



# THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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## Fight Back. Resist. Stop the Bombings. Stop the Wars.

VVAW NATIONAL OFFICE

From the National Office

Like a broken record, the Trump follies seem stuck in a groove, and the ruling classes are still dancing to that tune. We are as tired of this playlist as we're sure many of you are. It is hard to be positive while the constant barrage of lies, corruption, attacks on our liberties, and utter bullshit continues.

By the time you see this in print, the mid-term elections will be over. Will there be a big change in Congress? If so, will the Dems do anything better, or will they mire themselves (and us) in more stagnation? Or will they provide the leadership needed to turn us sharply away from the fascistic direction this country is heading?

If there isn't a change, what options remain for our decaying democracy and beleaguered military? Incompetence and corruption in civilian leadership are reducing the military's effectiveness and undermining the care veterans rely on. No matter who controls Congress, we must use our decades of experience fighting against the rich and their wars and demand justice on many fronts.

The current administration has made it clear over and over again that profit-making is primary. Not just profit, outright theft. Whether it's trying to steal the resources of other countries while waging war, destroying the nation's capital while defunding needed social services, or



Veterans Day in San Francisco, November 11, 1977.

"Der Fuhrer" Trump diverting funds to pay tribute to himself by stamping his image and name on every possible surface. This clown show needs to end, and the head clown needs to be tossed off the stage.

The continued, pointless war with Iran needs to stop. We need a truthful accounting of what's happening in the growing disaster in the "overseas operation." An atmosphere of secrecy permeates the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gulf region. We bomb

ships and shore installations with no accountability for ever-shifting goals. US bases have been destroyed, and the administration withholds the details. Iran is playing rope-a-dope with the US, while Trump/Hegseth deplete all our military stockpiles. Who benefits from this? Not the American public. Not the troops and veterans. Not the citizens being bombed. Once again, Trump will find a way to line his own pockets and the pockets of the Military-Industrial Complex, while

the Iranian Revolutionary Guard continues to weather the storm.

Meanwhile, Trump shrugs off concerns about US actions and support for Netanyahu's expansion of his war on Israel's neighbors, claiming the wars are "small potatoes." Trump also play acts at engaging with Putin for a resolution to his "special military operation" against Ukraine. Trump's government isn't even pretending

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## Moving Forward: Building Libraries for Vietnamese Children

VVAW

VVAW continues to fund children's libraries in Vietnam. Our **FIFTH** library has just broken ground. The overwhelming support VVAW members and supporters continue to show for the building of children's libraries and learning centers in Vietnam provides something positive for all of us in these dark times.

Our partnership with the Library of Vietnam Project (LOVP) continues to prove mutually beneficial and, most importantly, is providing educational opportunities to some of the poorest and most war-torn parts of Vietnam. In LOVP's almost three decades of building children's libraries in Vietnam (and Laos and Cambodia), VVAW has been their largest fiscal sponsor. We have you all to thank for that. Your donations and bequests are crucial as we move forward with more libraries.

We have overcome recent setbacks from nationwide redistricting in Vietnam, and construction is moving forward. In December 2024, Vietnam convened a major meeting of Communist Party leaders and



Huynh Thuc Khang secondary school. Groundbreaking ceremony moved inside because of monsoon. September 22, 2026

representatives from the then 63 provinces and cities in Hanoi, resulting in Vietnam now having 34 provinces.

Redefining political alignments is hardly a new thing in Vietnam. The stated goal of this new realignment is to eliminate bureaucracy. Earlier realignments occurred in the 1940s,

50s, 70s, 80s, and now in the 2020s.

Chuck Theusch of LOVP reports, "The planned fifth library, in the pipeline for processing by the then Binh Dinh Provincial District authority, had to be reintroduced to the Gia Lai Provincial Authorities. They harbor a more historic concern for American presence in their country. Gia Lai Province military enforcement was now being applied in the old Binh Dinh Province. The Gia Lai Provincial Security spent a great deal of time doing nothing but making reporting demands on the Project, irrespective of the local teachers, administration and People's Committee that hungered for VVAW's generous offer of a 2026 Library & Learning Center. Effective June 18, 2026 we terminated our Project in Gia Lai and moved to Quang Ngai, ironically closer to the historic My Lai Library built years earlier."

Beyond providing a physical

library and computer lab, our projects have helped spur additional government and private funding for other programs that benefit students and the local population. The Zhi-Shan Foundation Taiwan, a Japanese foundation for child and youth development in Asia, has donated books and resources.

Chuck Theusch of LOVP says: "Every VVAW and LOVP school and public library has a student or citizen volunteer group that is assigned given duties in the care and cleanup in and around the libraries on a regular basis. The libraries play a central role in extending environmental sensitivity to the students. It is not uncommon when we visit the libraries and schools to see students doing building and grounds clean ups and enhancement. At the Pho Vinh Library they have planted trees and maintain a flower bed around the VVAW Readers Garden. This

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More VVAW Library photos on page 8.



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Fight Back. Resist. Stop the Bombings. Stop the Wars.

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to hold Putin accountable for the aggressive probes he is making against neighboring NATO countries. We do not think this is a mistake. Will the US do anything as the challenges to European borders increase? Trump keeps cozying up to Putin, so it's not at all certain the US would go to the aid of the people of Europe after another outright Russian incursion. European leaders only need to look at how Trump keeps Ukraine dancing on a string to imagine what their fate will be.

China is sitting back and watching Russia and the US spend billions on war and engage in stupid trade wars with our former allies. They are winning the economic war, picking up the pieces as the US disengages from long-established world markets. China is putting increasing military pressure on Taiwan and South Korea, while moving to take over as much of Asia as they can. As China makes these moves, longtime US allies Taiwan and South Korea will be left defenseless. The people of these countries won't be able to rely on an exhausted, depleted, and demoralized US Military.

Who suffers? The contrast of money for warfare and not the health and welfare of Americans has never been more stark. We've seen this game play out before and have devoted our lives to changing it. The contradictions of end-stage capitalism have never been more severe and harsh.

Often when the economy is in the shitter, we see the increase in the economic draft. Today's youths, with limited resources and options, are pressured into the armed services, believing the lies recruiters tell them. Once in, like us, they realize they are cattle. We are encouraged that recruitment numbers are going down, because they see the current wars

as senseless and led by idiots more interested in GI testosterone levels. But beware the draft.

The treatment of those in the military has been plummeting to new lows. Trump and Hegseth disregard the mental health crises among Active Duty, Guard, and Reserves personnel. Tours in the Gulf have been extended into 2027. The trauma of being bombed at bases that lack adequate air defenses is downplayed because Trump declares our actions against the Iranian people are not a real war. We wonder what Pvt. Bonespurs knows about that. He even showed his true colors recently: the orange chicken, smuggled out in a food truck.

Secretary Hegseth is surrounding himself with sycophants rather than military and civilian leaders who have earned their places in the upper ranks. He has done this through an unprecedented ideological purge that favors a force filled with white males with specified levels of testosterone. His stated opposition to "woke" policies swings the needle 180 degrees, replacing the long-standing merit-based promotion systems with a litmus test for White Christian Nationalists. The Nazis proved that armed forces become weaker when their leaders remove their ability to think and respond individually as situations change. But hey, at least there will be no unwanted facial hair in sight. That's mission critical, isn't it?

Once the troops return from the current conflicts being waged, they will join us in struggling to access the care we were promised after our service. We have a conflicted history with the VA, but after years of challenging the system to live up to its promises, many of us now depend on it to maintain our health and quality of

life. The damage our service caused, both physical and mental, is part of the cost of war. The VA must be maintained and improved, not outsourced to more Trump cronies whose only goal is to line their pockets while making it more difficult to demand adequate care from a diffused and privatized health care system. We support the efforts of National Nurses United, Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, American Federation of Government Employees, About Face, Veterans For Peace, and others fighting against the outright destruction of the VA system.

