On Lifting the Trade Embargo Against Vietnam

by the Clarence Fitch Chapter of VFW

We believe that the United States war in Indochina was a turning point in American history. We believe that the conduct of that war exposed us and to the American people the contradictions and hypocrisy which lie at the very foundations of American foreign and domestic policies. We believe that the failure to understand and clarify these false lessons of the American experience in Indochina continues to foster in the American body politic. This failure has led directly to such dishonorable and disgraceful episodes and activities as: an embargo which punished the Vietnamese people for successfully defending their homeland, and which prohibited American scientists from publishing studies of the health effects of exposure to herbicides which afflict so many of our own brothers and sisters; our government's political and military support for the genocidal Khmer Rouge in Cambodia; the long cruelties on the families of the Americans missing in action played by our government and by unscrupulous POW activists. This failure has contributed indirectly to both covert and open U.S. intervention in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, and contributes even now to American policy in Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia.

We believe that our failure as a nation to come to terms with the American experience in Indochina is a contributing factor in the continuing isolation and alienation of Vietnam veterans. We believe that this alienation represents a failure to reconcile ourselves to the country which enlisted and drafted us, to the people we tried to destroy, and to our own experiences. We believe that one part of this reconciliation process requires that we recognize, understand, help heal and repair the wounds of the war.

Healing the Wounds of War

The following article was written by Steven Stratford, the Executive Director of the Veterans’ National Restoration Project. He is a Vietnam veteran and a member of VFW. In this article, Steven relates his experience of returning to Vietnam as a member of VVRP Team IV. In March, 1992, the members of Team IV spent four weeks at Xuan Hoa building a health clinic alongside the Vietnamese. Xuan Hoa is a small village which lies along Highway 1, 85 miles northeast of Ho Chi Minh City.

Since 1989, the VVRP has sent eight teams of Americans—almost all of whom are Vietnam veterans—to northern and southern Vietnam. Team members, who spend four weeks in country, deliver medical supplies and work with the Vietnamese, many of whom are also veterans, to build health clinics and other socially beneficial facilities. By participating in these projects, team members are healing themselves while reconciling for all Americans with the Vietnamese people. When the projects are finished and donated to the local community, team members tour Vietnam visiting the places where they served.

In early February at a place in Sebastopol, California called Magic Mountain, the members of VVRP have

Clinton and Veterans

On the surface the Department of Veterans Affairs is doing well—$1.3 billion more representing a 3.6% increase.

More that 10 million veterans are in their seventies, yet only 5 new nursing homes will open.

Persian Gulf Syndrome is already claiming more than 10,000 victims. Agent Orange has not gone away and atomic vets are now getting their dues. Yet, only 27,000 more veterans will be able to be treated in the hospital system. Only one new hospital and one outpatient clinic are to open. To conserve funds Vietnam Vets are being placed in civilian convalescent homes to die.

Forty percent of the homeless are Vietnam veterans. We came from the lower classes and oppressed minorities, were hired later than our peers and fired first.

123,000 Vietnam veterans have committed suicide since returning home—twice the number that died in combat in Vietnam. With the highest rate of suicide, alcohol addiction and divorce, expanded social programs geared to the particular problems of vets are essential.

Despite a nice speech about veterans, Clinton’s policy is not much different from that of George Bush.

Homeless Vets

Vets constitute more than 40% of the homeless population in the U.S. VFW members across the country have participated in “standdowns” organized by the VA and allied vet groups. ID cards are made, medical care provided, and psychiatric counseling, food and shelter are provided for 2,3 days.

After all, this is our comrades, our friends. Most of us are really only 2 or 3 steps from their economic situation. Given the circumstances we could be on the street.

But what about the other 363 days of the year? Where is the government that so eagerly sent us off to war? The VA and other government agencies must to more.

Thousands of homes are repossessed from every year—boarded up, and left empty. Open them up. Money can be found for SROs and public housing as well. We need a comprehensive program of training, jobs and housing—not monuments, publicity shots and patriotic speeches!

See page 17
When I was drafted back in 1967, I appealed on the grounds that I had a bad knee. That kept me out of the Army for about a year. But eventually the draft board called back. "Squat" they said. I squatted. "Go to the next station," they said. I went to the next station. About ten hours later I was getting my head shaved in a barber shop in Fort Leonard Wood.

I didn't pursue my efforts to get out of the Army too hard because I thought it was cool to stop the red horde in Vietnam. I didn't want to get shot at, but what the hell, someone had to do it. I did my time. I served honorably and all that crap that means a lot to civilian warmakers and Vietnam Veterans who look back through the dim light of history and declare that the war was good.

By the time I finished my tour in Vietnam, I felt stupid. Them anti-war protesters had been right. I can't find fault with someone like Bill Clinton for finding the way to keep out of the draft. While I was stupid, Clinton was smart. And he did it honorably too. Me, and hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of others didn't want to go because we wanted to live long enough to lose our hair and develop arthritis. I say that Clinton acted honorably, back then because his actions suggested more than a simple matter of saving his own skin like the rest of us. He protested and led protests against a war he believed wrong and which was wrong.

To oppose a war does not necessarily mean that you oppose the soldier in that war. It should mean that you oppose the politicians who start and continue the war and maybe the conduct of the general staff which carries out the war. It is not mutually exclusive that a person such as Clinton could have opposed the Vietnam War and still have feelings of empathy for veterans of that war, respect for the war's dead and sorrow for families of the dead. It was perfectly appropriate that he pay his respects at The Wall last Memorial Day. Yes, there was a problem that the wealthy and well-educated got out of Vietnam, but that's another issue. It was right that Clinton, the man, and Clinton the President, should pay his respects. Those who booed him at the Wall showed disrespect for the dead and are guilty of the political opportunism of which they accuse him.

Now that I've spent four paragraphs defending a sitting President. It's time that I do an about face. From my observations of Bill Clinton's first year as President? How about the wishy-washy way he defends the appointments he makes when they face Senate approval? Or how about the way he caves in on the election promises he made when he faces opposition from Washington's power brokers? Or how about the way he sold out the poor and working people with the North American Free Trade Agreement? Maybe his opponents were right. He would have served in the Military. If he didn't kill him, it might have given him the backbone to fight for some of those good programs he promised to implement.

"Its the economy, stupid." That was supposed to be Clinton's campaign strategy when he ran for President. Now, after a year, we can see where his policies are headed. And guess what? It's the economy, stupid. Mr. Wishy-Washy was afraid of the third party twit, so he attacked the deficit. The "attack the deficit" people have turned their policy into the religion of the 90's. Clinton goes right along with them. These are the people who are coming up with new and innovative ways to squeeze the poor and the middle class.

They now have some vague theory (or sales pitch) that eliminating the deficit will lead to lower interest rates which will mean that the wealthy will start investing. In reality, the wealthy have never invested just because they had money. They invest when they think the investment will pay something. People aren't going to buy anything unless they have the money. Therefore, the only hope for this sinking ship is for the government to stimulate the economy and put more money in the hands of the poor, so they can buy things. While we are waiting for the economy to pick up from this increased consumer spending, a lot of people can start having a decent life.

Speak of humane. The President who humanely opposed the war in Vietnam sent twenty-three cruise missiles into downtown Baghdad. Of course, the missiles were super accurate and very 'smart'. Do you think Bill, who is also supposed to be very 'smart' thought they were intelligent enough to avoid civilians? Maybe it was worth it to him anyway. Clinton's low popularity in the polls immediately rose eleven percent. Now maybe he won't be booed the next time he visits The Wall. Things change a lot in twenty years, don't they?
Impeach Nixon

BEN CHITTY
EAST COAST COORDINATOR

The good you do, they say, dies with you, and evil lives on long after you're gone. So it is with Richard Nixon. Just one example, maybe not even the most important.

1971—After more than two years in office, President Nixon's quest for "peace with honor" has killed thousands of Americans (mostly young) and hundreds of thousands of Indochinese (mostly civilians). The megalomaniac won't stop—whatever we do, whoever we talk to, however we act. Pettiness, lobbying, rigidity, marching, nonviolent civil disobedience, violent obstruction, political terrorism—nothing matters.

We find it hard to believe, hard to face, hard to sleep. We sit down in small groups and talk about it. We listen to each other and try to work out what it means, to us, to our families, to our country. We call them "the groups"—you might say "group therapy," or "reeducation counseling," a kind of self-medication.

The Veterans Administration takes notice. March 1971. Veterans Administrator Donald Johnson writes to Charles Colson, Nixon's liaison on veterans affairs: "Vietnam veterans tend to see their experiences as an exercise in survival rather than a defense of national values. The majority, given the opportunity in company of their peers, express both intense anger and much guilt." He recommends expanding a pilot program which provides counselling for returning veterans.

Bad timing. Nixon's been watching us on television—VVAW, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, now "his" war. In April a thousand of us march on Washington, defy a court order, and march to the steps of the Capitol to throw our medals back at Congress. Middle America, the Silent Majority, our fathers and mothers, families and friends, look on us and wonder, and shudder, and weep. Nixon directs the VA to suspend all reeducation programs for returning veterans.

And worse people. Charles Colson has already asked the Internal Revenue Service to revoke VVAW's tax-exempt status as a veterans organization, and has set up the rival "Veterans for a Just Peace" (total membership maybe eight). Assigned to direct the Presidential effort to disrupt and subvert the Democratic opposition, he goes on to glory in the Watergate affair. (In fact, during the cover-up's early days, Nixon's concern about VVAW's threat to national security is used to justify the White House special intelligence unit's "investigation" of the McGovern campaign's ties to violent radicals.)

Colson orders the infiltration of certain radical groups—VVAW, the Black Panther Party, other notorious revolutionaries—to provoke violence which can then be tied to the Democratic presidential campaign. Continuity planning includes declaring a national emergency and suspending the election. July 1972, the government subpoenas much of VVAW's leadership in Tallahassee, Florida, finally indicting us for conspiracy to attack the August Republican convention in Miami. With crossbows and slingshots. (All the defendants—minus the government informants expected during the trial—are acquitted the next year in Gainesville, after about an hour's deliberation by the jury.)

VVAW is only a sidenote in that operation, but that's the operation which finally brings Nixon down. Of course Nixon doesn't resign because he conspired to subvert the Constitution, just because he lied about it. (And Colson's convicted of perjury, not treason.)

Nixon lived long enough to see another imperial President subvert the Constitution and get away with it. He also lived long enough to see his spine against Vietnam vets turn into food's gold. The same imperial President demanded a better ending to the Vietnam story, and Hollywood rewrite the script on commission. Suddenly we discovered it had not been our country, our government, our Commander-in-Chief who betrayed us: it was—the peace movement! We all felt bad about how the peacekings disrespected Vietnam veterans we pushed out and bought yellow ribbons for the guys and gals in the Gulf.

Now Nixon's gone, laid to rest, praised by friend and foe alike. I'm wondering if it's too late to impeach him. Call me crazy.

Ben Chitty served in the U.S. Navy 1965-1969, deployed twice to Vietnam, and is Co-Coordinator of the Clinton Peace Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War in the New York metropolitan area.

Bombs Over Baghdad

Dave Kettenhofen
NATIONAL COORDINATOR

It seems Bill Clinton has found some temporary relief from all the flak showering down upon him. He dished out some flak of his own by firing missiles into the heart of Baghdad, skyrocketing his presidential approval rating by eleven points. What a coup! This cowardly, political act has pacified his right-wing attackers while not greatly offending most of his supporters.

Never mind the collateral damage—those bodies pulled from the rubble were only dark skinned Muslims, much akin to the conscripts of old. Killing conscripts and people of color is a well accepted practice in this country. After all, the only countries the U.S. has attacked since World War II were those of color making moves toward self-sufficiency and threatening the status quo.

Clinton, seeking to bolster his newfound popularity, followed up the Baghdad attack with some loud saber rattling in North Korea, home of those despicable commies from way back. Might just as well stick to the easy road, eh Bill? While President Clinton continues to beat up age-old enemies, he is mired in the holocausts of Bosnia, Cambodia, and Somalia. He is indecisive and seems to have no coherent policy for the Bosnian situation as it festerers on. His failure to put pressure on China for its support of the Khymer Rouge may very well draw Vietnam into another war in Cambodia. And the killing goes on in Somalia.

I'm getting tired of the liberals and so-called progressives telling me to keep quiet and give Clinton a chance. I'm tired of innocent people dying for the sake of his presidency. Sure, I voted for him, but he has backpeddled and caved in on so many issues that I find it hard to have respect for him anymore. Clinton seems more concerned with image and building for another four years than with having the guts to fight for what is right. He is alienating the grassroots people who got him elected. It would be much more admirable for him to go down fighting in four years than to be a mediocre sellout for eight. He is no savior of the people by any means. We have to rely upon ourselves to get this country moving in the right direction, not some self-serving politician.
Vietnam’s Health Crisis and Peace Village Medical Clinic

by Sally Singe

Vietnam’s health problems are almost overwhelming. Most health care providers lack even basic running water, and treatment rests on rudimentary at best. Surgical and anesthesia equipment is antiquated and in short supply, and intensive care units as we know them are virtually nonexistent. Dentistry and preventive medicine are rarely practiced.

Dr. Peter Singe, an endocrinologist in the Department of Medicine at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, also serves as President of the Board for East Meets West Foundation based in Oakland. He returned to Vietnam in 1991 after a hiatus of 24 years.

Dr. Singer explained, “When I was in Danang between 1966 and 1967, I worked in the same hospital as the one I recently visited, and I saw absolutely no improvement—perhaps even further deteriorations.”

