During the past two decades in the battle of Vieques, we have had ample opportunity to learn from people throughout Puerto Rico, the United States and other countries, about the effects of militarism on communities. The impact of the expropriations, military toxins, violent actions by military personnel, and economic stagnation in areas like Culebra, Aguadilla, Salinas and Ceiba — to mention a few examples — has much in common with the military presence in Vieques. For years we have shared with residents of these areas our experiences and strategies of struggle.

What we did not know, until recently, was the widespread and horrible impact of U.S. militarism within its own national territory and in many countries where the United States maintains military bases. The armed forces of the United States of North America carries out a war against its own people, particularly against Afro-American, Latino, Indigenous and generally poor communities. The plague of militarism extends to U.S. territories like Guam, Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico and is manifest in Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, Korea, Ecuador, Colombia and Panama, among other places on this planet.

The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV) has important contacts with peace organizations in Puerto Rico, in the United States and internationally, that help us see

our situation in a broader context. The participation of delegates from the CRDV in conferences about militarism held in the United States, England, the Philippines, Korea, Japan, Okinawa, Washington (DC), New York, San Diego, among other places, has permitted us to learn first-hand about the efforts of community organizations working to end military activities that violate the human rights of millions of people throughout the world. The CRDV works with the Caribbean Project for Peace and Justice (Puerto Rico), the Military Toxics Project (United States), the International War Resisters League and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (San Francisco), among other peace groups, to spread the word about



Veterans Support Vieques Contingent in the Jersey City Puerto Rican parade held on August 19, 2001. This year the Parade Committee presented Veterans Support Vieques the Efrain Rosario Memorial Award "in recognition of your commitment and exemplary dedication in the struggle for Peace for Vieques."

communities, through intense military contamination with the same long list of cancer-causing chemicals that we see in the reports from Vieques — heavy metals, nitrites, nitrates, RDX, ura-

Wampanoag Indigenous Nation struggles for the environmental recuperation and tribal control over the island of Tequanomans. Of great spiritual significance, the Navy bombed this island for decades. Families of this indigenous people who live close to Tequanomans Island suffer from the highest cancer rates in that part of the state.

In Alaska, radar stations abandoned at the end of the Cold War, with the cessation of spying operations directed at Russia, have left an enormous amount of toxins in the ground, in the waters and in the food chain of thousands of indigenous peoples of that region. In San Diego, California, large numbers of poor, Afro-American, Latino, Indigenous, Asiatic communities suffer the consequences of long years of contamination caused by military shipyards and the contamination from nuclear wastes from submarines and aircraft carriers stationed in that city's waters. Military practices relatively close to Washington, DC, at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland, have forced neighboring communities to take action to stop military toxins — including depleted uranium — from migrating to their backyards.

A series of rapes of young girls and other violent acts by U.S. military personnel in Japan, Okinawa, Korea, the Philippines and Panama remind us of the violence against Viequense women by gangs of Marines in the streets of Vieques in the 1950s and 60s. The death of "Mapepe" Christian, an old man in the Destino area of Vieques who was brutally kicked

U.S. militarism has left a trail of contamination, death and violence around the world and has provoked a new wave of international solidarity among people . . .

Vieques and to learn more about how militarism affects other peoples. Vieques is not alone in this battle against the forces of destruction.

Within U.S. territory — inside and outside the North American continent — a network of bases and installations brings death and destruction to entire

niun, among others. Mustard gas bomblets, a chemical weapon used in the second World War, were recently found during a construction project in Colorado. In Memphis, Tennessee, the community fights against the terrible health effects from a military dump. In San Antonio, Texas, the recently-closed Kelly Air Base is considered the root of unusually high cancer rates and other sicknesses related to the long history of contamination generated on that military facility. In Massachusetts, millions of gallons of water in the most important aquifers of an extensive area on Cape Cod have been seriously contaminated with military contaminants from Camp Edwards, where diverse National Guard units have carried out military exercises for more than half a century. In the same state, the



Juan Cartagena, parade grand marshal and president of the Hudson County Comité Pro Vieques leads marchers in chants for an end to the US Navy's bombing of that Puerto Rican island. This is the second year that a large Peace for Vieques contingent has marched in the Jersey City parade.

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A Shout For Peace

[From a Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques mailing, September 23, 2001]

The presence and activities of the U.S. Navy in Vieques were immoral before the 11th of September, and they continue to be immoral today. Our community in struggle has declared a moratorium on civil disobedience actions based upon our commitment to peace and as a show of solidarity with the victims and families affected by the tragic events of 11 September as well as concerns for the security of our people.

However, we emphasize that our solidarity is directed toward innocent victims of the terrorist attacks and not toward the militaristic actions of the U.S. government. The pain brought on by these violent acts for thousands of families in the United States, in Puerto Rico and around the world, is also our pain. And our struggle for peace is also the struggle for

peace for the United States, for Puerto Rico and all the peoples of the world.