Disrespect continues for veterans through the starvation of the VA while corporations reap the rewards. Major MAGA contributor Larry Ellison's company Oracle received a \$10 billion no-bid contract in 2022 to modernize the VA's records. They have delivered a broken product, basically sabotaging the existing system. Now they are coming back for \$17 billion more. Meanwhile, VA staff reductions and outsourcing to "community partners" continue.

The Administration and Pentagon are playing a shell game with taxpayer funds. Congress allowed the so-called "One Big Beautiful Bill" to take funds away from programs that enhance the health and welfare of Americans and then stand idly by while billions are wasted bombing Iranians and building ballrooms, triumphal arches, golf courses and more. The abuse of the National Guard continues. They'll be stationed in DC into 2029 with no concerns expressed about how much that will cost.

We think Trump's and Hegseth's destruction of the US military is a distinct threat to global stability. Some may cheer as our military capabilities deteriorate, but we've

seen the world becoming less stable. The world isn't Star Trek. There is no federation to maintain a peaceful coexisting society. Aggressions will occur when imperialist nations see vacuums of power. We do not advocate abandoning Europe to Putin, Taiwan to China, Greenland to the US. We also emphatically do not support the Nazification of the military and its increasing focus on internal "enemies." We also fear ICE becoming Trump's SS.

What can we do? Organize. Participate in national demos. Connect with younger anti-war veterans. Find out who is helping the disenfranchised in your communities. Fight back. Resist. Stop ICE. Stop the bombings. Stop the wars.

Organize and confront public officials. Let's not give the Democratic Party a pass either. If voters manage to overturn the MAGA leeches in Congress, will the Dem Party step up and clean out this pernicious, fascist organization? Or will they, once again, start whining for "unity" with the right?

We will not be fooled again. We are older, slower, and frailer, and we have lost many comrades along the way. But we are not fools missing the signs of rising fascism! The fight for Veterans, peace, and justice that we have waged since 1967 is more important than ever.

Progressive change has never been easy, and we know the struggle will outlast us. Join in the fight for a more just world, because the rich will never concede power willingly.



Veteran Staff

Jeff Machota  
Bill Branson  
Joe Miller  
Meg Miner

Thanks to those who have put VVAW in their wills. These gifts have helped VVAW keep on keeping on and have contributed to the building of libraries in Vietnam we are sponsoring. If you would like to put VVAW in your will or make a major donation now and don't know how, contact the National Office at [vvaw@vvaw.org](mailto:vvaw@vvaw.org). VVAW is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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VVAW Merchandise



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## Building Libraries for Vietnamese Children

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involvement in the presence of the new building is true at each of the LOVP libraries, and has been since 1999."

Here are some updates on the Library and Learning Centers funded by VVAW.

### #1 From our first library at Pho Vinh Secondary School, Duc Pho Town, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

*Mr. Tuoi, Vice-Headmaster reports:*

During the 2025–2026 school year, Pho Vinh Secondary School Library successfully organized library lessons and reading periods as part of the school timetable. Every class had at least three library reading periods and one library lesson each semester. The library also strengthened cooperation with other schools by organizing book exchanges and a mobile library program.

One of the library's outstanding activities was a bilingual book-promotion drawing contest and a weekly bilingual book newsletter introducing interesting books. These activities helped students improve their English skills while developing a stronger interest in reading. The library also participated in the "Books: A Bridge of Connection" competition organized by the Zhi-Shan Foundation and won multiple prizes. Two entries were selected for the provincial competition. In addition, the library encouraged all students to participate in the Quang Ngai Reading Culture Ambassador Contest. The library selected ten outstanding entries and submitted them to the provincial competition.

Looking ahead to the 2026–2027 school year, the library will continue to improve the quality of its library lessons and reading periods while further developing its book clubs. The school also plans to raise more resources to purchase new books, improve the open reading space, and organize more creative activities such as book-based drawing contests and author talks and exchanges. In addition, the library will continue promoting bilingual book introductions and applying technology in library management. These efforts aim to encourage students to develop independent reading habits and attract more students to participate in library activities.

### #2 From our second library at the Hanh Trung Primary School, Nghia Hanh Commune, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

*Vo Thi Xuan, Headmaster reports:*

Thanks to VVAW and the Library of Vietnam Project, the school's long-held dream of having a library became a reality. The library has become more than just a place for reading; it is now a vibrant learning and creative space where students can explore knowledge, develop lifelong learning skills, and nurture their aspirations.

By implementing a child-friendly library model, the school has gradually fostered a strong reading culture. The library has been equipped with

age-appropriate books, educational materials, bookshelves, tables, chairs, reading mats, and other facilities, providing students with a comfortable and inspiring learning environment.

Hanh Trung Primary School is committed to preserving and maximizing the value of this library by continuously improving its services, maintaining its facilities, and promoting lifelong reading among students. In the 2025–2026 school year, the library received approximately 5,200 visits. In the summer of 2026, 750 students borrowed books to take home.

On behalf of all teachers, staff, and students, we sincerely thank our sponsors for their invaluable partnership and generosity. We wish the funders and Quang Ngai Provincial Children's Protection Fund continued success in bringing meaningful educational opportunities to children across Vietnam.

### #3 From our third library at the An Nghia Secondary School, Kim Son Commune, Gia Lai Province, Vietnam.

As part of our ongoing support of the children's library and learning centers we have built in Vietnam, we just sent a \$5,000 grant to upgrade the computer lab at the An Nghia Secondary School. This was our 3rd VVAW-funded library built in Vietnam and dedicated to the memory of Barry Romo. This library and the computer upgrade happened because of you and your donations.

*Ms. Phan, Librarian, reports:*

During the past school year, the library at An Nghia successfully carried out a wide range of activities to serve the students, contributing to the promotion of a reading culture throughout the school. The library currently houses more than 5,500 books covering a variety of genres, meeting students' learning and recreational needs. The library maintained a regular reading schedule for all 19 classes, with approximately 3,000 student visits recorded during the school year. In addition, it organized several outstanding activities and collaborative programs with a mobile library, attracting more than 1,000 participants. The library also provides a welcoming and reader-friendly environment, featuring an open reading corner and themed book displays, complemented by vivid photographs showcasing library activities.

Looking ahead, the library aims to enhance the quality of its services further while promoting innovation in a modern and sustainable manner. The library plans to acquire an additional 1,000–1,500 books, develop a digital library, and increase the use of information technology in library management and reader services. The library will also expand its reading space, establish creative learning and reading corners, and organize at least five to seven major events throughout the school year to foster and promote a

strong reading culture among students.

### #4 From our fourth library at the Hanh Minh Secondary School, Phuoc Giang Commune, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

*Ms. Thao, Headmaster, reports:*

During the 2025–2026 school year, the Hanh Minh Secondary School library successfully supported teaching, learning, and reading activities. Books, newspapers, and other learning materials were well organized, managed, and kept in good condition. The library also provided timely borrowing and returning services for teachers, staff, and students, helping them use the library more effectively. The Social Science Department actively introduced books on different topics to support teaching and learning and to support the 2018 General Education Program. The library worked with the school to organize activities for Vietnam Book and Reading Culture Day (April 21). These activities included book displays, book introductions, and reading promotion campaigns that encouraged students and teachers to read more.

In the 2026–2027 school year, the library will continue improving its services and supporting the school's educational goals. It will make good use of its facilities, books, learning materials, and equipment. The library also plans to add more textbooks, reference books, life skills books, STEM books, digital transformation materials, and other learning resources to support the 2018 General Education Program. The library will continue to promote reading by organizing regular book introductions, storytelling activities, reading festivals, and themed book displays. It will work closely with teachers to include reading activities in lessons and other school activities to help students develop their knowledge, skills, and good learning habits. Students will also be encouraged to use the digital library, online learning resources, and information technology to find and use learning materials more effectively.