In 1990, the Vietnamese government spent $20 million, approximately $1 per person. Contrast with health expenditures in excess of $2,500 for every woman and child in the United States.

Although health officials in Vietnam are aware of the complex problems, the country is so poor that they scarcely have the resources to tackle their health problems. The government no longer pays for primary care, delivers care to the poor, or pays for the treatment of veterans with persistent problems due to injuries from recent wars with Cambodia, China and the U.S.

Many U.S. nonprofit organizations such as East Meet West Foundation (EMWF) in Oakland contribute significantly to improve the health status of the Vietnamese. EMWF makes a critical difference due to physicians and other professionals, who teach and work at Peace Village Medical Clinic in Danang.

Dr. John Murphy, an emergency room physician who practices at Marin General Hospital, worked for three months in Peace Village Medical Clinic last spring. “Physicians in Vietnam don’t have high-tech medicine. They lack training, resources to make diagnoses, and technology to provide the best care.”

“It’s our goal to interrupt this cycle at as many points as possible with increased resources, better training through cultural exchanges and with more volunteer medical personnel in Danang. We hope that Peace Village Medical Clinic will play a major role in this training process for years to come.”

Besides training physicians, other critical problems are related to communicable diseases and nutritional deficiencies such as iodine deficiency in mountainous areas that leads to cretinism and mental retardations.

Although the government’s efforts to control infectious diseases have decreased infant mortality, many infectious diseases that are easily treated in the U.S. often go untreated or unrecognized. Another medical volunteer in Peace Village Medical Clinic for three months, Linda Meier, is a nurse practitioner at San Francisco State University.

She explained, “Many children were insufficiently immunized or not at all, and they developed polio. Yet the government exaggerated the statistics about who was immunized, which prevented a more effective public health programs from being implemented.”

There are also a mounting incidence of AIDS in Vietnam. CARE recently published a report on sexual attitudes of adult men about transmitting AIDS and the results portends a potential nightmare.

“Vietnam is drowning in children,” added Debra Burke, who directs EMWF’s overseas programs for its first years and holds a masters in public health.

“Soon 50% of the entire population will be younger than 15. While there is a two-child family policy, only educated men about transmitting AIDS and the results portends a potential nightmare.”

Le Ly Hayslip Means with VVAV

by Joe Miller

NATIONAL STAFF

Last Veterans’ Day in Chicago, Vietnam veterans from Wisconsin and Illinois had the opportunity to meet with Le Ly Hayslip, the author of two books about her life as a young peasant during the Vietnam war and her subsequent move to the U.S. in a search for peace. These books were the basis of Oliver Stone’s film, “Heaven and Earth,” released last Christmas, but given short shrift by the critics and theater chains. The film is now out on video and has not yet seen it should do so.

Hayslip’s participation in VVAV’s Veterans’ Day ceremony last fall came about because a group of veterans from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana decided they would like to invite her to speak on campus. I was one of the participants in that group, and I raised the possibility of Le Ly being invited to speak at VVAV. Through phone conversations during the planning for the university event, Le Ly said she would be happy to speak to VVAV in Chicago.

When the day arrived, we were all pleasantly surprised at how cooperative the weather was—for Chicago in November. While it was chilly, the skies were bright blue. An enthusiastic crowd huddled around the ceremony site, awaiting the arrival of our guest speaker. Le Ly had been met at the airport by three university students, who then drove her to the spot. When she took the floor, her voice clear and firm, she spoke powerfully, in an open fashion, Le Ly stepped to the microphone, and in her quiet voice, spoke powerfully for the search for peace for all veterans of the Vietnam war. Americans, Vietnamese, and others. She spoke of reconciliation between Vietnam and the United States, for a final end to the war.

All of us were deeply moved by her words, and she received warm, prolonged applause as she stepped away from the podium. After the ceremony, Le Ly decided to join us at Annie and Joe’s for the traditional post-ceremony gathering. She visited with us there for an hour or so. Annie presented Le Ly with some VVAV souvenirs, we all said our good-byes, then Le Ly and the students headed for Champaign-Urbana. This was one of the most moving of Veterans Day ceremonies, since many of us began to feel a sense of closure as we had opposed the war as veterans and hope to connect to the Vietnamese as people through individuals like Le Ly Hayslip. For those who wish to contribute to Le Ly’s efforts to heal the wounds of Vietnam for the people of Vietnam, you should send donations to: Le Ly Hayslip, Director, East Meets West Foundation, 724 Washington Street, #130, Oakland, CA 94607.

Le Ly Hayslip calls the listeners to dedicate the Village of Hope

Unfortunately, 80% of the nation lives in rural areas where the primary methods of birth control are abortion and IUDs. To help the situation, EMWF recently added a gynecologist to the staff of peace Village Medical Clinic.

To highlight the shortage of supplies, Dr. Singer added, “A Vietnamese Peace Village Medical volunteer shared that in such short supply that diabetic youngsters could die unless their parents could afford to buy insulin. This was hard to believe—yet I never encountered this here.”

Many patients told Ms. Meier about a huge hospital, packed with patients and medicines, especially American ones, sold at higher prices. “Often appropriate medicines were not available, in part due to cost. For Vietnamese, the cost of a week’s supply of penicillin is comparable to buying a new car.”

In Vietnam, the health care issues are every bit as perplexing and complex as those we face at home, but the major difference is the limitation on care due to economic factors. Despite many drawbacks to practicing medicine in Vietnam, the system is not yet bogged down by high-priced malpractice suits or expensive insurance premiums. And in many clinics such as Peace Village Medical Clinic, patients can choose both Western and Chinese medical treatments.

Your $ Can Go a Long Way in Vietnam

$50 Buys clothes for 10 orphans for half a year

$50 Buys supplies for one student for half a year

$50 will provide educational supplies for one student for half a year

$100 will make an entire family self-sufficient by opening a small business with a sewing machine at home

Subscribe to The Vision


This quarterly publication provides information on EMWF’s medical clinics and orphanages and news about Vietnam. You will receive access to our “network” and notice of events in your region.

Le Ly Hayslip Meets with VVAV

VIETNAMESE BEER COMING

HANOI, Vietnam—U.S. drinkers will soon be able to get a taste of Vietnamese beer without traveling overseas. The Huy Huy Brewery has dispatched Vietnam’s first containers of Hanoi beer to New York, three months after the end of a 90-year U.S.-trade embargo against Hanoi, a spokesman for the brewery said Tuesday.

RIGHT TO STRIKE IN VIETNAM

HANOI, Vietnam—Workers in communist Vietnam now have the right to strike. The National Assembly overwhelmingly passed Vietnam’s first labor code, which seeks to balance workers’ rights with the interests of foreign investors in an economy whose state controls have been loosened, the state-run Vietnam News reported Monday.

COFFEE FROM VIETNAM

HANOI—Americans familiar with Vietnam’s Central Highlands as a wartime battleground could soon be drinking coffee from the mountains’ misty slopes now that trade ties are growing. A first shipment of 24 metric tons of coffee from the Lao Cai province has been sent to the United States to open up a new market, the official newspaper Lao Dong reported Tuesday.

A Humanitarian Relief Organization

725 Washington St., Suite 310
Oakland, CA 94607

EAST-WEST FOUNDATION
Filipino Amerasian Children of United States Military Basic Facts

Who are the Amerasian Children?

For nearly 50 years, the larger US military bases outside US territory were to be found in the Philippines. The U.S. population of the Philippines was brought by the Japanese occupation of 1935, who required the closing of Clark Air Base in 1951. The reoccupation by the Philippines Army in September 1991 of a new Bases Treaty led to the closure of Subic Naval Base in November 1992.

Countless children were born of the contract between US servicemen and the women of local communities. The servicemen were from the bases, those in transit and the countless others—particularly during the Vietnam and Gulf wars—who had R & R shore leaves.

These children, sired and then abandoned by US military personnel, are the Amerasian children. In the majority of cases they are being raised by their mothers. In other cases extended family members are the care-givers.

Under what conditions are the Amerasian children living?

These are nearly 50 years of living conditions of extreme poverty which result in poor housing conditions, inadequate nutrition, interrupted schooling and lack of medical care. As children of sexually exploited and marginalized Filipina mothers, the children themselves suffer discrimination and the risk of exploitation.

Why is the issue coming up now?

With the closing of the bases, the women have lost even the meager livelihood that working in the bases provided.

The Philippine government’s economic plans for conversion of the former bases include the possible creation of commercial and industrial complexes. Nowhere has provision been made for the training of women, their employment or their participation in economic development. The “entertainment” business was the main economic activity of Olongapo and generated enough annual income for Olongapo to gain city status in 1966.

The women’s contribution to the relative wealth of Olongapo has been considerable, yet these very women are being totally overlooked and not being offered the alternative livelihood that they desperately need.

With no current sources of income and no employment prospects, the mothers are extremely concerned about the situation of their children.

Is US citizenship for Amerasian children the answer?

There are some moves to press for an amendment to include the Philippines in the 1982 law granting citizenship to American children from South Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

The mothers of Amerasian children feel that the citizenship option should be open to their children, particularly given that they fall a class of adults without a prior status. But for now the concerned populace feels that:

1. As few children have documentary evidence of US paternity, most would not qualify for citizenship, and would continue to be raised in the Philippines.
2. For the few mothers who were able to obtain required documentation, their low educational level, no marketable skills, and lack of family or community support network would make integration into the US extremely difficult.
3. In many cases, the mothers have other children by Filipino husbands or partners. The mothers are apprehensive about leaving behind Filipino children or the difficulty of trying to raise larger families in the US.

What is the class action suit?

In November 1992, a San Francisco law firm, Cotchett, Illston & Pitre, approached Philippine organizations to propose filing a class action suit on behalf of Filipino Amerasian children.

The suit seeks to obtain medical and educational benefits averaging $8000 per child until 18 years of age, based on the implied contract between the US Navy and the women of Olongapo that provided health and education services to the women in exchange for their sexual labor for US servicemen. The lawsuit seeks to extend those benefits to the children born of those relationships.

What do the children and their mothers need?

Educational and medical funds are needed and will be welcome. However, the extreme poverty of this population makes limiting aid for the children to those two components inadequate. It may mean, for example, trying to ensure the children’s education while their nutritional needs would continue to be unprovided for.

The children’s basic needs include food, clothing, shelter, schooling, medical needs, and recreation. There are also special needs such as counseling and day care.

How can interested parties contribute to this campaign?

1. Monitoring developments in the class action suit. For more information contact the law firm, through Don West, Cotchett, Illston & Pitre, 840 Malcolm Road, Suite 200, Burlingame, CA 94010 [Telephone: 415-697-6000; Fax: 415-697-5300].
2. Lobbying for the passage of legislation providing child support for Filipino Amerasians and other positive legislative initiatives.
3. Forming support groups;
4. Drumming up public awareness of the concern;
5. Giving material support through donations and the like.

Vietnam Then and Now

Exhibit by Vietnamese Combat Photographers Premiers in U.S.

Opening Reception: September 29 at 6:30 PM
Exhibit: Opens September 27 and continues for three weeks
Eye Gallery
1151 Mission Street
San Francisco

A rare and compelling exhibit of the works of 30 Vietnamese photographers will be in display for the first time in the United States at the Eye Gallery for three weeks starting on September 27.

The photos, which span the period from the Vietnam war until today, include war photos taken by combat photographers working in North Vietnam and with liberation forces in the South. Especially dramatic are the images of the 1972 Christmas bombing of Hanoi and Hoi Hpong.

To launch the exhibit, there will be an opening reception at the Eye Gallery, 1152 Mission Street, San Francisco on Thursday September 29 beginning at 6:30 PM, with a program at 7:30 PM. Three of the Vietnamese photographers, Nguyen Van Hieu of Hanoi, Lam Tan Tai and Dang Duc Minh, both of Ho Chi Minh and the latter will be present at the reception.

The photos of contemporary Vietnam will also be on display at the Vietnam Trade Fair ‘94 at the Herbs Pavilion, Fort Mason Center from September 29 through October 1.

The photo exhibit is sponsored by the U.S. Vietnam Friendship Association with assistance and support from the San Francisco Mayor’s Office of Commerce and Trade. For more information call the Eye Gallery at 415/431-69121.

Sponsored by U.S.-Vietnam Friendship Association

☐ I cannot attend the premiere, please accept my contribution of $ ______ to help cover the cost of bringing this historic exhibit to the American people.

(Tax-deductible donations can be made to the Eye Gallery and sent to USVFFA PO. Box 480027, San Francisco, CA 94146.)
Reconciliation with Vietnam

Team IV began assembling. We came from all over the U.S. to meet and develop ourselves into a cohesive team before undertaking our journey. We got to know one another, shared stories about our first trip to Viet Nam and shared our motives for returning. We decided who would take care of which responsibilities and we packed the 1,200 pounds of medical supplies we would be delivering. In other words, we built a strong sense of community among ourselves and began to get in touch with the variety of emotions which had led us there.

On February 21st, we were met by our hosts, the People Committee of Dong Nai Province, when we landed at Tan Son Nhat Airport. We were to have been transported to the village of Long Hai, but at least that’s where we thought we were going. Instead, we were taken to the Dong Nai Hotel in Dien Hoa. The VVVP had received permission from the Vietnamese government for Team IV to complete the construction of a partially built health clinic in Long Hai and that is what our U.S. Treasury License gave us permission to do. However, things had changed.

We were told that we were to meet with Mr. Binh, President of the Dong Nai People Committee, three days later. At that meeting, we were informed that, due to recent redistricting, Long Hai was no longer a part of Dong Nai Province. Consequently, we could not build our fourth medical facility there. Instead, we were asked to build a new medical clinic, from scratch, on the old ground up, in a little village called Xuan Hiep.