We energetically reject terrorism, war and any type of violence as a means to resolve conflicts in our world. In Vieques, the U.S. armed forces have dropped more bombs that in all combined wars. We have been victims of every U.S. military action since the second World War — Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Yugoslavia and the many U.S. military interventions in the Americas. We do not want to be used for preparing wars in the 21st century.

Our people live the effects of war — military contamination and its serious health effects; restrictions on movement in our own land; forced immigration and the breaking up of the family; the dangers and tension from the daily possibility of a horrible military accident and the psychological impact of this situation for our people. We struggle to demilita-

rize Vieques. Our people are the first to suffer the effects of invasions and bombings of attacks launched by the U.S. government against other countries. We do not want more war for Vieques. We do not want any more war for anybody in this world. We join the growing peace movement that throughout the world — including the United States — is revitalizing itself before the imminent attack by the United States against Afghanistan.

We will continue to struggle for demilitarization, decontamination, the return of our lands and sustainable community development in a future Vieques freed from the Navy. We are preparing now for the next civil disobedience actions during the next maneuvers. We are recruiting in the neighborhoods in preparation for a massive entrance of Viequeses and Puerto Ricans from all parts of the archipelago.

We have declared a morato-

rium on civil disobedience because we value life — ours and the lives of everyone. All of the Vieques organizations related to the struggle against the military presence approved the moratorium because ours is a people of peace. But we wish to make very clear that our solidarity is directed toward the innocent victims of terrorism. We could never support or applaud the terrorism of aircraft carriers launching missiles against hospitals, schools, against populated cities, in the name of vengeance and of a democracy that in Vieques is stepped upon by the U.S. Navy.

We struggle for peace in Vieques, peace in New York, peace in Washington, in Afghanistan and in the entire world.

SAY NO TO WAR! YES TO PEACE!



U.S. Military Wages War

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and punched by several soldiers in 1952, is repeated constantly in U.S. military zones on every continent.

In Maehyang-ri, Korea, jets rest only on the weekends. Every other day they fly low over the poverty of the rice fields on their way to the impact zones only a few miles from the homes of thousands of Koreans.

Manila Bay and the closed bases of Subic and Clark in the Philippines, where today thousands of people try to remake their lives, have been converted into some of the most contaminated places in Asia — and the U.S. government refuses to take any responsibility for the environmental cleanup. A similar situation exists in Panama, where the military left the Canal Zone, but also left a deadly contamination that includes large amounts of chemical weapons in the Panamanian jungles and uranium dispersed in the ground and air.

The diverse struggles of the Hawaiian people for peace and for demilitarization share much in common with those of the people of Vieques. In the 1970s, while our fishermen paralyzed NATO maneuvers and were arrested and jailed, Hawaiians were beginning their struggle to rescue the Island of Kaho'olawe, an uninhabited

island with great spiritual and archaeological importance. In the Makua Valley, the guns of the U.S. Army have been silent for some years, but they want to renew practices. The people of Hawaii fight to defend Makua.

U.S. militarism has left a trail of contamination, death and violence around the world and has provoked a new wave of international solidarity among people opposed to the destruction of natural resources, to the arrogant and racist military attitudes, to the irresponsibility and air of superiority that permits the most horrendous actions against humanity.

The struggle of Vieques is not unique. However, the successful campaign of peaceful civil disobedience and the widespread support generated among sectors of the Puerto Rican and U.S. communities that are usually divided has had important repercussions. The attention we have received in these two years of intense battle, combined with decades of previous struggle, has caused other communities with similar struggles to look toward Vieques, to ask for our help, to learn from our successes and failures. The residents of Maehyang-ri, Korea, have begun to call themselves — **THE VIEQUES OF KOREA!**

We must do the same — learn

from the multiple examples of other communities that struggle with great dignity and with greater or less success, against the same enemy and in favor of the same ideal.

U.S. Army General James Jones said recently in a Pentagon interview, "I do worry about the effect of being forced to leave Vieques, not only on our domestic training ranges but on international access . . . this is a small world now . . . People on Okinawa watch what happens on Vieques, and they will draw conclusions from that."

Vieques is Okinawa. Vieques is Makua. Vieques is the Philippines. Vieques is Maehyang-ri. Vieques is the Canal Zone.

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Vieques is Alaska, Camp Edwards, Memphis, San Antonio, and San Diego. For the children of Vieques, for the children of Hawaii, the Philippines, Okinawa, Memphis, San Antonio, San Diego and Massachusetts, we will continue this struggle to end the dehumanizing structures of militarism, until there is peace on Vieques, until there is peace for all.