In addition, the library will continue to keep accurate records, check and protect library materials, and ensure that the library is safe and well managed. It will work to maintain and improve library quality according to current standards and create a

friendly, modern learning space that meets the needs of today's education.

### #5 From our fifth library at the Huynh Thuc Khang Secondary School, Nghia Hanh Commune, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam.

This VVAW Project is the fifth library in a remote region of Vietnam, where none has ever existed before. The school will receive the resources that come with the new buildings: professional librarian staff, projects, programs, books, and computers. VVAW will once again invest in caring for and improving the school and grounds.

*Chuck Theusch reports:*

The groundbreaking was held Tuesday, September 22, 2026. Gary Counihan and Mike Dixon of the Library of Vietnam Project were there. The monsoon season has arrived, but the event was moved inside and went forward. In Vietnam, rain on a construction commencement day is deemed good luck.

Born in 1876, Huynh Thuc Khang was acting President of Vietnam while Ho Chi Minh was in France in 1946. He is an icon of Jeffersonian proportion in Vietnam History. Widely revered as Cy Huynh ("Great Grandfather" Huynh), he is remembered as an unyielding intellectual of high moral integrity who dedicated his life to his country. He was a leader of the Duy Tan Movement (modernization). The Huynh Thuc Khang VVAW/Peters Library will be a profound homage to the life of inspiration he led.

So, we still have a lot going on. Once again, thanks to major funding from long-time VVAW members Richard and Debra Peters, this library will serve the children of Vietnam.

We would love to fund and build a **SIXTH** library in 2027, but need your support to do so. A few major gifts would go a long way towards making that goal. Maybe you can be one of those donors? If you would like to include VVAW in your will to support these projects, contact the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. But why wait? The children of Vietnam would appreciate your support now, and you can see the results of your donation.



Mr. Dinh Duy Long speaks at the indoor groundbreaking ceremony, September 22, 2026



# Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

Reprinted from the Spring/Summer 2002 issue of *The Veteran*.

"The first casualty when war comes is truth." Senator Hiram Johnson said that in 1917. So now we have the War on Terrorism, and you know that in this one, truth is a casualty.

The War on Terrorism is a war unlike any war we've experienced. Since World War II, the United States has been consistently involved in military actions all around the globe. There have been major conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf. We have sent smaller numbers of troops into places too numerous to mention. We've had bombing missions over Iraq, Serbia, Libya and elsewhere. What is clear about all these actions is that they were not done for any noble purpose. They were done to keep America and American business the dominant force on the planet.

This new war has its differences. The attack on the Trade Towers was an attack on the people of this country as well as on the government. As such, it requires retribution. That makes it different from the wars we're used to. The problem is that the retribution is left in the hands of George II and all those kinds of people who have been conducting fifty years of unjust wars.

George II's idea of how to answer 9-11 and conduct this war has been to declare Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda the masterminds of 9-11, and to decide that the Taliban were sheltering Bin Laden and his general staff, making the Taliban also the enemy. (The problem here is that those given the power to make war on terrorism get to choose who the terrorists are.) Since the Taliban is the enemy, it was necessary to bomb the shit out of Afghanistan and then send in foot soldiers to mop up. Meanwhile, the

media is unquestioning and plays its role of cheerleader.

If the goal were really to get Bin Laden and key members of Al Qaeda, the best thing they could have done probably would have been to smoke the peace pipe with Iran. The Iranians didn't like the Taliban, and they had the best intelligence on who was where in Afghanistan. Now it's too late.

In Afghanistan, the country's Taliban leaders were giving safe haven to Al Qaeda and probably Bin Laden. If you accept the assumption that Bin Laden and Al Qaeda were behind 9-11, must you accept the Bush line that a war was necessary? Or was there another way out? The Taliban wanted to stay in power and would probably have agreed to a trial in a neutral country—but Bush needed to shed blood.

Several Taliban leaders were invited to the United States in 1997. They were taken to Omaha to visit an Afghan cultural center and then to Houston, where Unocal wined and dined them. It seems Unocal wanted permission to build a pipeline across Afghanistan. The Taliban said no to Unocal.

Southwestern Asia has large oil and natural gas deposits. The most logical and lucrative market for this oil and gas is in East Asia. The most viable distribution would be a pipeline run through Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to Karachi on the Arabian Sea, where it would transfer to tankers headed for the Orient. Tajikistan and Pakistan were willing, but the Taliban said no.

If the Taliban had said yes to Unocal, would there have been war? George II has been accused of having no brains, but this was a no-brainer. The Taliban were not nice people. They treated women like cattle; they

tore down famous statues, and for minor offenses they stoned people to death or cut off their limbs. They had Osama hidden in their mountains. They said no to Unocal. John Ashcroft said God was on our side. It was a win-win situation, so the chief said yes. There was war.

So what are the results of the war so far? Not many terrorists have been killed yet, but we've probably killed more innocent civilians than were lost at the Trade Towers. And that number could rise rapidly. Afghanistan has a limited food supply after a couple of years of drought. Starvation was warded off by world relief agencies, which now can't operate because of the war.

Things aren't much better on the governmental level. This is a country with tribal feuds. It reminds one of Yugoslavia after Tito died. This Northern Alliance government the United States put in power has little chance of succeeding unless they come up with their own Tito-something. That's not likely.

On the home front, the pigs are at the trough. In the name of 9-11, Congress is dishing out the dough for corporate America. There was the famous \$15 billion for the airline industry while their laid-off employees got nothing. Boeing, biotech and drug companies, for-profit hospitals, and insurance companies are all getting their share. Vice President Cheney said that America has to prepare for a fifty-year war on terrorism. I guess he means that he expects us to tighten our belts for fifty years so these corporations can defend us.

The truth probably is that only a surgical strike in Afghanistan by an elite team with good intelligence would have done any good in this phase of the War on Terrorism. The

truth is that the way the war was conducted in Afghanistan probably angered more people and helped create more terrorist foot soldiers. The truth is that good police work is needed to uncover terrorists and that some ongoing police work is good. The truth is that some of the police work that is now happening is fascist and unnecessary (see the USA PATRIOT Act).

And perhaps the biggest truth is that 9-11 and most terrorist acts against the United States would not happen if US foreign policy were just. Osama bin Laden was once a US ally. He wasn't concerned with the United States after the end of the Afghan-USSR war. Supposedly, he turned against the United States after we stationed (infidel) troops in his holy land of Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War and kept them there.

People who hate us in the Arab-Islamic world do not do so because they envy our way of life, as American commentators and politicians are so fond of saying. Hatred arises because we support repressive governments in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They hate because we are responsible for the deaths of many Iraqi children, and because we supply Israel with the weapons to kill Palestinians. The truth is that as long as the United States maintains its aggressive, imperialist foreign policy, it will stir up much resentment, and within the many who resent will be a few who hate and will act on their hatred.



BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, AUTHOR, AND LONG-TIME VVAW MEMBER.

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir, Secretary of the Navy.

My name is John A. Lindquist. I was in the USMC from 1967 to 1969. I was a radio operator with the 3rd Marine Division along the DMZ from May 4, 1968, to May 25, 1969.

This letter concerns the naming of the new US Navy aircraft carrier—it was going to be named after Doris Miller, a Black sailor aboard the US West Virginia at Pearl Harbor,

December 7, 1941. He saved fellow sailors and manned a machine gun, shooting down two attacking Japanese aircraft. He died on Nov. 24, 1943, when his Auxiliary Aircraft Carrier was sunk. He was the first Black sailor to win the Navy Cross.