First we requested an inspection of the new proposed site and surrounding area. We wanted to determine the need for a clinic at the proposed location. We also visited the village on the original site so that we could see for ourselves that the people there understood the situation. We decided that the need was even greater at the new site, but, we were concerned about not having enough money to build a completely new clinic and we were also concerned about whether we would have enough time to build it in the four weeks we had allotted to this project. However, we were assured that the local People Committee would make up the difference should we run short of cash and that the construction would be done on time, we agreed to build the clinic where they asked us to. Two days later, construction was underway.

During the construction period of our stay in Viet Nam, the Peoples committee supplied us with housing, and what housing it was. We were staying at the Hoa Binh (Peace) Hotel, at K-4 Park, near Long Khanh. The Hoa Binh Hotel is unbelievably beautiful. It’s a huge hotel that was built after The Liberation. It was a place for Vietnamese Officers to relax after the War.

The three story hotel is surrounded by a moat and surrounding the moat is an unbelievably beautiful park. All the roads and ponds are bordered by hand-cut stone walls. The second and third stories of the Hotel each have sweeping verandas and the grounds around the hotel are covered with beautiful flowers and plants.

We had expected to be housed in mud or grass huts, so you can imagine our surprise when we were shown our accommodations. We even had running water and sporadic electricity. We were thrilled!

The job site was nine or ten miles north of the hotel on Highway 1. Every weekday morning at 6:30 a.m. a van would be out front to take us to work, and at 2:30 p.m. it would return us to our hotel, where we would spend most evenings sharing the day’s activities with one another.

The day began before we cleared the land to build the clinic, the Vietnamese burned all of the weeds off the site. In the process two land mines exploded. After the weeds were burned off, a bulldozer that looked as though it might have been used during the U.S. Civil War, scraped the ground clean. What it began to uncover was shocking—say the least.

The first little jewel the dozer scraped up was a live U.S. mortar round. Before that day was over we unearthed three more mortar rounds, and before the week was over, we had found numerous antipersonnel mines, antitank mines, hand-grenades, artillery rounds, rocket launchers, M-16 barrels, thousands of rounds of live M-16 ammo, ammo-cases, helmets, and GI boots—all military issue.

It only took the bulldozer a few days to clear the land. However, throughout this process the local children would chase along behind it trying to find anything uncovered that might be of value (scrap metal, plastic or glass primarily). On Friday of the first week I was busy digging out the foundation footings, when a ten-year-old Vietnamese girl walked up and handed me a live U.S. hand-grenade—with a very rusty pin.

The locals saw that we were saving up all the ordinance we found at the foot of a flagpole on the site, so the little girl though she was helping us out by giving me the grenade. Needless to say, this was a powerful experience, especially when coupled with my experience of the following day.

On the weekends most of the Team would either go to Saigon or Vung Tau. That first weekend we went to Saigon. While in Saigon, a few of us went to the To Do Women’s Hospital, a place I had visited in August 1991. This hospital has a whole room full of the preserved remains of hundreds of Agent Orange casualties (aborted deformed fetuses) and a wealth of statistics on the damage Agent Orange has caused the Vietnamese people. On this visit I discovered they had a new ward.

On this ward were about 20 children, all under the age of two. Every one of them had a leg, an arm, or both missing—or had their face severely damaged—as a direct result of the live ordinance the U.S. left behind. This scene, coupled with the memory of the little present the ten-year-old girl had given me the day before, had a devastating effect on me.

Most Americans don’t realize that the U.S. is still killing and maiming innocent civilians 20 years after our troops came home. The millions of tons of munitions we left behind literally litter the countryside, and it is usually the little children who accidentally discover them. You see, children tend to wander where adults don’t. Their natural curiosity coupled with their budding curiosity makes for a dangerous combination in a booby trapped countryside.

Once the ground was all cleared, and the foundation laid, the walls of the clinic began going up rapidly. One week into construction the building began to take shape.

The foundation consisted of large hand cut granite blocks placed on a bed of fist sized granite gravel. On top of the foundation went the earthen brick walls.

Although most of the American vets on the Team had some construction experience, we were not accustomed to the Vietnamese methods of building. The Vietnamese provided the skilled craftsmen; we were the grunt labor.

In all, there were 13 VVVP Team Members on the job and 28 Vietnamese. Many of the Vietnamese workers were formerly our enemy, but as the days turned into weeks, they became our friends.

By the end of the second week on the job the roof was going up. Hardwood rafters were embedded into the brick walls and earthen brick tiles were placed on top of them.

Three weeks into construction, all that remained to be done was finish work. Tiling the floor, installing electrical fixtures and glazing the windows didn’t take long.

By the 23rd of March the clinic was complete. To christen the completed project, we planted a peace pole in front of the clinic.

The area where we lived and worked during the first month of our journey was a very violent spot during the War. Neither side ever really controlled this free-fire zone. Evidence of the War remains everywhere. Many of the buildings damaged during the war have never been repaired.

You couldn’t take a stroll through the surrounding community without seeing many amputees struggling to eke out a living in this war torn district. Huge areas of the landscape are barren. To this day, virtually nothing will grow in these vast wastelands where we dumped our chemical weapons. Grossly deformed children attest to the fact that the dioxin has made its way up the food chain.

Twenty years later, craters still mark the spots where our bombs fell, but like most everything we left behind, they too are recycled: Now they are used for swimming holes, duck ponds or fish farms. The innovations and fortitude of the Vietnamese are nothing
short of amazing.

Upon completion of the Xuan Mep Medical Clinic, the Team split up. Most of us still had unfinished personal business to tend to, having to do with our war time experiences. A few Team Members chose to return home early, but most of us wished to return to the areas where we had served. For me, that meant returning to the hilltop at Tan Son Nhut where my first flight took place.

Ever since the War, the sound of helicopters overhead has caused me to reflect on the medals I had witnessed. At times, these reflections consumed me and I would find myself reliving experiences that I had never learned to cope with.

I would see the mutilated bodies of those who happened to be near the coordinates I had reported to the F-4s. I would hear the death screams of children who happened to be caught in an ambush meant for me. I would smell that awful mixture of cordite and blood in the air after a battle in I was in bliss.

That leads to the veterans of the Ho Chi Minh City War Veterans Association, I was able to gain access to classes at clasiﬁed areas of this military installation. I was actually able to stand on the spot where my barracks once stood—now there is no hilltop there, no thump-thump-thumping to hear. Now there is nothing there but a vacant field and the sound of birds chirping.

The Marijnissen-Eendracht Team (MET) helicopters that so often by the skies of the Emerald Triangle where I live, no long cause me the extreme discomfort they once did. Now when I hear them, I reﬂect on a country (though still one of the poorest in the world) that is ﬁnally at peace.

My Lai

On March 28, 1971, I turned 21 in Viet Nam. That night my live-in Vietnamese ﬂame was killed when a bomb exploded at a bar in Saigon. Twenty-one years later I turned 42 in Viet Nam. That night I was in Nha Trang restlessly wondering how I would handle visiting the My Lai Monument the following morning. Nothing I had read or heard could have possibly prepared me for what I wit-nessed the following day.

Four other members of Team IV undertook the four hour drive to My Lai the morning of that day. Four or ﬁve days of our journey, there was very little conversation on the road that morning. As we approached the site of the massacre, I was overwhelmed with the beauty of the countryside. I simply could not imagine such an atrocity taking place in serene surroundings. It just goes beyond my comprehension.

The rice paddies were all vibrant green. The paddy dikes all had mature palm trees and Border vines growing along them. The air was clean and bright. The people on the roadside seemed so peaceful and content. This seemed to be the last place on earth such a thing could have happened. An almost violent silence fell upon us!

As we unloaded from our van and headed in different directions, the words were spoken. "How is it possible this peace could be violated in such a way?" echoed through my mind.

My Lai is not just one moment. My Lai was not just one village. The whole area is covered with monuments that attest to the 502 innocent civilians who lost their lives on that horrendous day. Statues of men, women and children caught, and frozen forever, into the poses they held as they drew their last breaths. The expressions on the faces of those statues capture the agony these people must have felt in their last moments of life.

On the wall in the foyer in the My Lai Museum is a plaque that lists the names and ages of those who lost their lives that day. Over 40 of those names are children under the age of two. The sole survivor of this massacre witnessed American troops tossing genitals into the air to shoot them for target practice. The walls of this museum are decorated with actual photographs of the victims. Some of the photos show the victims just before, and after they were murdered. They show the roads and paths between the half dozen or so villages that were annihilated that day, and they are all littered with the mutilated bodies of the former inhabitants.

Team member Mike Bohem brought his fiddle with him to My Lai.

As we all stood in front of the memorial, he played taps for all who perished in the War. Each of us expressed our condolences in our own private way.

On the five hour journey from My Lai to Da Nang, not a word was spoken in our van.

Our journey ended in Ha Noi, where we spent our last week. Although Ha Noi still bares the scars of the War, it has largely been rebuilt to its previous splendor—the Emerald City of the Orient. The most visible scar is the poverty that still prevails.

Viet Nam is the third poorest nation in the world.

Join Us

The 66 Americans who have participated in the eight projects which the VVRP has completed in Viet Nam over the past six years are proud of the roll they have been playing in bringing about an end to the U.S. trade embargo against Viet Nam. It is a historical fact that the VVRP was the very ﬁrst American organization to build anything in Viet Nam since the end of the War, when the “Friendship Clinic” at Vung Tao was completed in April 1989. In fact, 13 hours after President Bill Clinton formally ended the embargo in February, the VVRP received a fax from the Ha Noi government, thanking us for the "valuable role" that the VVRP had made toward bringing about an end to the embargo.

After your visit, in spite of the obvious obstacles, the VVRP has remained dedicated to “Healing the Wound of War!” This summer Team X will return to Viet Nam and build independent housing for blind Vietnamese veterans and to distribute hundreds of pounds of much needed medical supplies. Team XI will return to Viet Nam this winter.

THE VETERANS VIETNAM RESTORATION PROJECT

JOIN US!

Help restore Viet Nam.

Reconcile with the Vietnamese people.

See Viet Nam as a country, instead of a war.

Since 1989 dozens of men and women have returned to Viet Nam as members of VVRP Teams. Join us for a remarkable, once in a lifetime experience.

You will carry urgently needed medical supplies with you and work along side former enemies and allies in the construction of a humanitarian project. At the conclusion of the four-week journey you will visit the places where you served.

Our group travel arrangements, which include an in-country tour organized by Vietnamese War veterans allow us to make the trips surprisingly inexpensive.

Join a VVRP team. Team IX departs this summer and Team X this winter. Call, write or fax for an application:

VVRP, P O BOX 369, GARBERVILLE, CA 95542
Tel (707) 923-3357, FAX (707) 923-4213

CONTINUED

THE HAT

me at O’Hare [airport, ed.]. I was standing in line at the ticket counter, and this guy wearing a suit behind me seemed to be bothered by it. He asked me if I had been in Viet Nam; I said no, that I was wearing the hat because I support VVAW. He asked me whether I got it, I answered that I bought it from VVAW people in Chicago. He said that he had been in Viet Nam; I said nothing (mistake!). He said he didn’t need some kid reminding him of it. I offered to take off the hat if it bothered him so much. I was in a particularly good mood that day, I had been reading Dave Dellinger’s autobiography—one of the best books I have ever read). But when I offered to take it off, he laughed and said, “No, I want it. It should be mine.” So I offered it to him. But he laughed again, saying, no that’s OK, keep it. I think he was probably right—it was his hat, which he is letting me keep till he is ready to wear it. So now when people ask me where I got the hat I can say that someone gave it to me in O’Hare.

But the best hat story happened to me in northern Wisconsin. Somehow as a part of my new job at the University YMCA in Urbana I got roped into going to “a camping project” outside Lac du Flambeau. I hadn’t been there very Flambeau. I hadn’t been there very long when I was feeling pretty alienated away from the comforts of civilization and the company of my Urbana comrades. I felt surrounded by with a couple of unknown Wisconsin people for a road-repair project, one of them noticed my hat and asked me, are you a member of VVAW? No, just a supporter, I answered. “Well I’m a member of VVAW,” he said.

Thus I met Jay Tobin. Suffice it to say that Jay had a vehicle and after a hard morning’s work of shoveling mud we repaired to town for a civilized meal of coffee, cigarettes and cheestole. We traded stories about organizing against the Gulf War while we are.

So it should be apparent that a VVAW hat is a fine thing. It keeps the sun out of your eyes, educates the masses, keeps you from getting lost, and when you’re friendless and far from home, can spare you the excesses of the back-to-nature crowd. Don’t leave home without it.

Bob Naaim is currently the Program Director for the University YMCA in Urbana-Champaign. He also serves on the Champaign County Board, works with the Illinois Disciples Foundation in Champaign, the Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative, International Jewish Peace Union, and the Palestine Solidarity Committee.
Veterans Peace and Reconciliation Park

On December 31, 1993, in Hanoi, Vietnam, a contract for the building of a Veterans Peace and Reconciliation Park was first signed by Nguyen Nhu Ngà, Nguyen Duc Van and Nguyen Ngoc Hung, representatives for the Vietnamese chapter, and Roy M. Boeheim, representative for the American chapter. The site for this park is located near Van Noi village, Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam. It was about 4 kilometers north of Hanoi. Land was donated by the Agriculture and Forestry Departments. This park will consist of fish ponds, fruit trees, shrubs and flowers. The focal point of the park will be a mound, based on Native American effigy mounds, in the shape of a dove. The idea for the park originated from a visit by Nguyen Ngoc Hung in late 1990 to the Highground Memorial in northern Minnesota, where he talked to veterans groups and others about the need for reconciliation and friendship. Hung’s visit to the Highground had a profound effect on both he and the American veterans. He was impressed by the emphasis on healing at the memorial, but he was profoundly moved by the Dove Mound. Hung was told that the mound was created for the peace of the mound, that it was a place to go to remember their friends who are missing or were killed, a place to leave their own pain behind. Despite the powerful effect that some veterans had volunteered their ashes to be placed on the mound when they died. When Hung was told of this, he went to the mound and burned incense and said a prayer for his brother who is missing in action.