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Not in Our Son's Name

PHYLLIS AND ORLANDO RODRIGUEZ

Our son Greg is among the many missing from the World Trade Center attack. Since we first heard the news, we have shared moments of grief, comfort, hope, despair, fond memories with his wife, the two families, our friends and neighbors, his loving colleagues at Cantor Fitzgerald / ESpeed, and all the grieving families that daily meet at the Pierre Hotel.

We see our hurt and anger reflected among everybody we meet. We cannot pay attention to the daily flow of news about this disaster. But we read enough of the news to sense that our govern-

ment is heading in the direction of violent revenge, with the prospect of sons, daughters, parents, friends in distant lands dying, suffering, and nursing further grievances against us. It is not the way to go. It will not avenge our son's death. Not in our son's name.

Our son died a victim of an inhuman ideology. Our actions should not serve the same purpose. Let us grieve. Let us reflect and pray. Let us think about a rational response that brings real peace and justice to our world. But let us not as a nation add to the inhumanity of our times.

Copy of letter to White House:

Dear President Bush,

Our son is one of the victims of Tuesday's attack on the World Trade Center. We read about your response in the last few days and about the resolutions from both Houses, giving you undefined power to respond to the terror attacks.

Your response to this attack does not make us feel better about our son's death. It makes us feel worse. It makes us feel that our government is using our son's memory as a justification to cause suffering for other sons and par-

ents in other lands.

It is not the first time that a person in your position has been given unlimited power and came to regret it. This is not the time for empty gestures to make us feel better. It is not the time to act like bullies. We urge you to think about how our government can develop peaceful, rational solutions to terrorism, solutions that do not sink us to the inhuman level of terrorists.

Sincerely,

Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez

Practical Advice on Organizing

REVIEW BY DAVID CLINE

A Citizen's Guide to Grassroots Campaigns
By Jan Barry
Rutgers University Press

Jan Barry is one of the unsung heroes of the Vietnam war era. Born in Ithaca, New York during World War II, his childhood ambition was to attend West Point. He joined the Army in 1962 and volunteered for Vietnam where he was a radio/navigation operator for planes supplying Special Forces units. After his return, he received an appointment to West Point, the first cadet there who had already served in Vietnam.

But he came home from Vietnam disillusioned with the escalating U.S. military involvement there. While in country, he got what he called "an education in colonial military policy." He witnessed Buddhist demonstrations in Nha Trang and the U.S.-supported Saigon regime's response of "tanks and machine guns and barbed wire all over the country." He concluded that he was "being

had."

He soon dropped out of West Point and got out of the Army. In April 1967, he attended an antiwar demonstration in New York City and marched with a contingent of Veterans for Peace in Vietnam. Someone pulled out a banner saying *Vietnam Veterans Against the War* that he and five others carried.

That was the beginning of VVAW. Soon a meeting was held and the organization was officially founded. Jan was elected the national president and devoted the next four years to these duties. During that time, VVAW grew to a membership of over fifteen thousand and became a leading force in the antiwar movement and an advocate for veterans' rights.

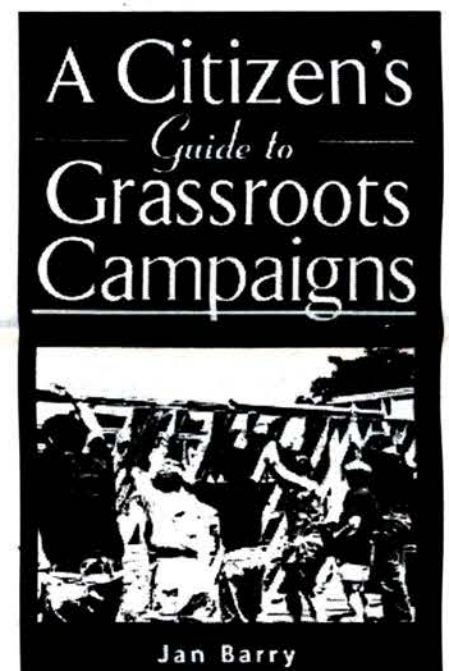
A prolific poet, he helped start 1st Casualty Press, an independent publishing house that printed several books of poems and short stories by Vietnam vets. He also helped form the first "rap groups" to deal with Post Vietnam Syndrome (now known as PTSD), enlisting the assistance of noted psychiatrists Robert J.

Lifton, Chaim Shatan and others.

Over the years he has remained involved in many progressive causes ranging from defense of the environment to efforts to stop the nuclear arms race. Today he lives in northern New Jersey and works as a journalist for *The Record*. He has been married for thirty years, and together with his wife Paula, has raised two sons.

Jan has now written "A Citizen's Guide to Grassroots Campaigns," drawing on his years of experience and the work of other New Jersey grassroots activists. There are chapters examining efforts to rebuild urban neighborhoods, save natural resources from developers, form self-help groups, and organize global civic action. Other sections cover organizing and conducting campaigns as well as dealing with politicians and the news media.