President Trump wants the ship named after himself. What did he do during the Vietnam War and the Cold War? He did nothing. He was a draft dodger. His dad paid for a fake medical

exemption for Heel Spurs.

I was in Marine Boot Camp with a private who had Heel Spurs. Every month he went to sick bay, but was back the same day. We should be offended by Mr. Trump's request.

President Trump, in 2019, called Marines in a graveyard in France "Suckers and Losers." He said this to his Chief of Staff, Bernard Kelly, when Kelly asked the President whether he wanted to visit the Belleau Wood

graveyard.

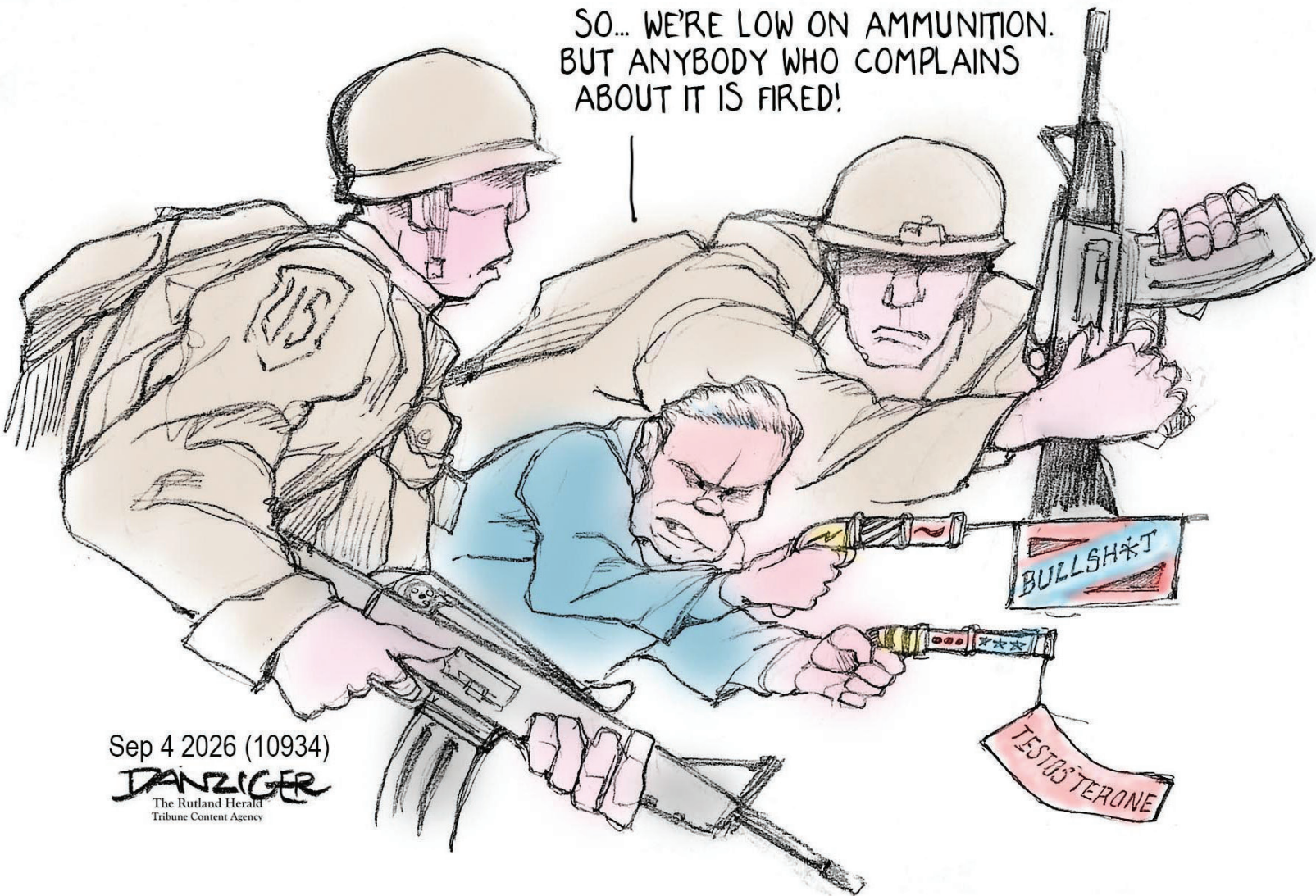
Stop this insult to American active-duty personnel and veterans. Name this ship after a real American hero and veteran, Doris Miller.

Semper Fidelis,  
John A. Lindquist



### Mr. Hegseth at the Front

SO... WE'RE LOW ON AMMUNITION. BUT ANYBODY WHO COMPLAINS ABOUT IT IS FIRED!



Sep 4 2026 (10934)  
DANZIGER  
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# The Weight We Carry: Leadership, Truth, and the Battle for the VA

AIMEE POTTER

What do we write these days? To be completely honest, some mornings I sit down and don't even know anymore. We are watching the world burn through another senseless war driven by a billionaire agenda—one that drains our collective resources and destroys human lives, including those of vulnerable immigrants, for no good cause. The heavy macro-realities of our world can feel entirely paralyzing.

It is against this backdrop of global exhaustion that I recently became the Union President of our local here in Chicago. I'll be the first to tell you: I didn't step up because I wanted to. I did it because it was necessary. This administration has beaten us down as federal workers to the brink of despair. Our contract has been eliminated, reinstated, and, again, subject to multiple re-eliminations. We walk on the proverbial eggshells daily, waiting for a pin to drop. Another HR rule change impacting how performance is rated, or another attempt to diminish the federal workforce is always looming.

Recently, I ran into a former FEMA employee. He told me he retired two years ago. I told him how lucky he was not to be working for this administration at this time in history. He agreed. He told me stories about the work FEMA did, providing disaster relief to children, and how heartbreaking it has been to watch the agency's decline and the services it provided nationally. He described how this administration has ruined the civil service and the federal programs that help people, how they have especially lied to Veterans, and how they are being used as pawns until they have eliminated socialized healthcare, padding the pockets of the rich.

Right now, we are living in a time where we all have to do things we don't want to do for the greater good. Veterans need an unwavering voice, and it is up to us—as workers, as advocates, and fundamentally as human beings—to stand up for those



About Face marching through downtown Chicago on Veterans Day, November 11, 2025.

who are currently unwilling or unable to stand up for themselves.

The fight for justice is an everyday grind because we are being attacked on every single level. But if there is a beacon of hope in this exhausting landscape, it is you. A union is only as strong as its membership. Over the past year, we have watched our local grow, develop, and foster incredible new leaders. Like me, many of these individuals didn't originally want to get involved. Yet, they felt the passion, saw the threat, and found the internal drive to step into the arena anyway.

We need that fire now more than ever, because the threat at our doorstep is existential. VA Secretary Doug Collins continues to appear on television and social media to insist that he has no intention of privatizing the VA. But we work here. We know the ground truth, and it looks entirely different.

When an administration aggressively outsources veterans' healthcare to private providers and orchestrates deep workforce cuts—slashing tens of thousands of frontline positions nationwide—what other conclusion can any rational person make? Privatization remains the demon around

the corner.

We have to ask the hard questions: What happens to the veterans we serve if this system collapses? What happens to the highly specialized, irreplaceable years of clinical and administrative experience held by our bargaining unit? There has been an ongoing surge in public money funneled directly into private Community Care providers. Yet, Collins continues to stand on his *Fox & Friends* and X platforms claiming the exact opposite. They tell you one thing online, but execute another in our medical centers. Which one do you believe?

The reality is that this administration is actively starving the system. They are pushing through massive staffing cuts to vital services—including lifesaving behavioral and mental health treatment—while burning through our hard-earned union contracts. They bypass hiring requirements and claim there is no need to backfill vacant roles.