Last summer, when I heard that Hung was going to be in the U.S. again, I arranged to have arrived. In Madison to speak. By this time I had begun my own journey toward healing. In February, 1992, I went back to Vietnam for the first time since the war. I went with eleven other veterans from across the U.S. to Xuan Huip village, Dong Nai province, to build a medical clinic. It was a wonderful experience and powerful for all of us and showed me how much of a part my life Vietnam is.

In the process of organizing Hung’s talk, I heard about his experience at the Highground and started thinking about the possibility of building a memorial like that in Vietnam. When I arrived in Hanoi last December, I saw firsthand just how much the veterans there want this park. Not only do they not hate us, there is enthusiasm and hope there that exists only between veterans. Every meeting was filled with enthusiasm and excitement, an intense desire for this park to happen. In spite of the fact that the Vietnamese government has donated this land, this is a grassroots effort by the veterans there.

Work will begin by this summer by the Vietnamese, depending on an initial funding by the American chapter of $10,000. This work will prepare the site for the coming together of veterans from both countries in October to build the Dove Mound.

Although we need funding for the park, it is just as important that veterans come to Vietnam to participate in the work on this memorial. The schedule is to arrive in Hanoi in late October, 1994 (exact date will be determined later), to work for two days building the mound. On the third day there will be a celebration of this event. Following the ceremony, the veterans have offered to arrange for travel to our old AO’s or anywhere in Vietnam. This park is a chance to work with each other, former enemies, to heal ourselves and our countries. To build instead of destroy, and to finally put the war behind us and move together as friends. And, finally, the Vietnamese want us to come and see their country at peace.

The Religious Society of Friends, Quakers has agreed to set up an account for us for tax exempt contributions. Make checks out to Madison Monthly Meeting of Friends, and mail to: The Religious Society of Friends, 1744 North 4th St., Madison, Wisconsin 53711. For more information contact Roy M. (Mike) Boeheim at 608-767-3799, or write to 4035 Ryan Rd., Blue Mounds, Wisconsin 53517.

- PROPOSAL -

Rough Side of the Mountain: A Documentary Portrait of Clarence Fitch

"For me and other black GIs in Vietnam in 1967, things were changing. Things going on in the States affected our behavior in Vietnam. The whole black power movement was taking place there, too. We were growing After, we got the word through rhythmic handshakes, African beads, trying to get as much of the black music as we could get our hands on. We kind of segregated ourselves; we didn’t want to integrate into what we considered the white man’s war. And our consciousness had been raised to the point that it wasn’t our war. I felt pretty guilty about being in Vietnam for a long time, knowing what I know... and my guilt was reflected in my behavior."

Clarence Fitch

Clarence Fitch died May 7, 1990, aged 42. Born in Harlem, raised in Jersey City, he was a son, father and husband, a postal worker, a Vietnam veteran, a recovering drug addict, a peace activist and a person with AIDS. Clarence’s life-history represents a generation of African Americans whose lives were marked by the disillusionment of the Vietnam War, a simultaneous coming to consciousness about racism and militarism in America, and the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s.

"Rough Side of the Mountain," will be a thirty-minute documentary telling the story of Clarence Fitch’s life, from his teenage years as a marine in Vietnam to his subsequent anti-war activism, from his struggle with narcotics addiction to his final battle with AIDS. Clarence’s personal testimony will be intercut with contemporary interviews with his family and friends and with video footage and photographs of his participation at community events, on fact-finding peace delegations in Panama and Nicaragua, and his speaking with high school students. The piece will conclude with footage of Clarence’s family as they complete his panel to be joined with the National Vietnam Quilt on the Mall at the Washington Monument, just a few steps away from the Vietnam Memorial. "Rough Side of the Mountain" will poetically illustrate the many changes in Clarence’s life while illuminating the strength and perseverance of the human experience. Some themes to be explored are Clarence’s difficult recovery from a 13-year drug habit, his growth to an profound understanding of the connection between black consciousness and peace activism, his mentoring and leadership role among high school students and hundreds of adults in recovery, and finally, his courage as a person living with AIDS. His story is a valuable contribution to contemporary African American history. This documentary will fill a media void and construct a unique understanding of the 1960s, 70s and 80s through the diverse and triumphant experiences that were Clarence’s life.

This proposal has been endorsed by the Clarence Fitch (New York/New Jersey) Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. All inquiries and contributions should be addressed to:

Clarence Fitch Youth Educational Fund
64 Chestnut Street
Montclair, NJ 07042
(201) 783-7338

Tami Geer (Producer/Director) is an award-winning video artist whose work includes: Facing AIDS: Stories of Healthcare Workers, "Prescription for Change, From Bedsides to Bargaining Tables," and "Delivered: Labor Struggle in the Post Office." She is Executive Producer of the television program "Labor at the Crossroads" and Professor of Communications at Hampshire College. Her work has been screened at the New York Film Festival, the Museum of Modern Art, and other local and international festivals. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Video Artists fellowship from the NJ Council on the Arts. Along with experience and talent, Tami brings to this project a deep and long friendship with Clarence and his family. Elena Schowlsky-Fitch (Project Consultant) is a pediatric AIDS nurse in Newark, NJ. A founding member of the Nurses’ Network, she worked several years as an RN organizer for Local 1199. She has been a member of the steering committee of the New Jersey Rainbow Coalition, and remains active in her local community. She met Clarence through support work for striking postal workers in Jersey City and began a 10-year relationship in which she shared both his recovery from drug addiction and his battle with AIDS. As Clarence’s widow and partner who shared both his struggles and triumphs, Elena brings a unique and important perspective to this production.
Who in charge here?

by Steve Geiger

President Clinton assumes a defensive posture towards the military establishment; his Administration’s actions are under review by his staff. This attitude is his own and is shared by a growing number of other military leaders across the country. The military is now in a state of uncertainty, unsure of where it is headed and what it stands for. This uncertainty is reflected in the rising number of suicides among military personnel.

The military is now in a state of uncertainty, unsure of where it is headed and what it stands for. This uncertainty is reflected in the rising number of suicides among military personnel.
Casualty of War
Incarcerated Veterans
Not Just a Statistic

David Curry
National Staff

On Veterans Day 1992, Johnnie W. Shaffer was formally presented a Combat Infantry Badge, a Purple Heart, and a Vietnam Service Ribbon for service rendered 23 years earlier with the Americal Division in Chu Lai. It’s always nice to see the system catch up with a vet and see that he gets what he’s so long had coming to him. In Shaffer’s case, however, the system didn’t have to look far to find him in his status as an inmate in the West Virginia Correctional Center. Actually the system doesn’t have to look very far for a lot of Johnnie’s brothers and sisters either.

In 1985, The Veteran featured a story about incarcerated veterans, detailing their numbers and their needs. This story was intended as an update, but the most recent government publication on incarcerated veterans is older than our original story. In 1981, when the Bureau of Justice Statistics issued its most recent publication on the subject, it was reported that in 1979, about a fourth of state and federal prisoners in the U.S. were veterans of military service. Of these 65,500 prisoners, over half had served in the military during the Vietnam War and over 13,000 of these had completed tours in Southeast Asia.

Statistics never mean as much as the human beings that they represent, but the 13,000 far exceeds any estimate of POWs or MIA’s alleged to have ever been held by Hanoi. The 25% figure is a smaller proportion than the 40% of American homeless who are veterans. What is most missing, however, is any more recent statistic. The date of the last public release of information on incarcerated veterans stands a warning signal of how long it’s been since anyone checked to see how many veterans found a prison cell to be part of their veterans benefits package. The statistic as its 1979 date is pre-Reagan-Bush and all the extremes of neglect associated with those three long terms of conservative Republican administration.

But a Bureau of Justice Statistics report sent through a time machine can’t be the only source of information on incarcerated veterans, or can it? We contacted the Bureau of Prisons, the American Correctional Association, Bureau of Justice Statistics, House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), VFA Legal Services, VFW, American Legion, and American Civil Liberties Union Prison Project, and all we were able to obtain was the one 1981 publication. Maybe we’ll try again later, in hopes that someone will give a damn.

Bob wearing the hat

The Hat
By Bob Naiman

Some time ago Barry Romo came down to Urbana to take part in a panel on oppression in the military.

At the end of the meeting there was the usual milling about the propaganda table. But in addition to the usual flyers and buttons, Barry had brought some special merchandise from Chicago—VVAV hats. We were all duly impressed when Barry opened the bag to reveal the sturdy caps and several of us opened our wallets. For my own part, not only do I like baseball-type caps, but I sorely need one for softball duties. Of course, for a "man of the left" not just any insignia will do: only a scab would wear a "CAT" hat these days, and sports logos are frowned on in some hard core PC circles. So a VVAV cap was the silver bullet; we put on our new caps immediately.

On the way to the mandatory post-meeting libations, someone said something about "posing as veterans"; Barry of course smashed this notion immediately, pointing out that we were proclaiming our support for VVAV—what could be better than that?

Ever since then I’ve been wearing the hat, and I’ve had some interesting experiences. Here are few of them.

A typical comment at work, given my age (27), was "hey…you’re not a veteran?" to which my typical response was "well, if I were wearing a Cubs hat you wouldn’t say, ‘hey, you don’t play for the Cubs!’" This usually drew a laugh. Then I would often get to say something about what VVAV is and why I support it. This shows that a VVAV hat is an effective political tool.

A more bizarre experience happened to

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Milwaukee Fourteen
Dave Kettenhofen
NATIONAL COORDINATOR

On September 24, 1968, fourteen men broke into the Selective Service office in Milwaukee, Wis., stole 10,000 draft files of 1-A classified young men, then publicly burned them in an area outside the building. This Vietnam War protest action landed the "Milwaukee 14" in jail for sentences averaging one year each and resulted in the deportation of one, Michael Cullen, to his homeland of Ireland for eighteen years. Fifty similar raids, sparked by this event, occurred throughout the U.S. in the following four years.

The "Milwaukee 14" marked the 25th Anniversary of their action with a reunion demonstration, public forum, and dinner. Eight of the protesters were able to attend, while two are deceased, and the others couldn’t make it for various reasons. All remain committed to the struggle for peace and justice.

The high point of the reunion was the two hour forum held at Marquette University which attracted approximately 200 people. Many issues of concern were discussed, including the war situation in Somalia and Bosnia, the violence in our own communities here in the U.S., and the role of the news media in shaping people’s opinions of world events. Many of the participants stressed the point that we as individuals must stand up and fight for our beliefs and commitments before we point accusatory fingers at governments and institutions for their actions.

There were a number of statements made concerning Vietnam veterans which were encouraging. Michael Cullen said, "I think it’s important that we remember that we need to be reconciled to those who went to war, even in Vietnam, sometimes against their will, sometimes because their conscience also led them." He said, "We must have a healing with vets." As a gesture of reconciliation between Vietnam Veterans and war protesters at home, Cullen and I stood up before the gathering, shook hands, and embraced each other. Cullen then went on to salute the Vietnam Veterans who joined the protest movement and in particular the actions at Dewey Canyon III, where the Vets threw their medals on the steps of the Capitol.

Art Heitler, who was student body president at Marquette in 1968 and is presently a lawyer, spoke out on the plight of Vietnam Veterans. He said that although many war protesters at home, such as the "Milwaukee 14", paid the price for their actions with beatings and jail sentences, many veterans are still paying for their experience. Thousands of Vietnam Veterans continue to fight the war, with homelessness, PTSD, and suicide. They need the support of the people. Art’s law specialty is working with Vietnam Veterans in anti-discrimination suits.

James Forest, who flew in from Holland, said the message to be learned from the "Milwaukee 14" is, "Don’t be bullied or manipulated or guilt-tripped into obedience - or disobedience. You have a conscience; learn to hear it; no one can hear it for you."
VVAW Meets with Disabled Nicaraguan Vets

Louie DeBenedette
Clarence Fitch Chapter, NJ,NY

I returned to Nicaragua by land on March 14, 1993. I planned to visit the wheelchair Sandinista veterans whom our chapter had sponsored in this country in 1990 and who had joined VVAW at the anniversary of the Kent State massacre. I was accompanied by a former Sandinista soldier who had family in Nicaragua.

The situation among the disabled veterans has changed radically since the new UNO government had taken power. It is now very difficult for a disabled veteran to obtain medicine. A normal pension for a paraplegic is only twenty dollars a month. Unemployment in the country is over fifty per cent. The chances for employment by a person in a wheelchair are very small. Often the family has to help out with their meager funds. It is obvious that the policy of the United States is to finish off the Sandinistas little by little and as in our country, hit the veteran hard. The new government and the U.S. work hand in hand to prevent any Sandinista victory in 97.