This book will benefit all people working for progressive social change, from longtime activists to those just getting involved. The book is written in down-to-earth language and is full of valuable insights on how to go



out and actually organize for change instead of just talking about it. If you are looking for a radical manifesto, look elsewhere, but if you want practical advice on organizing, read this book.



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

Dewey Canyon III

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arms—but they were also tainted by the imperialist nature of this war. They had to be returned as one final act of bravery by those who had earned them. I returned my dogtags and the only medal I had been given: my Good Conduct medal. My good conduct during my service years remains my only regret.

I have since grown up, raised

my family and become an older man. I remain proud of my service to my country, including Dewey Canyon III, and I am pleased to say that my children have never served in the U.S. military. Honor the warriors, hate the war!



MARK HARTFORD
US ARMY DMZ KOREA, 1966-1967



Mark Hartford organizing for Dewey Canyon III in San Bernadino, CA 1971.

My View

JOHN ZUTZ

It's time for Vietnam veterans to stand up for our brothers. Leadership is needed, and 'Nam vets, including VVAW, ought to provide it. The problem? In one word: Hmong.

In Milwaukee, a group of Vietnam veterans attempted to buy a brick to be placed at the Southeast Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial for a Hmong ex-colonel. To test existing restrictions, they requested it be placed in the "inner circle" alongside the bricks of other Vietnam veterans. That request was refused. The test exposed what the veterans expected.

In Sheboygan, a citizens' group has worked for over a year to erect a Hmong memorial slated for a park near existing Civil War and Spanish-American War memorials. At the last minute the VFW state junior vice commander (whose wife is a Sheboygan alderperson) along with the VFW state commander persuaded the city council to bog the action down in committees.

Many, including some veterans, seem eager to arbitrarily deny any recognition of the services provided, and sacrifices endured, by the Hmong during our war in Vietnam.

Before U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, the Hmong lived a family-based tribal life sustained

by hunting and farming, similar to our Native Americans, in the mountains of Laos. The United States realized that the North Vietnamese were using Cambodia and Laos to infiltrate men and supplies into the South. At the time, it

were paid from the U.S. treasury, just as we were. Many lost parts of their bodies, or parts of their minds, just as we did.

Our government promised to remember them and take care of them, just as they promised us.

Our government promised to remember them and take care of them, just as they promised us. They received a Vietnam Service Ribbon, just like the one we got, and then they were forgotten, just as we were.

was politically unacceptable for the United States to put troops into those "neutral" countries, so the CIA secretly recruited the Hmong to act for us. The Hmong helped prevent that infiltration.

We overflew Laos daily with B-52s, cargo planes, fighters, and choppers. The Hmong rescued downed flyers. They fought for their own reasons. Just as we did.

They were trained and equipped by the United States, just as we were. They followed orders from the United States and

They received a Vietnam Service Ribbon, just like the one we got, and then they were forgotten, just as we were. But the Hmong risked more than we did, and they lost so much more. Many lost family members, some lost whole families. Some lost whole villages. Over 40,000 lost their lives. All of those now in the United States lost their homeland. Congress recognized that sacrifice by giving those who fought a special medal.

More Hmong ended up in Wisconsin than in many other

states, but their problems are nationwide.

Some efforts have been made, over the twenty-five years since the war ended, to repay our debt to the Hmong. U.W. Stout is working on a Hmong cultural center, and teaches Hmong classes. Wisconsin recently approved a Hmong veteran license plate. Congress has finally allowed Hmong immigrants to take citizenship tests in their native language. Still, twenty-five years after the war ended, the Hmong feel like outsiders. Considering the incidents cited above, it's easy to understand why.

It's time for Vietnam veterans to stand up as a positive force, and embrace our fellow veterans. Local chapters need to integrate with local Hmong groups, reinforcing each other and holding joint ceremonies. Individual veterans need to provide leadership and political leverage as necessary to reinforce this movement. Give a clear signal that we accept the Hmong as Vietnam veterans. Accept Hmong veterans as full members of veterans' groups. It's time to wish the Hmong "welcome home."



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

VVAW Statement on Robert Kerrey

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and whatever he may think of that medal, he got it according to standard operating procedure in Vietnam.

Kerrey's admissions challenge attempts to rewrite the history and distort people's memories of that time. After the war ended, right wing forces began a long term effort to convince the American people that despite a few mistakes that were made, they were for the right reasons. The unjust and criminal nature of the war was being transformed into what Ronald Reagan called a "noble cause".

The purpose of this revisionism was to confuse people and weaken opposition to new military interventions. Strategies were developed to manipulate public opinion, duck accountability and minimize U.S. casualties while waging war in Latin America and the Middle East.