Why do they do this? Because a workforce protected by work standards, safety guardrails, and a collectively bargained contract is a direct threat to their top-down agenda.

When you have a contract, they cannot simply terminate your employment whenever they see fit; they must follow rigorous legal guidelines, data, and due process. This administration behaves as if the rules simply do not apply to them.

These past two years have been incredibly long, and frankly, the road ahead feels never-ending. As we try to chart a path forward and lean heavily on our community coalition partners, I often find myself wondering: How do we keep carrying this weight?

Some days are much heavier than others. Some days feel like an infinite loop, with the same institutional roadblocks as the day before. But we carry it because we have each other. We carry it because the Veterans of Chicago depend on the protections only this union can provide. We are growing, we are organizing, and we are not backing down. Stay unified, protect one another, and let's keep fighting.



AIMEE POTTER IS A LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER, AND AFGE PRESIDENT, LOCAL 789.

## 30 Years of The Veteran

JEFF MACHOTA

For decades, Barry Romo made sure *The Veteran* (and before that, *Winter Soldier* and *The First Casualty*) was published and distributed to VVAW members and supporters across the country. First he did this as part of a collective, then later with only a few to help out. In 1995, Barry couldn't finish the current issue.

In the summer of 1996, after viewing the incomplete layout at Barry's apartment, I told him I was pretty sure I could give it a try. I brought the production into the computer era. Joe Miller, Lisa Boucher, and, of course, Barry helped with the content. I also brought the VVAW mailing list into the computer era.

Hard to imagine that was 30 years ago. I don't think in the summer of

1996 I had any idea I would still be doing this all these years later.

Many things have changed since then, most significantly the new format we had to adopt 10 years ago to keep up with the changes in the print industry. Also, the loss of Barry two years ago, and the loss of super reviewer John Ketwig this year are deeply felt.

The wars of GW Bush increased our circulation to close to Vietnam War level numbers. We still distribute over 17,000 issues of the paper across the country twice a year. The days of stamping and labeling them around my dining room table are long past.

We have also put every issue of *The First Casualty*, *Winter Soldier*, and *The Veteran* online on our website. 55 years of articles by and for VVAW

members and supporters.

Over the 30 years I have been working on this, countless people have contributed articles, poems, photos, and cartoons. It amazes me that we can still get great articles and keep rediscovering great photos from

the past.

Thanks for the opportunity to play a role in keeping VVAW alive.



JEFF MACHOTA IS ON THE VVAW NATIONAL STAFF.

## 20 Years of The Veteran

BARRY ROMO

Reprinted from the Spring 2017 issue of *The Veteran*.

All praise to Jeff Machota on 20 years of putting out *The Veteran*.

Jeff is not a vet but loves VVAW people so much. He got his start in the struggle for peace and justice by working to end Apartheid in South Africa and didn't stop. He worked on the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign. He is an anti-war activist from the Gulf to Iraq, an advocate for good, affordable health care, and a supporter of the rubber workers

striking in Decatur, IL. If it is racist, he is against it, including demanding the removal of racist sports mascots nationally and locally.

I used to put out *The Veteran*, and readers would race to find all the misspelled words. Now the paper looks very professional. What a man, thank you, Jeff, for helping to keep VVAW alive and kicking!!!



BARRY ROMO WAS A LONG TIME LEADER OF VVAW. HE PASSED AWAY IN CHICAGO, MAY 1, 2024.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

50¢

Volume 26

Fall, 1996

### Recognition, Finally!!

On July 11, 1995, the U.S. and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam announced the establishment of formal diplomatic relations. This is something that we in VVAW have called for since the end of the shooting war in 1975. While we celebrate this action, we must remember the price the people of Vietnam paid while waiting for successive U.S. political administrations to make this move. Though the shooting war ended in 1975, for the next twenty years the U.S. waged political and economic warfare against the people of Vietnam, even to the point of supporting Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge against them! Finally, when Vietnam was knocked down to its lowest economic level, with the denial of international funds for reconstruction, not to mention the continued effects of the war (Agent Orange poisoning, unexploded ordnance, etc.), moves were made by political and economic elites in this country to open formal relations with the former "enemy." We must recognize this as a victory for the people of Vietnam.

continued on page 17

### VVAW Celebrates Anniversary

By JOE MILLER, VVAW NATIONAL OFFICE

The U.S. government has finally decided to establish normal diplomatic relations with Vietnam, and this is certainly an occasion to celebrate. It's about time! It must be remembered, however, that our government kept up an economic and political war against the Vietnamese people ever since that day in 1975, April 30, when they took their country back, after nearly thirty years of the intense struggle.

To celebrate the anniversary of that earlier event, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) and our friends gathered at the Hothouse in Chicago on Saturday, April 29, 1995. This event was first planned at the annual VVAW National Meeting in October, 1994. We wanted to have a party to remind people that Vietnam's struggle against U.S. aggression was a just struggle. Further, we wished to remember and to celebrate our role in helping to end the U.S. war against the people of Vietnam.

Nearly one hundred and twenty people attended this gathering for a small donation, half of which would be sent to Vietnam to assist in people-to-people aid projects. There were also VVAW projects. continued on page 6

### Vietnam Era Ends at the City University of N Y

By JUNE SVETLOVSKY AND BEN CHITTY

Twenty-two years ago, the last of over two and a half million American men and women sent to war in Vietnam came back to the world. Used by an imperial government, abused by a vindictive Pentagon, neglected by a corrupt and demoralized Veterans Administration, shunned by self-styled patriots among our fellow countrymen, we picked up our lives and carried on. Or at least tried.

For a lot of us, that meant school. For most of us, trying to make do on the G.I. Bill, the schools were public. The largest single undergraduate institution in the country—then and now—was the City University of New York, with its 18 colleges scattered across the five boroughs. Like everywhere else, veterans' continued on page 7

### Fallen Comrades

- Jack McCloskey - obit on page 9
- Shelly Ramsdell - obit on page 10
- Walter Collins - obit on page 10



# Control of Congress May Shift, But Doug Collins Will Still Be VA Chief

SUZANNE GORDON AND STEVE EARLY

### Here's What VA Defenders Can Do!

By Labor Day, 2026—the traditional start of general election campaigning—the likelihood that MAGA Republicans will lose control of Congress was no longer a question of whether, but of how much.

Depending on the scale of any mid-term rebuff of President Trump that puts Democrats in charge of the House and/or Senate, the White House's post-election response is likely to include, in traditional fashion, a cabinet shake-up.

Some controversial Trump appointees—Kristi Noem, Pam Bondi, and Lori Chavez-DeRemer—did not even make it to the midterms. They lost their top jobs at the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice, and Labor, respectively, because of mounting bad publicity about either gross misbehavior or personal bungling of presidential directives.

President Trump fired them almost as fast as he once dismissed failed contestants on *The Apprentice*. President George W. Bush may have been an early fan of the show because two decades ago this November, after heavy Republican losses in the 2006 mid-term elections, he quickly pushed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld out the door.

Rumsfeld resigned on November 8, 2006, to deflect mounting popular criticism of the administration's failed "shock and awe" campaign in Iraq. In the wake of its sinking fortunes at the polls, the floundering Trump-Hegseth war on Iran may require a sacrificial lamb as well.

We can confidently predict that it won't be the guy who went to Penn rather than Princeton, where our current DOD Secretary penned a post-9/11 letter to *The Daily Princetonian* praising Bush and Rumsfeld for responding "in an appropriate an effective manner" to the "correct perpetrators" of mayhem in the Middle East.

### A Mayhem Creator at Home

Doug Collins, another "officer class enemy" profiled in our new book *Courage or Complicity*, is a leading candidate for not being purged from the cabinet. And the likelihood that Collins will still lead the federal government's third-largest agency budget and second-largest workforce for the next two years is not good news for the 17 million veterans it serves.