I spent many days with Fernando Lopez, the ex-president of ORD (Organization of Disabled Revolutionaries), who visited us at Kent State. Fernando is paralyzed but drives a mean Susuki stick shift pickup, Russian made. Daniel Ortega, who is still the leader of the Sandinistas is up on charges now for having donated so much government property to the people before he left office. A lot of Susukios made their way into the hands of the people. I still think that Daniel Ortega is the most compassionate and intelligent President many of us have seen in a long time. Fernando has had to drive his truck up to the market and look for work hauling goods. Fernando is an honest man and loves his country. He is married and they hope some day to have children through a special procedure at the hospital in Managua.

But the expense is great. I had to put over $500 into the truck to keep it running. We visited a town called Boaco to make another donation to Antonio Oporta, wheelchair vet who needed more leather to make and sell saddles. The shop has been in existence for three years and employs a couple of veterans. I spent Good Friday and Easter up there in the mostly UNO city of former Contra. There were may processionings and religious services but Antonio and I sat these out watching X-rated movies taking turns watching for the parade to pass by and to look holy. Both Antonio and I are not religious, Jesus struggled for Justice for the poor. These religions services did not project the Christ I believe in. However, Nicaragua is full of faith but most of it is celebrated in the base communities, not in big churches. Cm. Thomas Borge, who is not Christian, said that the Christians were the Revolution. Chacma's reign has brought back the conservative religion which seeks power, not LOVE. Domino's Pizza donated four million dollars to Cardinal Abando y Bravo to construct the cathedral in Managua. Ten thousand children beg for food in the streets of Managua. It was much better under the Sandinistas.

I was saddened by the changes that had occurred. I can imagine what the U.S. has been up to in Vietnam by refusing to open up trade. In all the countries, Panama, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Vietnam there ought to be restitution for what had been done there by our war making. The struggle is terribly long and yet the Sandinistas met continue to want justice. We are all in this together and our common struggle is to disarm the U.S. and to create a civilization of LOVE. Our veteran friends in Nicaragua greet us and urge us to continue the struggle together. Dave Cline urged this fraternal sentiment in a letter I presented to the vets on behalf of VVAW.

GI's, Vets
March on D.C.

Dave Curry
National Staff

Over a thousand men and women serving on active duty and veterans joined hundreds of thousands of other advocates of full citizenship rights for gays and lesbians in Washington, D.C., on April 25. Members of military service and veterans were the third group to appear in the parade that wound by the White House and down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. Preceded by a small group of dignitaries (mostly show business types and members of Congress) and a stark contingent of AIDS victims, gay and lesbian active duty personnel from every branch of service marched in well-dressed ranks. One color guard preceded the active duty personnel and two more were staggered further back in the parade. Rank insignia as high as those of colonel and lieutenant colonel were worn proudly. Regional signs and banners indicated the national representativeness of participants. Perhaps, the most surprising contingent appeared near the end of the active duty and military veterans groups. About fifty cadets from the three service academies walked in an obviously nervous but determined throng behind a collective banner.

VVRN
MARKS 5TH ANNIVERSARY

It was 5 years ago this past month, on July 14, 1989, that the Vietnam Veterans Radio Network began transmitting from the local Community FM Station here in Kansas City, Missouri.

VVRN's informative, educational, and entertaining transmissions are a blend of historical reference, personal experience, and Rock & Roll! RFPI's Program Guide describes VVRN this way, "VVRN is forthright in its criticism of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war and those that followed. Its provocative message is interspersed with music of the era, giving life and memory to the words...unique and sometimes shocking in nature."

VVRN's weekly half-hour transmissions are available to all non-profit radio stations free of charge (individual subscriptions are available for a tax-deductible donation). For further information write to VVAW/VVRN, 7807 N. Avalon, Kansas City, Missouri 64152, or call us at area code 816-587-5966.
Elton Manzione
Southern Regional Coordinator
Athens, GA

He sat staring through the flap of the briefing tent at the green mountain face. The green was strange to him. There was no green like anywhere in the world. Sharp, crystalline, almost painful in its intensity—it was Vietnam's green. Like a jade Buddha it was sometimes faceting, and like an iridescent blowfly it was sometimes repellent. Today it was merely distant.

"You will be a minimum of three clicks beyond the demarcation line at the Ben Hai River. That means North Vietnam and, gentlemen, you know what that means." He knew, but did the briefing officer really know? Did the dumb-ass second lieutenant drouning on in this tent really know of no resupply, no air support, no artillery, no acknowledge? He knew and the men squatted around him on the floor knew.

"Shark people, again," Van Lessor whispered to him.

Shadow people. It was their name for themselves. Never heard and never seen, they worked in the dark and left only bodies behind to mark their passing. Their own troops rarely saw them when they came into a base camp or a few days stand-down their area was declared off-limits. They lived in dark bunkers and came out only at night.

"Keeps you night vision from getting fucked up," he told a curious grunt one evening. In a nine-month period Van Lessor knew of a few the things he said to anyone who was not one of those squatted around him.

In the official rosters they were called SEAL Team One, the Order of Battle they were B-53 detachment of MACV-SOG. The other troops called them crazy. The Vietnamese called them crazy. They called themselves The Shadow People.

"Proceeding up the banks of this small stream," the officer pointed with a stick. The officer's boyish good looks were all the more disgusting in contrast to the haggard faces and aging eyes of the men around him. How this group, over one of the few things he had said to anyone who was not one of those squatted around him. The Shadow People or whatever they were called was one of the Navy's most elite unit was a mystery to him. "Surf" Chamber wanted nothing more than to drive his souped up '56 Chevy—"fastest in Southern California"—and shoot the curl of his Hobie surfboard. "Professor" Downey loved books—dammed smart what a guy, a world in the system. "Some day I'll write one of own. All of y'all be in it," he had confided one night. Van Lesser flunked out of accounting school, destroyed a family dream and got a draft notice. "The first business science major to work with the Dutch East India Company in 1620; Wall Street, not Quang Tri, was what my father had in mind." Eddie "Swets" Swets had at first been bothered by having to explain the inordinate number of perfumed letters he had received his first two months in country. Now it seemed the first-class womanizer was bothered by the fact he had stopped coming.

And he had always known his womanless wanderings would put him where he didn't want to be. He had always felt like the right person in the wrong place. College was a waste. He had gone to school for the general label. For him, Vietnam was inevitable.

"It is important that this threat to free movement in the area be..."

The lieutenant asked in response to his star.

"No sir. No Questions."

"Then I guess I'm to assume you know all that correct?"

He shook his head slowly. "I don't know it all, sir. This is just my 10th insertion." "I'm familiar with the record of this squad. Your methods are... Let me put it this way, in a conventional war you'd probably all have been court martialed and shot by now."

"We get the neutralizing done."

"That's all we want on this. It's yours," the lieutenant turned on his heel and strode from the tent, tapping his pointer against his leg.

"What an asshole," Van Lesser said.

"Downey, Chambers! You two made me look like an jerk in front of that candy assed briefing officer again; I'm going to kiss ass and take names. Got that?"

Chambers shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I was just fooling around. Ease up, D.G."

Downey just smirked and turned his hands up in a gesture of surrender.

"Jesus Christ, another over the fence mission," Van Lesser grumbled, as they were leaving the tent.

Nothing new really, most were over the fence. The grumbling was just Kenny's way of getting ready.

"In fact, so they got you, not Swets punishment. Swets jumped up on a table and began singing, his campfire-like head bobbing and his body swaying to a Rhumba beat.

"Brassiere, I love the things you hold so dear."

And when you press them in my ear.

You show my balls in second gear.

A brassiere, brassiere.

Well, it sounded like "Brazil". Swets was getting ready too.

"Smiled" Downey as he watched Swets' antics and began to crack his knuckles as he walked in tighter and tighter circles—winding his mainspring he called.

He turned from the pair toward his own hooch. Slipping into the darkness hunkered, he took off the green cotton fatigue and sat naked on the dirt floor. He forced his vision into the darkest corner. Crossing his hands in his lap and straightening his back he began a slow, steady breathing. With each inward breath he inhaled a little more of the darkness, the decay, the death and the green around him. With each outward breath he forced a little more of the humanity, the tenderness, the logic and fear from himself. He focused on, sorted, cataloged and remembered each of the myriad sounds around him: hooch girls sweepin, a peddler on a squeaky bike, a c-ration can clattering into the garbage. He breathed deeply and listened to the most minute chatter coming from the regular Army compound and the clatter of pots and pans from the Mess Hall. He recognized the Professor's footfalls passing the bunker. Exhaling, holding his luings empty, he heard a dog paddling and snuffling around the edges of the SEAL compound. He could hear the angry buzzing of a paint sprayer somewhere, the acute scrape of the opposite corner of the bunker. Then he heard Van Lesser's shuffle, Swets' clearing his throat and the affix of a tape being wound. He stood and stepped through the door.

He walked naked across the dirt compound toward the others sitting in a small circle. Chambers, the mantracker. Van Lesser, the demo man. Swets, their nose. Downey, the eyes. He was a slight man and he carried a slight sound to a man breathing at 30 feet. He stepped into the center of the circle, and straddling the battery power cable, he stepped forward for a moment at each of the faces. Van Lesser's eyes reflected tension, Chambers' resignation, Swets' amusement. Only Downey's refused to yield any clue. They remained hard, reflective.

"I played the tape recorder on and stepped to his place on the edge of the circle. The thumping, savage beat of "Symphony for the Devil" saturated inside the compound.

"Please allow me to introduce myself. I'm a man of wealth and taste. I'm Jagger and as they slid into black pajamas. The regular Army guys in the camp—clerks, gunnies and radiomen—moved restlessly away from the fence of the SEAL compound. Night was falling.

... killed the Czar and his minister. Anastasia screamed in terror. They smeared the jaggled lines of camouflage paint on their faces.

Looking into the small mirror as he composed the side of his hub of aewes in a swath of dark green paint he could hear the bongos, congas and maracas pumping in savage harmony. The blood poured in his temples. He smiled, saw a grinned apparition in the mirror, shuddered and howled with Jagger.

"I rode a tank, held a general's rank when the blinkerigazed and the bodies stank." Chambers snubbed the bolt of his Belgian automatic rifle.

"every cop is a criminal and all you sinners, saints."

"Downey winked his head and bringing his foot back stiff, snapped it and smirked as the bamboo cracked and shattered with the sound.

"Just call me Lucifer ..."

He ran his thumb over the edge of his Gerber knife. "... cause I'm in need of some restraint ..." He plunged the point into the dirt, once, again, again, again, pulled it out with both hands and held it up point by point. "If you want to meet with some courtesy, have some sympathy and taste. Use all you well-learned queries or Yin your soul to waste." They shouted together now.

"Tell me baby, what's my name,"

he screeched along with Jagger as they walked single file toward the compound gate.

"Tell me baby, what's my name."

He heard the sound of the hooch being picked up by the fence and heard the man say under his breath. "The gods are in for some splendid sight" as he watched their five dark shapes headed toward the jungle canopy.

"Woo hoo hoo, woo hoo hoo, haw haw haw haw,"

Jagger's voice faded out across the compound as they disappeared into the high elephant grass.
It was dark before them, silent behind.

They let go. Nobody paid attention to the tape recorder. Somebody always did.

He could feel the dampness as the cool night began to distill the day’s humidity off of him.

He closed his eyes. He could see patches of moonlight through the light jungle canopy and his eyes burned through the darkness even then.

He checked the radio. He liked carrying the radio, even though he knew it made him look sure.

They had already left the main trail and followed Downey, sifting through the brush parallel to the easy, narrow, clearly marked trail. It was almost like when he was a kid, playing war in Independence Park.

It seemed as if each break he brushed awakened a memory.

Ludwig with the broken, bloodied nose; and his tears, the tears of a five-year-old over a hurt friend.

Mary Lou in the small, white casket—drowned in a tube by an insane babysitter. “Wake up, Mary Lou,” he had whispered into her small face. He had told her what faith he had had then. Another branch jolted loose the memory of Mary Lou—beak of a crane, low from the crows, from the Misselot, Ohio who had stepped on a mine and what was left went home in a handkerchief. The poor kid had died, and even in the same camp he saw his first sunrise in Vietnam. He had cried then. He wanted to cry now, but he couldn’t—he had this switch. It kept him from crying to play his part.

That’s why he liked the radio. It was the other switch—a connection with reality, a way to pull himself back from the jungle.

He hit the button on the radio handset and listened for the click. He was always afraid it wouldn’t work.

He walked up the column, touching each of the men on the shoulder and signing them to sit. He listened to the jungle. He heard the buzzard circle and his eyes strained to pierce the darkness. Swetz sniffed the air like a dog. Only then each of them nodded and waited for silence before he spoke.

“Cover leader, Raven two. Radio check,” he whispered into the handset.

“Raven two; Cover leader, check. Came the reply. The radio check-in completed, they filled down the column.

Every two hours they would perform this simple check-in procedure. It would let the officers back at the base camp know the team was still alive. If they didn’t check-in the PIO officers would begin to formulate the official denials. They were not supposed to be here, the orders were.

And he wasn’t there. Not anymore. He had traveled down a 60,000-year-old staircase of racial memory and experience, a nightmare jungle. The soldier too young to shave was gone. He was a primitive man.

It was with the eyes of this primitive man that he saw the figure crouching below him on the trail.

Downey saw it too and halted the group.

Downey, Chambers and himself held their positions as Swetz and Van Lessen moved down hill toward the crouching figure. He drew the auto pistol from his waistband and squeezed the trigger.

Swetz and Van Lessen, knives drawn, moved closer to the figure. As if in silent meditation, the figure sat, unaware of the danger.

He watched his two men as they crept with the utmost of care. He heard the sound of the Virgil. Swetz aimed his blade at the base of the man’s skull and moved in for the kill. Suddenly, he turned back toward them, threw his hands up in exasperation and motioned for the others like a man who had been shot. Van Lessen stood shaking his head.