Now a small portion of the

brutal facts are again before the American public. Some have responded to Kerrey's revelations by painting him as the victim, ignoring the Vietnamese dead. Others have pointed fingers at him, a bad soldier in a good war. In some quarters, the differing versions of events have even been used to justify the killings.

There can be no justification for what happened, but the culpability lies primarily with the politicians and generals who initiated, planned and ran the war, not those who were sent to fight it. Until we honestly face up to what happened in Vietnam and those who are responsible—especially Johnson, Nixon, McNamara, Laird, Rusk, Kissinger, Westmoreland and Abrams—are held accountable, the past will continue to haunt us.



Patriotism

for Paul D. Wright, USMC, Operation Desert Storm and Eric Larsen, USMC, who resisted

Let's make no mistake here
about where I'm coming from
or have been.

To stand, with a gun in your hand
and face your opposite number,
to do the bidding of your country,
is surely one
of the most heroic acts
a man or woman
might perform in life.

To refuse to do that,
against all odds,
if it is clearly wrong,
is no less so.

Dave Connolly

VVAW 1970

continued from page 19

M48's ninety mike mike main gun. Its hard to lay the gun by eye, firing manually, and get a first round kill. Nobody asked why a mother would be out plowing, the man — if there was one — away in the ARVN or NLF, maybe.

"No problem!" he said, with the correct gung-ho enthusiasm, bringing the turret around. And when the newbie did blow that "dink bitch" away with the first round, he won a punch in the shoulder — "Good 'nuff for government work!"

"But of course," he concluded, "the water buffalo was dead too. I had tried not to hit that." This story is not, I say again, not one of a bad individual, or even of a bad squadron. The attitudes were widespread; it is a story of a bad war.

Tricky Dicky's May 1970 invasion of Cambodia set off more and bigger demonstrations through the streets of our town. A platoon of angry National Guardsmen let loose shooting at unarmed students on the campus of Kent State and hit a bunch of them, some on their way to class, killing four. It was not the first such event, either. These killings caused more campus demonstrations. A few VVAW members helped to keep order as parade marshals. At the Vietnam Studies Center scores of students were hospitalized after a clash with a phalanx of helmeted, baton-wielding police. More clashes led to a National Guard infantry battalion complete with support units arriving in our college town. At our local armory the inexperienced, half-trained guardsmen were shaken down for personal weapons, and a small, glittering pile of confiscated pistols and knives formed on the drill floor. Army quarter-ton jeeps with big, boxy wooden frames strung with barbed wire mounted on the fronts careened through the streets of the town.

Within a week, several thousand students occupied "the strip" on the main street of the town, in a wall-to-wall sit-in that extended for blocks. It was at first a festive street party, in which marijuana cigarettes and bottles of wine circulated freely. I noticed a line of young people in wheelchairs up on the sidewalk. After strolling around greeting friends, I went home kind of bored. Near midnight, I heard the familiar shrill scream of "deuce and half" army truck superchargers, as riflemen

in gas masks were being convoyed up to the student street party. Many were noticeably overweight, and their gas masks did look like pig snouts. Dressing quickly, I was soon jogging beside the rolling column of screaming army trucks.

For a brief moment, when the guardsmen were clumsily dismounting their vehicles, I had a very odd feeling — soldiers in uniforms that in Vietnam had instantly signaled "brothers" were now deploying against my fellow university students, and therefore deploying against me. And just for one instant I instinctively oriented myself as to whatever was available in the terrain as cover, that is to say anything thick enough to stop a full metal jacket thirty ought six. It didn't seem ironic that a lot of guys in those days were in the Guard to dodge the draft and Vietnam; they were still soldiers and still my brothers and it was a very odd feeling.

A few of the demonstration's more radical organizers had become frustrated with a mere street party and led a small group to sit on the railroad track. Current doctrine would say to isolate and arrest these few, using the Guardsmen as a blocking force. The excited local mayor, untrained in handling civil disturbance and for some reason in command, immediately ordered a gas and riot baton general attack. The strategy was apparently the customary simple "mace 'em and chase 'em," in the jargon of the trade.

What happened next was the end of innocence, the end of political agnosticism as our campus had known it. Screaming and unable to flee the pepper gas, the panicked crowd surged against one rank of swinging riot batons and then surged back toward another, and managing to seep away through gaps and alleys, reforming for other confrontations throughout the night. The "wheelies," however, could not flee the first assault by the Illinois State Police. Wheelchairs toppled, spilling the kids onto the street, where through the stinging gas I could see them taking a thumping from state police riot batons. I charged past a little knot of crew-cut men peering from the doorway of a large church, loudly screaming, "Kill 'em! Kill 'em!"