This low-profile Air Force Reserve chaplain is a clean-living Southern Baptist minister, small-town lawyer, and former Congressman from Georgia. He became Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) in early 2027, with bipartisan support that was very undeserved.

Twenty-two Senate Democrats, including Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), voted to confirm their former Capitol Hill colleague. Collins even got a confirmation vote from Bernie Sanders (I-VT), former chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) and a longtime foe of VA privatization who definitely should have known better.

During Collins' term in office so far, Trump's third—and worst VA Secretary ever—has kept the nation's largest and, in the past, best-functioning public healthcare system on a disastrous course of accelerated outsourcing. This will eventually lead to downsizing and dismantling of the VA's own direct care capacity.

### Taking Care of Veterans?

So, going forward, VA defenders will have their work cut out for them, even

with a Democratic majority in charge of the House or Senate, when a new Congress convenes in January.

Fortunately, veterans' organizations, across the political spectrum, had a major victory earlier this year when they derailed the "Take Care of America's Veterans Act" (TACVA), which Collins supported. Traditional Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) like the VFW, DAV, and PVA all sounded the alarm about this deceptively labeled legislation championed by Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson.

Without a doubt, it would have helped 50,000 former service members—whose careers were cut short due to medical problems—collect both their military pensions and VA disability benefits.

But, as Common Defense Political Director Naveed Shah warned in July, this omnibus bill was also heavily booby-trapped. If enacted, it would have adversely affected hundreds of thousands of other veterans.

According to Shah, an Army veteran who served in Iraq, it would have "cut \$57 billion from our future tinnitus and sleep apnea claims, tripled the VA home loan fee, allow disability appeals to be decided in bulk rather than on the merits of each veteran's record, enable more lay-offs that threaten the quality of VA care, and lay the groundwork for handing VA facilities over to private operators."

### A Damage Control Agenda

In the future, advocates for veterans, inside and outside the Beltway, need a damage control agenda that will restrain, rather than enable, further White House attempts to cut VA jobs, services, and benefits over the next two years.

Those most motivated to lead the charge against Secretary Collins on Capitol Hill in 2027 are veterans on the ballot this fall, who personally depend on the VA for their own care. Among those opposing VA outsourcing as part of their insurgent campaigns for Congress are former Army paratrooper Richard Ojeda in North Carolina, former Marine drill instructor JoAnna Mendoza in Arizona, and Navy and National Guard veteran Dan Osborn, a labor-backed independent making his second run for the US Senate in Nebraska.

In upstate New York, another blue-collar challenger to a MAGA Republican incumbent is Afghanistan war veteran Alissa Ellison. She came back from the Middle East with toxic exposures and related health problems that made her a PACT Act-enabled patient of the VA. In 2025, Ellison reports, she "was working at the VBA, helping veterans secure their benefits when she was fired during the cuts made by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)."

### Grassroots Organizing Needed

If elected, any of the above would be a much-needed addition to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees, where playing nice with Collins (and his Biden Administration predecessor) has gone on for too long.

But nobody inside the Beltway—whether in Congress or veterans' advocacy organizations—will get much done on their own, without far more "Save The VA" public education and protests around the country.

Paul Reickhoff, the Iraq war veteran who helped found Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) two decades ago, warns that "both parties are looking for quiet ways to control VA disability spending, which now tops \$118 billion a year for 5.1 million disabled veterans."



Joe Miller and Guy Miller (no relation) at March 2026 No Kings march in Chicago.

Reickhoff's new group, Independent Veterans of America (IVA), backs candidates like Osborn—who are running against both major parties. That's because IVA fears that "career political operatives" in Washington are still floating "budget options" which include "cutting benefits and raising minimum disability rating thresholds." To counter these continuing threats, veterans have to "build the media and organizing muscle to mobilize fast when veterans' benefits are on the line."

### How to Defend VA Care?

Veterans for Peace (VFP)—through its longtime "Save Our VA" (SOVA) activity—has been an invaluable first responder whenever veterans' health care has been at risk. VFP's SOVA committee has generated thousands of letters to members of Congress about VA-related threats, which VSOs too often ignore. VFP members have personally lobbied several dozen members of Congress or their staffers on VA issues.

A newer Common Defense campaign—branded as "VA Not For Sale"—has done VA-focused lobby days in DC and town hall meetings around the country. Both groups have partnered with the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute (VHPI), which produces research studies, fact sheets, and journalistic reports on VA privatization. ([www.veteranspolicy.org/](http://www.veteranspolicy.org/))

In California, members of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and VFP have joined forces with active and retired VA caregivers to conduct weekly anti-privatization picketing and rallies at an outpatient clinic in Santa Rosa, CA. Last April, this same group organized a town hall meeting in the Sonoma County Veterans Memorial building, attended by more than 100 VA patients, their family members, unionized caregivers, and community supporters.

There should be many more such events like this around the country. Many should also target Secretary Collins' continuing rollout of a new electronic record-keeping system installed by Cerner Corporation, a subsidiary of Oracle.

### Stop Oracle's Rollout!

As Ace Allen, a now-retired VA medical oncologist, noted last spring in the *Kansas City Star*, the contractor responsible for this disaster was co-founded by Trump buddy Larry Ellison, the world's second-richest man.

During the president's first term, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner helped Oracle-Cerner get a no-bid contract to replace a "custom built, publicly owned electronic health record (EHR) system that was refined over decades by VA clinician-coder

teams to support clinical care, not maximize revenue."

According to Allen, wherever the VA's existing record-keeping system has been "modernized" by Oracle-Cerner, the result has been serious disruption of patient record handling and widespread demoralization among VA caregivers forced to use an inferior system. As a result, "huge numbers have quit or retired early."

Meanwhile, the estimated cost of a \$10 billion contract (awarded during the first Trump Administration) "has ballooned to \$32 billion or more," in the same "cost-over-run" fashion as infamous Pentagon projects like the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.

In Michigan, Steve Friday, an Air Force veteran, VFP member, and former VA social worker, is helping rally foes of Oracle-Cerner as part of *StopTheRollout.org*, a grassroots campaign gathering steam around the country.

According to Friday, this critical effort "brings together clinicians, VA employees, veterans, advocates, union members, and others who understand what is happening and are willing to act." They are scouring contracting records and publicizing the inspector general. GAO reports on Oracle-Cerner system failures, and sharing whistleblower information from patients and providers with members of Congress trying to hold Collins responsible for the resulting patient safety threats.

As Friday explains, "protecting the VA has become about something even bigger for me. The VA, for all its problems, demonstrates that we can publicly fund and publicly deliver healthcare rather than turning every patient into a source of profit. I think losing that would hurt veterans, workers, and the larger struggle for healthcare as a human right."

When and if additional reinforcements arrive on Capitol Hill—to help win this fight—the beneficiaries will include everyone who needs better health care in America.



STEVE EARLY AND SUZANNE GORDON ARE THE AUTHORS OF *COURAGE OR COMPLICITY: HOW VETERANS ARE RESPONDING TO THE ASSAULT ON DEMOCRACY FROM PM PRESS*. GORDON IS A CO-FOUNDER OF THE BAY AREA-BASED *VETERANS HEALTHCARE POLICY INSTITUTE*. THEY CAN BE REACHED AT [LSUPPORT@AOL.COM](mailto:LSUPPORT@AOL.COM))





# Democracy Defined: Vietnam Veterans Against the War

ROGER BARRITEAU

I was a civilian who worked with the Columbus, Ohio, chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War from 1973 to 1975. VVAW had launched Operation Winter Soldier, and in part of that nationwide effort, civilians like me helped the veterans, their spouses, and partners with projects such as getting the word out about Agent Orange, Amnesty for military deserters, Medical and other benefits for Vets—and we helped Vets to express their outrage and anguish over the death and destruction of the war.