He slipped the pistol back on safe and eased up the hill. Swetz pointed to the Buddha statue sitting along side the trail.

He almost wanted to laugh at the thought of the Buddha and the still drawn knives of Swetz and Van Lessen reminded him the world was no longer humor.

He walked up to the statue and saw the can of fresh joss sticks sitting in the Buddha’s lap. Little cones of piled ashes covered the area in front of the statue. He motioned Downey over and pointed to the incense container. Chambers and Van Lessen crossed the other side of the trail.

Downey gave him a thumbs up sign.

Swetz removed a grenade from his belt, popped the pin, dropped it down into a few small rocks in the bottom of the can and handed it to Swetz.

The Buddha’s upturned palms received the round of the grenade, and he could hear the detonator spoon in place.

Chambers and Van Lessen strung a trip wire, ankle high, across the trail a yard or two below the small jungle alcevo in which the statue sat. At the other end of the wire was a stout shoot of bamboo. At the other, a white phosphorous grenade. He motioned the other two toward the statue and they quickly, held his hand up to stop them.

He could hear movement further up the trail. He put his finger to his lips commanding silence from his four comrades.

Five or seven, he figured, judging by the sound.

The men moving down the trail made no effort to move quietly. They knew they were snug, confident. This was their territory. There should be no Americans here. It was their jungle. The night belonged to them.

He motioned Downey and Swetz to cross the small trail, just to verify the clearing. Chambers and Van Lessen nodded and moved to similar positions below the clearing. He slipped into the brush just behind the Buddha.

He had only squatted in the brush for a few moments when he noticed a tree spider, nearly as large as his palm, moving slowly up his leg. He wanted to crush its repulsive hairs, but his MOSV courtesies were among early ear shot. He gently brushed the creature from his leg.

Two of the Vietnamese approached the man and passed across the small clay reeds that formed the container of joss sticks.

The men shared a split second of immobility, brought on by surprise, as the grenade rolled from the Buddha’s palms and landed at their feet.

Suddenly the calm sing-song of the Oriental voices turned to excited chatter as the NVA tried to flee up the hill, and down the trail.

He could feel the heat and hear the blast and splintering of shrapnel and dirt and grain the detonated grenade. The five NVA looked like panicly revelers pushing through a crowded fire exit, as they tried to flee their god.

The two men running down the trail were blinded by the white phosphorous grenade as it detonated.

Downey and Swetz tripped the two fleeing up the trail and jabbed mercilessly at them with their knives.

The last man stumbled aimlessly into the clearing, reeling from blind.

ness, shock and fright.

He moved off to the side from behind the Buddha, knife in hand, just as the man seemed to regain his senses. He struck the panic button.

The knife went easily into the man’s throat and cut short the scream before it could leave his mouth.

He began to pull the documents from the man’s courier pouch as the others came into the clearing.

“Christ we made a racket,” Downey said.

“Shots, and the sound of the grenade doesn’t carry very far,” he replied.

“D.G. I think we’ve compromised our position.”

“Bullshit. There’s nobody out here.”

“What did we do this for?” Van Lesser asked.

“Intelligence. We got maps, lists, maps, look at the map”—he said, and the men were already prefering the documents from the pouch. “Besides, did you have any better ideas?”

“Nah, I guess not,” Van Lesser sheepishly admitted.

Downey leaned against the Buddha, shook his head.

“I think we fucked up!” he spat. “And you don’t get paid to think, do I.”

He snarled. Like a deaf surgeon, he cut the fingers to remove the dead man’s liver. Snulling at the reddish mass in his hands he lifted it and took a bit of it, sifting the raw meat at Downey’s feet.

“SIN loi. No Buddha heaven for this fucker,” he griped.

“Let’s get the hell out of here,” he said as the first of the blowfrys descended on the piece of liver at the Buddha’s feet.

He moved up the trail and took the slack, number two, position in the five man chain. Downey was on point. Half of steps forward, the man on point reached a clearing in the jungle. The village of Lai An, just 200 yards away, slept.

He motioned Van Lesser to his right and Chambers to his left. He handed the radio to Swetz and motioned for him to squelch in place. He started, with the grenade launcher, squatted along side Swetz.

Sithtering on his belly, he entered the clearing. Swetz and Downey approximatively as it dictlies behind him.

Drawing his legs up he pushed with the heels of his feet and stibbered forward, moving like some perverse cross between a snake and a frog. Four and a half feet, two thirds of a body length, and he paused to listen. He could feel his heart pounting against his ribs. The faint, whossh, bumb, whossh of the blowfrys in his veins was the only sound he could hear. Drawing his legs up he pushed with the heels of his feet.

In the next two hours he repeated the motion more than a hundred times. The village gate was just two feet away. He pushed a long blade of grass from the ground and, like a wasp, he brought the blade over in ever widening circles. About two and a half feet from the ground the blade bent slightly. He could faintly hear the low sound of a trumpet in the pre-dawn darkness—booby trap. The wire was anchored to a fence just a few feet to his right. The free end, like the other, was equipped with a claymore dump of bushes on his left. The half-moon crescent of a claymore was casted out to the trip wire clump. As he reached in toward the claymore something rustled in the brush, he brushed his hand and stumbled, crept back into the mud, and under it into his back, panting. He could feel his heart pound. He listened. Noth.

It took several buffets to calm his shaking hands. He reached in the claymore and carefully removed its firing mechanism, turned the mine around and replaced its detonator. He hooked a steel balls splayed out by the mine when it went off would rapidly thin the ranks of his pursuers should anything go wrong with the trap. He wiggled through the slats in the gate. Lai An still slept.

He skirted along the thatched shed and came net covering the anti-aircraft gun just ahead, right where the informant had said it would be. To the right was the hut of the cadre leader.

He watched as Van Lesser ducked behind the shed before going into the grass at the base of the home. He hoped Chambers had taken up position behind the well to cover their retreat.

The door wasn’t locked; they never were. It wasn’t booby-trapped—they were usually. Inside he looked out the trip wire. He was breathing, four of them by the sound of it. He remained motionless in the center of the room, waiting for Van Lesser to step out the door. He didn’t step out into the darkness. He noticed the almost imperceptible change in breathing of a trail of breaths. The signal that someone had crossed the trail from old to sleep from wakefulness. He held his breath. The figure stirred. The figure stirred. The figure stirred. The figure stirred. The figure stirred.

He moved. Placing his hand over the figure’s mouth he slashed the side Gerber on its still flat edge.

He remembered the training session. Up, under the first rib. The blade went in. The figure struggled more. Turn up and push, turn up and push. The heart and aorta. The figure ceased struggling.

As he withdrew the blade he heard the roar of an explosion. Van Lesser’s charge on the gun. The pop, pop, pop of rifle fire came from the base camp. Downhill.

He pulled the pistol from his belt and leveled it at the wakening figures in the hut. In the dark he was nothing but a shadow, a dot, a shape.

He spoke in a gutteral voice.

“Dîi, you hear. Outside, dîi.”

Three remaining figures placed their hands on their heads and filed sheepishly out into the dirt clearing in front of the hut. As he stepped out he saw other groups of village people huddled behind in front of their homes. The middle-aged man he had just pushed out the door glared at him and muttered a phrase over and...
GULF WAR SYNDROME

Ray Parish, CHICAGO CHAPTER STEERING COMMITTEE

In a recent Readers Digest "Humor in Uniform" story, a commander told his troops in the Persian Gulf War that they should worry about the smoke from the oil-well fires because the US Health Service said that they merely had to "avoid prolonged breath-
ing."

This story reveals the government's attitude towards the health hazards of the GIs encountered and sets the stage for this most recent victimization of American troops. I think that the thousands of veterans and their families who are suffering from the medical problems and resultant financial hardships of the "Gulf War Syndrome" find little humor in this story.

Congressional subcommittees held hearings and issued reports on the "mysterious" medical problems that are afflicting at least 5000 veterans of the Persian Gulf War. The information which came out during these hearings shows that US and allied troops twice reported exposure to chemical weapons during the war, and that the De-

partment of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) have purposefully ignored medical evidence and misdirected their research, evaluation and treatment efforts, pos-
sibly in order to cover up the size and nature of the problem. Persian Gulf vets have reported a variety of symptoms since their return: fatigue, headaches, weight loss, hair loss and discoloration, memory loss, skin rash and growths, sensations of "pins and needles" in various areas, loss of sensation in various areas, confusion, nervousness, dizziness, muscular weakness and spams, respiratory problems, deterioration of various or-
gans, impotence, infertility, miscarriages and birth defects.

So far, the military and the De-

partment of Veterans Affairs (DVA) have ignored the fact that over 80% of these symptoms are "stress." The military's response was to simply discharge those military personnel whose medical problems af-
fected their performance, but few got medical retirement or disability compensa-
tion. Some were punished for not being "fit for duty.

The DVA began investigating these problems and set up a "Gulf War Veterans Registry," but only after the veterans' complaints got the media's attention, and Congressional and pub-

lic opinion became a factor. Now another 5000 Gulf vets have come forward to join the mil-
lions of Atomic Bomb test, Agent Or-

ange, PTSD and other disabled vets in their never-ending struggle to get medical care and compensation when challenged by "lost" records, DOD and DVA and "national security" policies.

MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY

One of the people testifying on June 9 before the House Subcommit-
tee on Veterans Affairs was the investigative reporter of the Veterans Affairs Committee was Dr. Richard Haines, a Major in the In-
diana National Guard. After spend-

ing $1,500 of his own money and the evaluating the problems of hundreds of vets, he's come to the con-

clusion that the military simply doesn't want to spend the money, and the "military medical establishment" simply doesn't want to spend the money and the "military medical establish-
ment" is the answer. The military medical establishment, MCS, also known as ecological or environmental illness or hypersensitivity.

According to Dr. Haines, possible causes of the veterans' problems in-
clude: pollution from the Kuwaiti oil-
field fires, vaccines and medications designed as antidotes to biological and nerve gas weapons, aerial spraying of pesticides, spraying of diesel oil to con-
trol dust, radiation exposure from de-
pleting uranium in use in armor and ar-
mor-piercing shells, portable heaters using gas and diesel fuel in unventilated tents, contamination of drinking, cooking and washing water with diesel fuels, exposure to chemi-

biological weapons, gas attacks when the battlefronts were destroyed and Leishmaniasis, a parasitic infection.

It is this great variety of problems and possible causes combined with the government's reluctance to take re-

sponsibility, which has resulted in so-

much confusion. Part of this has to do with the controversy surrounding Mul-
tiple Chemical Sensitivity. It is a rela-
tively recent phenomenon that is mis-

understood by many in the medical community and rejected by some. It is an acquired disease caused by or exacer-
bated by exposure to toxic chemicals or agents.

In a pamphlet for mental health professionals, Kay McCarty, a Chicago social worker, explains: "There is a growing concern that the thousands of toxic chemicals which have become part of daily living are adversely affecting certain segments of the population, causing the development of MCS in some. While most synthetic chemicals do not bother most people, the number of the "chemically sensitive" is grow-

ing at an alarming rate."

This is exactly what has happened to these veterans and a growing num-

ber of civilians, especially these living near waste dumps and incinerators.

While their bodies may have been able to tolerate and recover from a slight exposure to several chemical agents or a higher exposure to a single agent, get-
ing a heavy dose of several toxic agents may be enough to cause MCS, if it doesn't kill you immediately.

In my capacity as Executive Di-

rector of the Midwest Committee for Military Counseling, Dr. Haines and I had long conversations about the prob-
blems faced by Atomic Bomb and Agent Orange veterans and how the Persian Gulf vets could try to avoid these same pitfalls. Part of Major Haines testi-

mony is titled "How to design a medi-

cal cover-up." Since it "says it all," it's reprinted here.

If a powerful, self-appointed group were to implement a medical cover-up, how would they proceed? What tactics would they employ? What public relations "spin" would they use? What conclusions would they draw?"n

"In any matter of major public policy, "lead" agencies come to the fore and are expected to address issues of major importance. The lead agencies involved in the Gulf War Illness controversies have so far been the VA, DOD, and CDC in that order. And when a major controversy emerges, lead agen-
cies routinely project themselves as omniscient, paternalistic; everything's under control" type organization.

"But, the fact is, what we have is a leadership group that is quite out of control, that is without public accountability, that has abdicated its medical ethics and succumbed to private corporate interests."

"The cover-up problem for the managers, however, is that their game plan would leave this wide-ranging col-
lection of symptoms without a diagno-
sis, a tenuous proposition for a presti-
gious public institution that supposedly has "everything under control." And true to the tactics that powerful private interests use for the past 30-40 years have exercised normally, they conjecture that stress is an underlying etiology, even though their own data supports no such hypothesis. Despite the fact that the psychiatric portion of the 2123d ACOM study of these 79 Indiana Re-

servists is clear that the symptomatology is not of psychiatric origin nor structure, you skin over this part and send deadlines throughout the country that stress is the primary e-
tiology.

"But, in any event, you maintain to the Congress that there is no "uni-
ifying pattern" of specific illness, at least of all the illnesses that you be-

lieve have been made known to con-
sider. You would work hard to obscure from the masses that your basic blood test would not show toxins, nor meta-
bolic imbalances, nor psychological group was demonstrating them. De-

spite the fact that widespread liver de-


cificiency, asthma, and immunodefi-
ciency are hinted in your own govern-
ment test results, you retain these pa-

thologies from public view.

"To tighten the lid on this cover-up, you ignore major documentation flood-
ging your office that the symptomatology all points to environ-
mental illness, and you declare dozens of offers of free environmental testing, as well as cash offers from other sources to even pay for all of this.