In this atmosphere, the university soon closed. We VVAW guys continued to persuade by writing little articles and letters to

the editor. One Native American who had spent a year as an army journalist in Saigon wrote about being unable to forget stepping over a gutter each day on his way to lunch in which fluids from a GI morgue across the street gurgled beneath his feet.

Soon a set of local ordinances set a 19:00 curfew on our town, and it required a written request submitted three months in advance to hold any assembly of more than nine unrelated persons, indoors or out. With an extreme conservative as governor at that time, it was not long thereafter that faculty who had openly opposed the Vietnam Studies Center were fired, 106 people at a stroke, and lawsuits be damned. Any anti-war activity could have serious repercussions. I witnessed negative recommendations mailed by campus administrators, blackballing graduates in their field. I learned only recently that our Special Forces guy had been blackballed by his academic department in that manner, all for a twenty-five minute talk we VVAW guys made late one afternoon on local television. A graduating senior then, a good soldier and a Green Beret, an excellent man, and his hard-earned degree was suddenly worthless.

Scores of students were arbitrarily expelled for having been present at demonstrations. In researching for this memoir I interviewed a gentleman who had been an assistant dean of students then, in charge of discipline. I am now in my mid-fifties, did two tours at the Vietnam War by the time of the riots in 1970, and am now retired from the military after a further twenty-six years of it, mostly infantry, and this gentleman treated me to the same browbeating lecture he had given to students he had expelled. "So what if you are at the back of a demonstration, just wanting to see what's going on? What happens when that demonstration turns and runs? You become one of the leaders!"

One of my police friends at that time took me to see an old armored vehicle that was a toy belonging to a couple of good old boys, telling me that he hoped to use it as an "urban assault vehicle," to attack barricaded houses. That ambition seemed odd somehow in this normally quiet college town, but the vehicle never did become more than a plaything, as its engine was too unreliable.

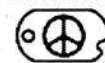
Fresh city ordinances lowered the number of persons constituting an "assembly" down to

six, then down to three. The guardsmen and police patrolled in columns of vehicles, never less than six, stopping occasionally to surround student houses and peer closely into the windows. If more than three people were spotted inside, the house might be gassed and assaulted by what we would now call SWAT. At least three houses were burned down here by fires started by gas grenades tossed through the windows. Two of my friends walking to work were jumped by the police patrols without warning and given a thumping with batons.

A veteran friend in Seattle called to inform me about demonstrations and repressive tactics going on in his area. We suspected that a general news blackout was downplaying the political disturbances across the nation; we learned eventually that over three hundred universities closed their doors.

Friends led me to one house that had been sacked by the police with particular thoroughness. For the crime of being more than three persons together (without the required permit), the student renters and some friends visiting from out of state had been flex-cuffed, forced to lay face down in the middle of the street, and given a good thumping. All the doors were torn off their hinges, all windows were broken out, the furniture and appliances had been thoroughly smashed, all the LP records were stomped into bits, and an awed neighbor quietly related that even the cat had had its brains dashed out against the door. Three days afterward, the ruined house still reeked strongly of pepper gas.

Naturally, my veteran buddies and I violated these curfews, if only to keep each other informed. Veterans could be distinguished among the people sneaking around the empty streets, dodging the police patrols by their use of "individual movement techniques," flitting from bush to tree, staying always in shadow. And once inside a house, to avoid being noticed by the army patrols, we conversed in low tones lying flat on the floor. I will never forget a certain moment during one of these clandestine meetings, when I craned my neck up to watch the news on television. I remember being fascinated by the famous quivering blue jowls of President Nixon, as he petulantly assured America, "There is no repression!"



JAMES MAY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW.

The Promised Land, Nicaragua

LOUIS DE BENEDETTE

The poor in Nicaragua must vote for a Sandinista government on November 4, or the poverty and corruption will not end. I have lived a year and a half in Nicaragua, primarily in the department of Boaco. My last article for *The Veteran* was in 1999, when Mark Swanfeldt and I financed the initial reconstruction of the Sandinista department office. I also built houses and repaired a school in a poor barrio. Since then, the situation in Nicaragua has gotten worse.

Even the United Nations declared Nicaragua the second poorest country in Latin America. My firsthand experience of this poverty has made me angry at the corruption in the government and at U.S. intervention. There are many children here in Boaco and almost all are malnourished. There is gross unemployment, and little free health care. This situation never existed under the Sandinista. I have meager funds, and with this I distribute food and medicine. When people donate to me I use it for the needs of the people, who are always poor Sandinista.

Poverty is related to the corruption in the Aleman government. Arnaldo Aleman, of the Liberal Constitutional Party, has betrayed the people of Nicaragua. Taxes for water and electricity are very high, and this tax money never finds its way to the poor. Aleman came into office as the former mayor of Managua and with 3,000 dollars. He now has millions, and acres of prime farmland.

Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista candidate for president, is recommending a transition commission made up of the candidates from the three main parties: Sandinista, Liberal and Conservative. This commission would clean up the corruption before the elections and

give the people of Nicaragua a chance to survive the poverty. Interestingly enough, Ortega's running mate was incarcerated by Aleman this year. Agustin Jarquin Anaya served a brief time in jail before the people clamored for his release. Jarquin was the treasurer and blew the whistle on Aleman. Jarquin is a member of the Christian Social Party that aligned with the Sandinista. It was a great move by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

War veterans of the Sandinista army receive no free health care, as they did during Ortega's time. With the help of Eric Swanfeldt, a Methodist pastor, I was able to pay for testing and medicine for a disabled veteran who nearly died after a fall from a ladder. I live among many veterans and disabled veterans of the war. Unemployment is great for them, since the area is heavily Liberal. Officers of the army were promised land in 1993 and have yet to get their titles. The wives and the mothers of the vets and their children all need health care. I have been sending them to Planned Parenthood, since the best doctors are there. The state health centers do nothing good. This is a country of children who receive little help from a corrupt government.

With Daniel Ortega, there is hope to reach the promised land. The FSLN is a party of the poor. It is revolutionary, socialist, democratic and against U.S. intervention. Our U.S. government does not want a Sandinista victory. President Bush recently sent Leon Gutiérrez, the acting assistant secretary of state, to Managua. He said that the Sandinista need to sever their ties with Cuba and Libya. The FSLN never responded since it prefers not to enter into a conflict over a provocation. The



United States intends to send 3,000 troops to do construction work in Nicaragua after the elections. The United States will try to force an alliance among the Liberal and Conservative parties.

Daniel Ortega has always been a problem for the United States, but Daniel is the one person who can speak truth to the empire. The truth hurts the arrogance of the U.S.A. Daniel is the choice of the poor and the workers. For ten years he has been leading the party. He enters into all the conflicts. No wonder the people love him. I met him, and he is a man of peace and compassion.

I am helping the Sandinista in Boaco. In the barrio and in other pueblos the FSLN is registering people to vote. I do some of the funding and visit the communities. In Boaco the Sandinista are in the minority and have not won a mayoral election in ten years. In Boaco it is expected that Daniel will get 16,000 votes—not enough to win, but every vote counts. In Estelle Leon and Managua he will win big. Many Sandinista have not registered to vote, but now, for the first time, they are registering.

I went with the voter registration team to the coffee regions of Boaco. There the people are poor, since they need loans to cultivate the coffee plants. The government will not free up the money, in the hope that the farmers will default and the state can take over the land. These coffee regions were greatly affected by Reagan's contra war. Coffee is a cash crop that the Sandinista were using for their defense. The contra could block the money flow by destroying the crops. I spoke to many who told me that their brother or their husband was killed defending the coffee from the contra. I was very touched by these humble and good people, whom I suspect are very

like the Vietnamese who worked the rice paddies.

The struggle of the Sandinista is the same as our struggle as veterans who are against U.S. militarism and capitalism. We fight for veterans who are homeless, sick and without food. We are involved in the campaign for a free Vieques and against the presence of the U.S. Navy on that island. We campaign to close the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia. We align with Veterans For Peace for better unity among veterans. The Sandinista are doing no less.

These elections in November are a non-violent campaign to return the country to peace. The FSLN is a revolutionary party and has paid the price in two wars financed by the United States and Reagan. The party is well-organized and very serious. There is no better candidate for president than Daniel Ortega, who is a man of peace. I believe the Sandinista will win the elections and the United States will have to accept this victory. A victory for the Sandinista is a victory for all of us who want peace. We need to support the people of Nicaragua and the Sandinista elections on November 4, 2001.

I wish to thank all of you who have sent donations. Any other donations can be sent to: Dave Cline, Clarence Fitch Chapter, P.O. BOX 7053, Jersey City, NJ 07307. Make checks payable to VVAW.



LOUIS DE BENEDETTE IS A MEMBER OF THE CLARENCE FITCH CHAPTER OF VVAW. HE CAN BE REACHED AT <LUI@MYSTATION.COM>



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
- www.vvaw.org

RECOLLECTIONS

“Render Unto Caesar . . .”

JERRY LEMBCKE

James May's piece "Chap-lains" in the Fall/Winter 2000 issue of *The Veteran* caught my eye because I was a chaplain's assistant in Vietnam in 1969. May's portrayal of chaplains was not too flattering, but I wouldn't quarrel with it. I worked for several different chaplains in Vietnam. They were all different; three stand out as being especially interesting.