VVAW published a newspaper (which I managed to get into Marion Correctional Institution while lecturing there). Vets in the local Chapter put a lot of time and effort into absorbing and discussing the issues and projects coming from the National VVAW office—and we civilians joined in these discussions. The Columbus chapter held several joint meetings with chapters in other cities, and we got to see how each Chapter had its

own character.

There was a striking openness to new ideas—the Vets were very happy to be "back in the World!" ( as they put it ) and to catch up on the social changes. The Winter Soldier civilians were anti-war activists, feminists, anarchists, and even a few hard-boiled Stalinists. The Akron chapter had a civilian gay activist with a David Bowie (Ziggy Stardust) hairstyle and a will to explain and be understood.

The vets were from the various services and of several ranks—both officers and enlisted. They were the core and the very meaning of the Chapter. When important decisions were to be made, the vets met, discussed the issues, and brought consensus regardless of previous rank (though a former enlisted man carped to me that the officers still tended to dominate things). I was asked if I wanted to join the vote, but the other civilians and I stayed out. I remember watching the circle of standing vets in the next room quietly discussing

whether to support the effort to gain amnesty for deserters and draft resisters who left the country. These vets had served in Vietnam, and there was obvious reluctance from some to support amnesty—but they discussed and discussed and finally accepted the call from the national office.

To me, they were a band of brothers—united in their recognition of the truth—that so much of the war was so very wrong. Democracy became defined for me by that circle of brothers. They reached out to each other by granting each other the right to speak and be heard—to question, discuss, and render a collective and well-considered decision. They recognized that they required the help and knowledge of outsiders, but they took their own counsel.

Down the road, the VVAW vets would draw their families and partners more and more into their organization.



## Recollections

BARRY ROMO

*Reprinted from the Feb/March 1984 issue of The Veteran.*

The war in Vietnam had a strange effect on the Vietnamese economy. It turned mothers into prostitutes, Saigon officials into drug-pushers, and children into explosive "scavengers."

In our unit, we used to pay 100 piaster (about \$1) for unexploded rounds brought in by the local population. It was well worth the money because the VC could turn our junk into deadly mines and claymores, which we would have to face later on. And the kids from the local village could also use the extra funds to buy rice. As a consequence, almost every morning young children would show up at the barbed wire with 105 rounds,

claymores, and other "duds" to trade for cash. The only problem was that many of these "duds" were ready to explode.

As a Battalion S-2, I had a helicopter at my disposal to reconnoiter the area of operations for what we called "targets of opportunity." On this January morning, however, I would not be on a sightseeing mission.

A Vietnamese girl of about ten was bringing a white phosphorus round to the base camp. Just outside the wire, it exploded. Whether other children around disappeared in the smoke or not is debatable, but this girl lived; her entire body was burned and burning. I directed the command-and-control helicopter to the area and picked her up.

She was a beautiful child; her face was untouched, but her body was crisp. She was not screaming but whispering in terrible pain. I wrapped her in a poncho, put her on the helicopter floor, and we took off for the hospital at Chu Lai.

I had to hold her as she was rolling in pain, and I was afraid she would roll out of the chopper. I probably increased her pain, but there was nothing else to do.

We landed in the hospital compound and doctors and medics ran to the chopper, but when they saw it was a Vietnamese child, they waved us on. I could not believe it, but was informed that Vietnamese nationals could not be treated here and that we should take her to a missionary

hospital at Tam Ky.

I was still holding her as we took off north; it seemed like hours, but it was probably only 15 or 20 minutes until we sighted the hospital. We landed, I gave the child to someone, and we left. I never learned what happened to her.

A year later, I went to see John Wayne in the *Green Berets*. At the end, Big John tells a Vietnamese child, as he looks into the sunset, "This war is all for you, for your future" (or something like that). The war was also for the child I held for an hour in I Corps.



*BARRY ROMO WAS A LONG TIME LEADER OF VVAW. HE PASSED AWAY IN CHICAGO, MAY 1, 2024.*

## Upon Leaving the Accountant

The taxman acknowledges the newly dug hole in the ground  
And in my heart

Prepare yourself for next year  
Start saving  
You can't file jointly  
You'll have to pay a lot more  
The widow's penalty

I feel punished for the death of my husband  
I didn't know  
It's a crime to be single in America  
My sentence:  
His Social Security stops  
His veterans benefits stop  
My car insurance goes up  
No discount for...shush...single drivers

Some genius behind a big desk  
In a huge office must believe that  
Surviving spouses should be grateful for the  
One-time lump sum death benefit of  
\$255.00 from Social Security

Some genius behind a big desk  
In a huge office must believe that  
Spouses should be happy to receive a  
Bronze plaque and a folded flag  
From a grateful nation

I am NOT grateful  
Military toxins  
Killed my husband  
I feel punished and robbed

—Lynn Kennedy

## Feeding Children Is Work

If more bombs would have won  
If bigger bombs would have won  
If more defoliation would have won  
LBJ would have ordered it  
Nixon would have ordered it

The idea that gwai lo ethos  
Restrained the violence  
Is the wrong lens  
To understand then  
To understand now

The danger of now  
Is faith in the gwai lo ethos  
Makes the gwai lo confident  
No mistake is so big  
It can't be fixed

Society is held together  
By the hoi polloi believing  
It works. They need to believe it works  
Propaganda has limits  
On some level things need to work

—Carl Nyberg

## Vietnam War Memorial

I want to crawl into this black stone,  
returning;  
try and find the truth written there  
before I get any older  
and you forget  
but the spit shined granite  
gives up only the names  
and a dark reflection  
of my face.

—Ken Sauvage



# VVAW Library Project Updates



Pho Vinh Summer Reader's Festival, July 6, 2026.



Hanh Trung VVAW Library Summer Reading in regular play clothes, August 3, 2026.



Zhi-Shan Foundation makes a contribution to the VVAW/Charlie Jones Library, May 2026.



Huynh Thuc Khang Secondary School Site, August 3, 2026.





### John Ketwig: In His Own Words

JOHN KETWIG

VVAW member, John K. Ketwig, 78, of Bedford, died on Saturday, May 9, 2026. He is survived by his wife, Carolynn; daughters, Emily (Stephen) Preite and Thersa (Jason) Sarkissian; and grandsons, Cameron, Blake, and Jaxton. John was an author, writer, and speaker. John, a Vietnam Veteran, was dedicated to supporting veterans' issues. He had a long career in the automotive industry. John was a lifetime member of VVAW.

As of 2013, I am retired from an automotive career that included 17 years with Toyota, 7 years with Rolls-Royce/Bentley, 4 years as a consultant to Ford, 4 years with Hyundai, and 4 years with Prevost high-line buses and motor coaches. We have resettled to the Blue Ridge area of Virginia and are enjoying life.

...and a hard rain fell came about almost by accident. I had never written more than a letter when I began to write down my experiences related to the war in Vietnam. To my utter surprise, a chain of cosmic circumstances led to my recollections becoming a book! ...and a hard rain fell was first published in hardcover by Macmillan in 1985; I'm very proud that it has

been on bookstore shelves for more than 35 years!

The Vietnam era was one of the most turbulent times in America's history. Still, few reference materials are available to today's students seeking to understand the questions and social forces that contributed to the unrest. I am fortunate to speak to many high school and college classes, and I have answered many questions. The one that I hear most often is some variation of "I understand that Vietnam is important, but I don't know why."