"Next, for those soldiers whose conditions are medically dire, you con-

centrate only on the MANIFESTA-
tions of their illness. You surgically remove the soldiers' strange, warlike growths; their color polyps, and for the epidermal rash, you prescribe oint-

ments, which don't work, so you sim-
ly accuse them of poor hygiene.

"In any comprehensive coverup, mind control is a "multiplier," so be-

fore you even review their health his-
tory, or ask them if they've been around environmental hazards, you remind the veteran patient that his condition could not possibly be from the Gulf War. And you brush off most of their ailments as incidental and attributable to other causes."
**BEWARE OF "VVAW"**

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War" or on its web page. Their activities are centered mainly in Seattle, San Francisco, and New York City. They often claim to be part of our organization and their most recent antics include bombarding American flags at demonstrations and at the war bond rallies. "VVAW" is not a faction, caucus, or unit of VVAW. They are not affiliated with us in any way. "VVAW" is actually the creation of an obscure, ultra-leftist group. Its leader, John La Noue, is designed to pick off of VVAW's history of struggle and continued activism. Their objective is to create confusion and deception in order to promote themselves. They urge all people and organizations to beware of this rogue outfit. Don't be fooled, they aren't what they claim to be. Forewarned is forearmed.
Vietnam Vet Visits School

by Linda Bronnec, Erin Claezen and Hollee Kelly

Recently classes in the Alternative School have been studying about war and the effect that it has on people’s lives. We have been especially concentrating on the Vietnam War. In English classes we are currently reading “Born on the Fourth of July,” by Ron Kovic. Kovic is a Vietnam veteran who was shot and is now paralyzed from the waist down. Kovic devoted much of his life to protesting against the war in an organization called Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

Veteran Dave Cline Visits A-School

In our Social Studies classes, we have also been studying about Vietnam, as well as incidents in other situations in Somalia and Haiti. As a follow-up to all this, we had a Vietnam veteran by the name of Mr. Dave Cline (who is a member of VVAW) visit our A-School to discuss his experiences in Vietnam. Mr. Clive is very dedicated to his cause, and has spoken to large audiences across the country. He spoke of his opinions toward War and answered some of our questions about Vietnam. Overall, we had a very interesting discussion and we appreciated that he took the time to come and speak with us. Here are some of our reactions to his visit:

Danielle Leamy . . . I think Mr. Clive gave us a better outlook on how it really was in Vietnam, and what the vets really think of the soldiers, and how some movies like Platoon can glorify things at times. I think I understand more about what happened and I felt horrible that our soldiers had to go there and live the way they did. I also think that most wars are not necessary and that everyone has to work more to try and get along. There are much better ways to handle things and our government needs to realize that and stop sending young people to foreign countries to die.

Michelle Gatto . . . I was very interested in what Mr. Clive had to say about the Vietnam War. He told us his feelings about the War and how he was wounded over there. I think that he and the other soldiers must have been very brave because some of them, like Dave, were only 19 when they went to War. I don’t know if I could talk about a war like that if I were 19; it would probably be too painful and I would try to block it out of my mind. I don’t think there should be any more wars; we have to try to get along.

Joe Pentler . . . I had very little reaction to most of what Dave Clive said. Of course, I respect him, and a lot of things he said were true. Although he also had a lot of things I didn’t relate to and that I disagreed with. I am sure most people who volunteer feel differently than people who were drafted.

Tommy Davis . . . Vietnam Vet

Dave Clark Visits A-School on October 21, 1993. He was a very interesting speaker and he helped me to understand what kind of things happened during the Vietnam War. It was interesting to hear what type of emotions he experienced when he was wounded by a grenade, it also, seemed that he was very concerned with why the government sends people to war, when sometimes it’s not worth it. He thought the government was just using soldiers as bait, which is why they joined VVAW when he returned from the war. I guess I would say thank you to him for helping me understand more about Vietnam and getting to meet a vet.

Bill Bronnec, Chicago VVAW, talking with student at Ken State. VVAW has a vision of war different from that usually heard. Photo by Dan Steiger.


Vet Returns to ‘Nam On a Hire Mission

By Bruce Stanley

HANOI, Vietnam—Bill Willert takes pride in his service as a gunner’s mate on a U.S. Navy destroyer that shelled communist targets during the Vietnam War.

Now a successful manufacturer, Willert has returned to Vietnam to build a factory and create jobs for up to 500 Vietnamese.

“They deserve it,” he says.

Willert, 47, is president of Willert Home Products, a family-run firm that makes mothballs, toilet bowl deodorizers and potpourri. He spoke from his home in Hanoi, Vietnam’s first trade fair for U.S. companies, which ended Sunday.

“Any time I went, I was looking for these kinds of opportunities to help Vietnam,” Willert says.

Willert first came to Vietnam in 1980 as a gunner’s mate aboard the USS Stoddard. He commanded a gun crew that fired daily salvos at communist forces near the central Vietnamese city of Da Nang.

“I knew who was on the receiving end of the shells,” he says with passion. “They were people trying to do harm to U.S. troops.”

Nevertheless, he now calls the Vietnam War unjust and says the mistakes are continuing today.

President Clinton lifted the 19-year U.S. economic embargo against Vietnam in February, but he still has not established full diplomatic relations with the country or granted it most-favored-nation trading status.

“Because the U.S. lost the war . . . many Americans don’t like Vietnam,” he says. “Conversely, we won the war with Japan and Germany, and we are very good trading partners with both of those countries.”

Willert hopes to do something about that. His plans include finding a local partner to help him grow flowers for potpourri and make incense sticks, plastic fly swatters, flypaper strips and mop handles.

None of these projects, with a total estimated start-up cost of $300,000, would cost American jobs, he stresses.

Willert first employed Vietnamese who came to the United States as refugees in 1985. Today, they make up about 20 percent of the 350 workers at his main plant in St. Louis.

Willert, a college dropout whose firm generates revenues of $60 million, says he is not a typical businessman.

“The concept of increasing the size of my company for dollars or profit is not my No. 1 thing,” he says. “I’d rather provide jobs for more families in St. Louis, New Jersey, Los Angeles, or West Virginia—and Vietnam.”

New Species of Deer Discovered in Vietnam

By Nick Ludington

WASHINGTON—Scientists have found a new mammal species—the giant Muntjac deer—a deer-like animal that was considered a "lost world" in Vietnam, the World Wildlife Fund reported Thursday.

The discovery was made by Vietnamese researchers and biologists in northern Vietnam’s Vu Quang Nature Reserve where another new mammal species, the Vu Quang ox, was discovered in 1997.

It escaped the bombing and military pesticides since the Americans and French had sprayed large parts of Vietnam’s countryside during the Vietnam War.

Scientists working in the area also have found evidence of other new species of fish, two previously unknown bird species and an unknown type of striking yellow shell.

Vu Quang was described by British scientist John Mackinnon as "a lost world."
Vets Stand Down

Homeless in Chicago

Barry Romo
National Coordinator

Chicago VVAW worked three full
days running the kitchen, washing the
floor, cleaning the stove and dishes. It
wouldn't have happened without the
leadership of Bill Bramon and Mike
Terry, and the constant work of Joel
Greenburg and Annie Lugisbili and a
cast of 30 other VVAW members. 600
vets registered. 800 homeless were fed.
We worked with other vets groups
like Viet Now, and VVA, along with
VA employees who put homeless vets
needs first.

VA staffers such as Phil and Gail
showed us all what professionalism
and heart can accomplish in coordinat-
ing services, volunteers, and homeless.
They put in triple shifts and were a real
eexample of what the VA can accom-
plish. VVAW presented each with a
special gift from Vietnam to show our
appreciation.

VVAW is known for standing up
to bureaucrats and has taken on more
than a few VA administrator offices in
our time. But the VA, different vets
groups and the homeless people en-
joyed each other's company and com-
radeship.

Of course a low point was when
the suits showed up—expensive VA
honcho bureaucrats who had to have
their photo op. (No, they did not visit
the kitchen.)

All photos on this page by Jesst Aymne
Romo.

Serving the homeless at the Chicago Vets Standdown
REAL WAR STORIES FROM FORMER YUGOSLAVIA
An Interview with Greg Payton

VVAW member Greg Payton toured parts of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia during late September and early October 1992. His tour was co-sponsored by the Veterans’ Interna-
tional and peace activist groups in the region. The purpose of his trip was to meet with conscripts and vol-
unteers in the former Yugoslavia who are now returning to their homes, demobilized, injured, and traumatized. Greg is active in VVAW and knowledgeable about post-trau-

What did it feel like to be in Serbia?
Greg: After a six-hour train ride from Vienna, I arrived in Belgrade, Serbia. There is no fighting in that region but a lot of tension. I was surprised that I didn’t see many Serbian soldiers on the streets.

Everybody knows the war is happening, but the Serbs are in denial. Most people try to act like they are someplace else. What is this going on over there?

The attitude is “It’s not me, it’s them. There’s nothing I can do. I don’t know why they’re pouring sanctions on me. Why do I have to suffer like this?”

I talked to some young people and they just don’t know what is going to happen. Their parents were from family and friends in Zagreb. They don’t understand why they are fighting.

What is the effect of the sanctions?
The U.N. sanctions against Serbia began in May and were beginning to have an effect when I was there. Lives are disrupted. Things like there is no gas left or it costs $10 a gallon. People who normally have freedom to travel and use their cars wait for the trolleys. There are lines for certain foods like milk and other goods and prices have gone up. Money is being controlled on the black market and salaries are cut. My host’s father was making about 1200 marks a month. Now he is making 150.

Many Serbians wanted me to influence my government to lift the sanctions. They thought I should go back and say the U.S. should at least provide humanitarian aid. My response to them was to ask what they were doing to petition their government to stop the war. Then they were silent. Nobody ever answered that question.

What peace activities did you participate in while in Serbia?
I went on major television and radio shows in Belgrade. I was interviewed by the newspaper for the week-end section. The peace activists had very good media contacts. The Anti-War Center organized a forum at a student cultural center. The dialogue was good. The turn-out was poor and there were other problems. The relationship between peace groups and veterans is nothing like in the U.S. The forum organizers went out of their way to get a veteran who they thought would be appropriate, but when this veteran, Stivo Kovačević, had a chance to speak, he grabbed the microphone and said, “I would go back to the front tomorrow. With my one leg I’d go back. We can’t allow them to kill us. The Muslims might have a jihad.” I’m used to opposing viewpoints, but he created a very emotional situation and really dominated the forum.

What else is the peace movement doing?
In Belgrade, they hold forums, contact the media, and produce literature, but they didn’t seem to have a handle on how to rally the people or how to follow through on some of their organizing techniques. One of the suggestions I made to them was that from now until the end of the year they should have something going on every week. They should keep their literature in the streets where people can begin to identify with them. Many people in Serbia weren’t even aware there is a Serbian peace movement.

In Pančevo, just outside of Belgrade, I spoke at a forum and a good crowd listened for three hours, asking lots of questions. It’s a small town and has a close-knit group of anti-war activi-

ists.

In Bonn, I had dinner with WRI activist Marko Hren and his two room-
mates. All three of them had different opinions about the war—nobody could agree about anything. These are people who live together, have political con-
sciousness, and are in the peace move-
ment, but they all have different ideas. One thought the U.S. should intervene; show this as the only way to end the fighting. These differences have an effect on organizing.

What kind of treatment is there for war-related stress among veterans?
I went to Novi Sad in northern Serbia where I spoke at a forum with other veterans including a strong Serbian veteran, Sava Slojšin. He fo-
cused on the problems of veterans and how the government wasn’t doing enough. They were doing something for Serb civilians.

I visited a new post-traumatic stress clinic at the University of Novi Sad and we had a discussion with the clients there. During the discussion, one of the men stepped up and said, “Listen, I’m still on active duty. I’m not a veteran.” He told me about the things with the kind of talk about they are still at war, and it’s very diffi-
cult to realize you’ll have to mobi-
lice to take care of post-traumatic problems. People don’t even think about the war ending because the objective is still unclear.

You went to Croatia. What were your impressions of that trip?
To get to Zagreb you have to take a ten-hour bus ride from Subotica through Hungary and back into Croatia. You have to change buses after you cross the Hungarian border be-
cause the Serbian bus can’t go to Zagreb. While we waited, two buses full of refugees pulled up. You couldn’t see the pain on their faces, but also the relief when they got off the bus. There were kids on the bus but no playing and no laughter.

When I arrived in Zagreb there was no one to meet me, and I got stuck all night in the bus station. I sat in the post office with two veterans and a guy who worked at the post office. One veteran was about 24 years old, and he talked about the atrocities—babies being slit in half—and other things he had seen and done. He couldn’t find work, couldn’t travel, couldn’t do anything. At 24 years old he felt he didn’t have anything else to live for.

I learned a powerful lesson that night. The postal clerk had helped me and he wanted to exchange numbers because he might come to New York. So I put my notebook address on it to a page for him to write on. He said, “Oh no, I will not put my name on the page with him. He is my en-
emy and I will not do it.” There was a Serbian’s name on that page. The Serbians are in denial, but the Croatians are clear: “Kill Serbs.”

What did you learn about military deserters or refugees?
Before returning home, I went to Vienna, Austria, to a big meeting with deserters from Bonn, refugees, and reporters. One deserter on the panel started talking about his experiences and began to have flashbacks while he was talking. I had to talk him out of it because no one else knew what to do. He started talking about the atrocities he had seen. It was ironic that this happened during this program.