For the first six months I was assigned to the Headquarters Battery of the 41st Artillery Group, encamped about ten miles west of Qui Nhon, just beyond the perimeter of Phu Cat airbase. My chaplain there was Major Elsie, whose day-to-day duty was to visit the Group's gun placements spread around II Corp. By Jeep and helicopter, the chaplain and I made weekly rounds to Landing Zones (LZ) Uplift and English along Highway 1, firebases along Highway 19 near An Khe, and several more sites scattered throughout the area.

But ministering to the troops was only a day job for this career man who was a character out of Joseph Heller's "Catch 22." Elsie was also the unit's self-designated procurer who would buy, trade or otherwise obtain whatever he needed to endear himself to the brass. While on an LZ one day, he did an enlisted man a "favor" by taking a contraband AK-47 off the soldier's hands before he got caught with it. Elsie took the weapon back to headquarters where he turned it over to a fellow officer for whom, the chaplain cynically explained to me, it would become a war trophy.

Elsie's biggest coup was obtaining a portable swimming pool for the officers at Group headquarters. Somehow the chaplain had "found" this pool (assembly needed, of course) at the loading docks in Qui Nhon. I wasn't privy to his negotiations to obtain it and I don't know how it came to be in Qui Nhon in the first place. But a few days after our stop on the dock, a Sikorsky helicopter delivered a large bundle of materials to our camp. Elsie told me what it was and proudly said it was what

"we" had gotten in Qui Nhon that day. The demolition guys immediately set to work blowing a hole in the ground, but the 41st was disbanded shortly thereafter and, as I was later told by one of the last men to leave, the pool was still sitting there unpackaged when they turned out the lights.

Upon the breakup of the 41st HQ Battery, I was sent to a battalion HQ a few miles outside Ban Me Thout, near the Cambodian border. The process of reassignment took me through Dalat, where I was paired with a Chaplain Tumkin. Tumkin was being reassigned from the Delta where,

My last months were spent at LZ Betty, near Phan Thiet on the coast. The chaplain was Father Daniel McCaffery, who had been in mission work in South Asia when he decided to do his stint for the country. McCaffery stayed at Battalion HQ near Phan Rang airbase, which left me alone on the LZ. A couple of times a week he would chopper in, and together we would tour the other firebases in the area. McCaffery was basically against the war, and he really deepened my own understanding of what it was about. He was the first to explain to me that the United States would not win the

defoliated by U.S. planes and the French nuns in charge were furious.

In some ways, my time in Vietnam was personally rewarding because I got to travel all over the central highlands and see the war and the country from many different vantage points. But I left Vietnam pretty disgusted with the chaplaincy as an institution. One of my first acts of resistance upon my return to the States in February 1970 was to write a letter to the Army chief of chaplains. It was a whistle-blowing kind of letter, informing the chief of the misdeeds I had witnessed, those mentioned above included. One of my complaints was that chaplains seldom took seriously enlisted men's difficulties with authoritarian officers and NCOs, or their objections to the war. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" was a phrase I had heard delivered in way too many counseling sessions with soldiers troubled by the war.

I expected my letter would quickly find the circular file, so I was surprised by the lengthy response I received. I wish I had the letter to quote from, because I remember it being a classic upbraiding of dissident behavior, and a chastising of my bad attitude and lack of commitment to the mission. It was "Render unto Caesar" one last time, I guess. Not long after that, I discovered VVAW in Denver and signed up. At the time, I was a graduate student at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley and learning to put words like "imperialism" to the lessons I had learned from Father McCaffery.



One of my complaints was that chaplains seldom took seriously enlisted men's difficulties with authoritarian officers and NCOs, or their objections to the war.

he told me, he had been wounded and gotten into some kind of disciplinary trouble. We flew to Ban Me Thout together and spent the first night in a bunker. About midmorning the next day the first sergeant came stomping after me, demanding to know where "my chaplain" was. I said I had not seen him, to which the first sergeant replied, "Well, goddammit, neither has anybody else!"

Chaplain Tumkin was gone, AWOL. Through the grapevine I heard that Tumkin had split because the camp was too rough — he wasn't "going to live in no bunker." I was sorry to see him go, because we had hit it off well during our few hours together. Also, his departure left me unprotected from the whims of the first sergeant, who sought to use me for every unpleasant duty imaginable. A couple of weeks later I was reassigned again.

war because the Vietnamese people did not want us there. He probably taught me to think of the war as an act of American imperialism, although he spoke more in terms of culture and religion than of economics or politics. He loaned me a book of world religions that gave me a deeper respect for the beliefs of other people and even "relativized" for me the very notion of religion — something he probably had not intended to do.

Being a chaplain's assistant was a learning experience in many ways. Chaplains had a role in the war for hearts and minds, so there were regular visits to Vietnamese schools, orphanages, and religious leaders. We went on MedCap missions to Montagnard villages. One of our stops was a leprosarium near Qui Nhon that had until recently been a self-sufficient agricultural commune. It had been

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