The peace movement in Austria has a support network for deserters, and many live there. There are about 60,000 known deserters, but neighboring countries have closed their borders to more deserters and refugees. They can’t find work or get papers, and people in those countries are reluctant to support them because of job compe-

ition.

More personally, on my flight from Austria I started talking to the man next to me. It turned out he was a deserter on his way to Australia. He had been in the army and didn’t want to go back. Here was a young man 23 years old who just lost his whole life, em-
brassed to be fleeing the war. His girlfriend and mother are in Serbia, all his teenage recollections are in Serbia, and he’s going to a completely new world and has no idea what to expect. He was really scared about what he was doing.

Did you speak with any women vet-

erans or get a sense of women’s re-

actions to the war?
There are women in the military, but none of them came forward to talk as veterans. Most of the women I talked to are opposed to the war, both in Serbia and Croatia, but the bottom line is that they are very afraid to say anything because they don’t want people to think they’re not supporting their men. Also the men don’t seem to be open to women’s opinions. The women are very frustrated because they don’t have any voice.

Just to close up, did you come away with any particular things to do or ways that you see that vets here can be helpful?
I’m already in the process of talk-

ing to other veterans and sharing infor-
mation about things that are taking place. Not only stuff about post-trau-
matic stress, but just daily organiza-
tional stuff. I’ll be getting in touch with other veterans groups too like Disabled Vets of America.

I think the only thing that can hap-

pen is for the Serbs to have daily rallies to stop this war. People are afraid to say that they are opposed to the war because they are afraid they’ll be ostracized from their community. The peace movement in Serbia needs to just keep hammering away at the conscience of the people.

PHOTO BY LAURIE SANNO
Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Where We Come 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 Vietnamese vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among veterans to U.S. military actions and to highlight the strong feeling among the youth of this country to end the war. In the early days, the organization was small, but it grew rapidly and by the end of the decade it had a membership of over 50,000 through-out the United States as well as active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam.

The membership has been growing since then and today VVAW is one of the largest veterans organizations in the United States and has a national office in Washington, D.C., and regional offices in many other cities across the country.

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INSCRIPTION

The words from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Inscription are:

"Yellow and red are the colors of freedom. The red Ground is the soil of all the veterans' and aggressors from beyond the 18th parallel. (i.e. The Great Wall of China). The opening to the wall through which this dedication and recognition flow is blocked by the white marble representing United States military aid and support. The wall is exact and the world political power is in the offensive action pushing the aggression back."

It was first used at the 18,000 "advocates" in Vietnam in March of 1969.

INSCRIPTION OF VIETNAM VETS AGAINST THE WAR

We took the MACV's path as our own, replacing the wall with the upside-down (like we believe), the international symbol of Solidarity. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of U.S. agen-

cies in Vietnam as well as to emphasize the people's desire for peace. As the Allied forces poured into the territory, the MACV officials also put forward lies. The U.S. military was not fighting the Vietcong in Vietnam but from the People's Republic of China, and was indeed trying to "save" Vietnam from itself and so our exploitation. Our imbalance has come to represent veterans fighting against this advancing war. We are fighting for peace and a free world for veterans and their families.

In Vietnam, we are taking the path of the people, a path that includes the whole world. We are taking the path of the people, a path that includes the whole world. We are taking the path of the people, a path that includes the whole world.

Point Man of the Vets Movement

Join with VAWA

Since 1967 VAWA has led veterans in the fight for peace and justice. We stood up to reveal the nature of U.S. crimes against the people of Vietnam. We held rag groups for veterans with post traumatic stress disorders 10 years before the VA started the same program. We were in the forefront of fighting to get benefits for veterans of Agent Orange, a fight which continues today.

VVAW has been out in front when it counted. We catalogued the blacklists of the U.S. government in Vietnam—when the government said no U.S. troops had been in Cambodia, we had the proof that they had been there. We worked to get the Vietnamese veterans honor into the veterans group from the People's Republic of China, and was indeed trying to "save" Vietnam from itself and so our exploitation. Our imbalance has come to represent veterans fighting against this advancing war. We are fighting for peace and a free world for veterans and their families.

We're asking VVAW and the VAVA and other organizations to group up for any reason the march without permission.

Fighting for Veterans, Peace & Justice since 1967

National Office
P.O. Box 408594
Chicago, IL 60640

Join with VAWA

Point Man of the Vets Movement

VWA Re-Up

Since 1967 VWA has led veterans in the fight for peace and justice. We stood up to reveal the nature of U.S. crimes against the people of Vietnam. We held rag groups for veterans with post traumatic stress disorders 10 years before the VA started the same program. We were in the forefront of fighting to get benefits for veterans of Agent Orange, a fight which continues today.

VVAW has been out in front when it counted. We catalogued the blacklists of the U.S. government in Vietnam—when the government said no U.S. troops had been in Cambodia, we had the proof that they had been there. When the Black population of Cairo, IL., were under siege by racists, we used our military experience to convoy food and clothing; ex-

medics from VVAW used their military experience to start a clinic in rural Alabama. Again and again VWA did things that others would not do, took up causes that others would not advocate.

In our almost quarter of a century, VVAW has seen many great movements come and go—and many times come back again. Today there are many avenues for a veteran who wants to see positive change in our neighbor-

hoods, cities, country or world. In the late '80's, a Vietnam veteran who wanted change—was an activist for years, let us know because he was still a member. We're creating new mem-bershchip cards—we'll send them out when we get the forms in.

VVAW has been able to do what we have done, to enjoy the reputation we have today, because of our members—because of you. We hope to hear from you once you get this issue of THE VETERAN:

VWA wants you: now!
Vietnam Veterans Tell Their Story

A Forgotten Anniversary?

Joe Miller
National Staff

During this summer of anniversaries, from D-Day, to the walk on the moon, to Woodstock, I am afraid we might miss another extremely important anniversary. This anniversary is important to me, as it should be to all veterans of the Vietnam War, including the families of those who lost loved ones there and the millions of people here at home who fought so hard to end the war before even more were killed.

Thirty years later, the question still arises in those quiet moments: How may I have saved? When thinking about the Vietnam Veteran Memorial in Washington, I sometimes wonder who among those nearly sixty thousand names is truly at rest and refused to go off to war if he or she knew the truth (or untruth) of the war’s origin, as I did.

I then realized that myself, this story, or its main outlines, was part of the public record since early 1968, when Senator Fulbright held hearings of the Gulf of Tonkin “incident.” Perhaps by then it was too late, though. Our “national honor” was at stake. Our “boys” in the field had already failed, and now we changed the rules by (replacing with fresh faces and whole bodies.) And so, by 1971, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution would die a quiet death, unlike those who were sent off to war after its 1964 passage. Yes, the war would go on, bringing death and destruction to thousands more Americans and millions of Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians. The inertia of commitment to those who had already failed took over, combining blood and flesh after blood and flesh, until we just got tired of it all.

How may I have saved? Do I have a chance to redeem my earlier silence and lack of personal courage? Will I live up to the commitment to save my son and the sons and daughters of fellow veterans, not to mention the parents and children of any future “enemy.”

Since the end of the Vietnam War, many have attempted to regain that oil post-World War II sense of national omnipotence and righteousness. That war has been redlined under a barrage of truce-inducing book and articles written by self-serving journalists, scholars, politicians, and novelists. Young people are being told fairy tales by Michael Groves, waved in the flag. In this magical transformation, outright lies by public servants, from the President on down, are now excused due to their high moral purpose. Policies which resulted in grotesque levels of death, maiming, and general destruction are now again put forth as “necessary” for the attainment and maintenance of peace. This is directly from the Orwellian script: war is peace; freedom is slavery; ignorance is strength.

Well, I would like to remind people of the facts behind the escalation of the Vietnam War. The real story is about lies, lies which drew many of us into an orgy of death, destruction, and lies that would continue for more than 10 years.

The residue of that period is still with us, and no numbers of memorials or parades will ever really wash it away. We must remember this anniversary and not allow the manipulators to cover it over.

Thirty years ago, during August 2-5, 1964, a series of events took place that became known as the Gulf of Tonkin “incident.” The official story told to the American people then claimed that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had engaged in an “unprovoked” attack on the destroyer, USS Turner Joy, on the afternoon of August 2, 1964. Supposedly, the Maddox was sailing along in international waters, just minding its own business when attacked. This was the first lie.

The Maddox was on an intelligence mission, a Desoto patrol, which had as its objective the provocation of showboat clashes on communications on the northern coast of Vietnam, as well as those on the Chinese island of Hainan. The collection of communications signals from these areas were meant to aid in the efforts to break Vietnamese and Chinese codes, a task of the U.S. Naval Security Group working under that national Security Agency (NSA). The temporary intelligence team on board the Maddox for this mission included Vietnamese and Chinese linguists, a couple of whom worked me at the Naval Security Group Detach- ment on the island of Taiwan. On these patrols it was often necessary to turn the ship landward, enter the target nation’s territorial waters, and then begin recording the verbal engagement. This time, however, the response was more intense than anticipated, and the North Vietnamese sent boats to repel the invading American warship. The Maddox sent out a call for help, and fighters from the ship, the U.S. Ticonderoga (CV-14), were sent to save the day, in the best John Wayne tradition.

Two days later, our ship received another call for help, this time from the Maddox and another destroyer, the USS Turner Joy. They claimed they were under attack by North Vietnam- ese torpedo boats again. This “attack” was taking place late at night, during heavy seas. There were no definite sightings of “enemy” boats. In fact, one of the first U.S. pilots on the scene, Commander James Stockdale, from one of our ships, claimed there was no attack. This was ignored. It was enough for the Johnson-McNamara team in Washing- ton to claim that an attack had indeed taken place. This was just what they had been looking for to justify in-

increased American involvement in Viet- nam. This was the second lie.

These two lies were the basis for upping the war in Vietnam. For on August 5, 1964, U.S. air attacks were made against military installations in northern Vietnam, which the U.S. called “reprisals” for the “unprovoked at- tacks” against our ships in “international waters.” Lies, lies, and more lies. Then, on August 7, the U.S. Senate (with only two dissenting votes) adopted the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which would function for the next six years as a blank check that allowed the Johnson Administration to increase the level of direct U.S. involvement in a combat role. Then the Nixon Adminis- tration arrived on the scene, and the damage had already been done. No one wanted to hear that U.S. troops might have died in vain, died for a series of lies. Nixon even bragged that he did not need the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to support what he was doing in Indochina. The dynamic of war-making has taken hold, once the rubber lines were used to continue the war until 1975.

For me, this anniversary brings pain at the thought of so many who died. And I wonder if our people’s struggle for national unity and independence. All the result of cold warrior’s lies. This pain is especially acute, since I was one of those who knew the truth of the Tonkin Desoto patrols, having served in the naval Security Group between 1961 and 1964. Some of the intelligence personnel on the Maddox were workmates of mine. I worked at the Naval Security Group Detachment at Linkou Air Station on Taiwan. After the so-called “inci- dents,” I talked with one of them and was not horrified. After all, I was still part of the intelligence “club” who felt more important because we knew what other did not. Unfortunately, this sort of silliness still attracts young people into the lying business.

My personal horror grew as ques- tions drove me to learn more about Vietnam, as the numbers of dead Viet- namese, Americans, and others piled up day by day and week by week. How many might have been saved if people like me spoke out more earlier? How many names on that black wall in Washington might not be there if the truth were told sooner? The wall itself might never have happened!

So, we should always remember how easy it was for the government to manufacture its own “facts” to support a desired policy. How easily we all ac- cepted the lies, even those of us who knew they were lies! We should cer- tainly remember all those who died or suffered serious injury while in the war or fighting against it.

While many may prefer the euf- phoric memories of Woodstock, these should be balanced by the memory of the murdered, clobbered, and graceful, Goodman, Chaney, and Scherwen, as well as the memory of the Tonkin Gulf, August 1964.

Ellie Shuman
Chicago Chapter

On Saturday, 4 May, a mock D- Day invasion was staged on Montrose Beach (along Lake Michigan) in Chi- cago. This reenactment was a disgrace and an insult to the vets who partici- pated in the real thing.

The invasion of Normandy in 1944 was planned by the brass and carried out by the soldiers from France, Great Britain, Canada, the U.S. and a small number from various occupied countries in Europe. About 19,000 soldiers lost their lives on or near the beaches where the landing took place. Today, their grave markers make an eerie ocean of white on the green meadows of the D-Day memorial site in France.

Veterans whom we have heard in- terviewed on recent television specials tell their experiences of bravery, hor- ror and death on the beaches code- named Omaha and Utah. Some were launched in 12 feet of water and forced to ditch all their weapons and equip- ment to avoid drowning. Many swam to shore through a sea of corpses and body parts. They fought their way up the beaches inch by inch just trying to stay alive. All the time there was the deafening pounding of the weapons fire and the yelling of the troops. All there were the African-American soldiers many of whose job it was to gather up the dead, whole or in pieces, for identification if possible. The women nurses, following shortly be- hind the invasion, patched together the wounded.

The reenactment allowed some macho war lugs to have an outing in the park, to strut their stuff, risk-free, in front of the television cameras. The reenactment sanitized the battle. It allowed us to engage in the kind of sentimental nostalgia that casts a rosy veil over the past and makes it cozy and safe. It trivializes the sacrifices made by the vets and their importance to our nation’s history.

A more fitting memorial would have been to remember D-Day with a parade. Similar to the Welcome Home parade for Vietnam veterans, it would honor the vets, alive and dead, and the sacrifices they made. Fifty years is a long time yet vets still vividly remem- ber. All of us should learn to see this historic event as clearly as they do.

D-Day “Reenactment”