With time in retirement, I began researching the entire Vietnam era in search of final answers. The result is a second book, published in 2019. *Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter* is my final statement on the Vietnam War. At long last, I have come to terms with Vietnam. The problem is, I have three grandsons, and I fear for their futures. America has become the most militarized, warlike society in history. I will be an opponent of militarism and war until the day I die. My books are anti-war, but not anti-American. One loves the sick child but abhors the disease. I have made every effort to determine what really happened,



and to define my generation's history before, during, and after the war. I have also described the ubiquitous corruption that affected the war at every level. A friend's father worked in the highest levels of the CIA in Southeast Asia at the time, and he told his son, "The story that this war is about stopping communism is just

a coverup. This war is about the drug business." As *Vietnam Reconsidered* relates, that theory makes far more sense than the lies we have been told for decades.



### Remembering John Ketwig

THERSA SARKISSIAN

I don't imagine that most kids have memories of protesting war at four years old—holding a ribbon around the Pentagon and advocating for peace—but I do. Or having their dad blast the Country Joe McDonald song ("Give me an F!") so the neighborhood could hear we had just declared war, but I do. Or listening to their dad on the phone, talking a suffering veteran off the ledge while brushing their teeth and getting ready for bed, but I do. Or seeing their dad spending hours and hours on a typewriter—typing with only his two pointer fingers—reliving the atrocities he experienced, but I do.

I know it didn't all make sense to me at the time, but what was always clear was how important it was to my dad. He was driven to stand up for what he believed in and what was right. As I grew older, I began to understand that

his involvement with VVAW wasn't just a chapter from his youth. It was a lifelong dedication he poured into for the rest of his life.

My dad never sat my sister and me down and explained Vietnam to us, but pieces fell into place as we grew up. It wasn't until college, when he needed a digital copy of his book, that I got a better idea of what he went through. I spent my winter break retyping his book, ...and a hard rain fell.

That is when so many things began to make sense—why he freaked out when a helicopter flew over our house, hated the loud boom of fireworks, or why we weren't allowed to have water guns as kids. What he lived through shaped him in ways many would never understand.

But my dad was so much more than what happened to him in Vietnam.

For those who didn't know him, my dad was an avid reader. He read the newspaper every day, always had a book, and even instilled the importance of reading in my son when he'd drive out to Arizona every fall to visit our family. I loved watching that connection between them. In his own way, he was passing something on to another generation.

I think that is one of the things I miss most—his stories, his opinions, our talks, his car advice, and simply knowing that I could call him and hear his voice. I regret not asking more questions when I had the opportunity. There is so much more I wish I had known about his experiences and his life.

But I am grateful that I got to know the parts of him that mattered most. I got to see how deeply he

cared, how strongly he believed in standing up for what was right, and how determined he was to make sure veterans' experiences were not forgotten.

My dad dedicated his book to John Lennon, someone who dared us all to imagine a different world. I think my dad did that in his own way, too. He dared to imagine a peaceful world where veterans could be heard, and their stories would not be forgotten.

And now, in a small way, I feel like I am helping carry his story forward. Maybe I can dare to imagine, too.



THERSA SARKISSIAN, JOHN'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER, LIVES IN ARIZONA WITH HER HUSBAND AND SON.



John Ketwig at the Vietnam Veterans memorial in 2023.



John with one of his grandsons.



# Indeed, a Hard Rain Has Fallen

W. D. EHRHART

I was shocked and saddened to get the news last spring that John Ketwig had died very suddenly. As I suspected, a massive heart attack got him, and the irony was—as his wife told me—that he had had no previous history of heart problems. But there it is. We all know it's coming, though we seldom know how or when. But John's death seemed especially—what's the word? Weird? Eerie?—because John was a prolific reader and reviewer, and I had just been reading several of his reviews in the Spring 2026 issue of *The Veteran*.

I first met John at a conference on the Vietnam War at Gettysburg College in 1985, right about the time that his memoir, . . . *and a Hard Rain Fell: a GI's True Story of the War in Vietnam*, was first published. I admired his book very much because it was the only memoir I knew of at the time that wasn't a combat war story. John was a truck driver during his time in Vietnam. Not a rifleman or an artillery forward observer or a machine-gunner. Just a truck driver.

There were certainly dangers involved with truck convoys, but he never tried to inflate what he did in Vietnam or what he had to deal with. I think his memoir reflected the day-to-day experiences of many more American soldiers than combat memoirs by the likes of Phil Caputo, Tim O'Brien, or Robert Mason.

In any case, John and I hit it off that day and stayed in touch regularly thereafter. He was a latecomer to anti-war activism, perhaps because he married, had children, and took up regular employment working in various capacities throughout his life for Toyota, Rolls-Royce, Bentley, and Ford. At the same time, many of us—I think I'm safe in saying this—had a lot of difficulty settling down and living responsible, stable lives for several years after we returned Stateside.

His obituary says that he was a life member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, which I do not doubt. Still, I have no recollection



Jan Barry, Bill Ehrhart, and John Ketwig in Washington, DC, 2015.

of encountering him in that capacity until after we had first met. The Reagan Wars in Central America seem to have been what made him "go public" with his anti-war views; at least that is when I first became aware of that aspect of his life. I remember receiving an impassioned phone call from him in about 1986 or 1987, urging me to join him and others for a protest on the steps of Congress.

One of my fondest memories of John is from VVAW's 25th anniversary gathering in New York City in 1992. Many of you reading this were there. So you will remember that most of us were aging Hippie-types with long hair, wearing tie-dyed shirts, blue jeans, and odds & ends of old military uniforms. And we were mostly all stoned. The elevator shafts of the hotel we stayed in positively reeked of marijuana smoke. You could get high just riding the elevators up and down.

And in the midst of this, there was John Ketwig, dressed in what I would call "country club casual" with his wife and two young teenage daughters in

tow. How he explained the rest of us, let alone the overwhelming odor in the elevators, to his wife and kids I never asked and never did learn, but it must have been a challenging task for a father.

Nevertheless, he was there: with us, and one of us. And whatever his wife and daughters might have thought of the rest of us, all four of them were still there when we gathered in that church on the last day of the gathering.

Meanwhile, John's memoir has stayed in print all these years. I still find it on the shelves of almost every bookstore I go into. (Yes, actual brick-and-mortar bookstores are hard to find these days, but there are still some around. A Barnes & Noble just opened last year up the street from me in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. And when I checked out their selection of books, there was John's book in the war history section.)

John wrote a second book, *Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter*, that was published in 2019. Though we

often corresponded—most recently he wrote a review of my newest poetry collection, *Smart Fish Don't Bite*, for the Fall 2025 issue of *The Veteran*—the last time I actually saw John was at a 2015 conference in Washington, DC, called *Vietnam: The Power of Protest* where John joined Jan Barry and me on a panel the organizers titled *Vietnam Era Authors and Poets*.

And now John Ketwig is gone, and I will miss his always intelligent and insightful reviews, of which usually at least two would appear in every issue of *The Veteran*. Of course, we are all at that age now when the list of those who've gone before us will only keep getting longer, but I selfishly hope that I'm not the last one standing. It is just damned hard to keep constantly saying, "Farewell."



W. D. EHRHART IS A LONG-TIME VVAW MEMBER, POET, AND AUTHOR.

# John Ketwig, Presente!

JAN BARRY

John Ketwig made a public service campaign of speaking forthrightly to high school and college students. Challenged by students' questions, he wrote *Vietnam Reconsidered: The War, the Times, and Why They Matter*, published in 2019. This is a long-considered sequel to Ketwig's mind-blowing war memoir: *...and a hard rain fell*, published in 1985.

Amid his professional career as an automobile service manager, side trips as an author doing speaking engagements, and activism with Vietnam Veterans Against the War protesting US military interventions that kept popping up around the world, Ketwig read piles of books about Vietnam and the wider events of that era.

"I have been obsessed, trying to put it all together," he wrote in *Vietnam Reconsidered*. "Trying to understand." And to share what he learned. Whenever we'd get together, he'd regale me with one of his latest revelations. He discovered from obscure books and rare news reports, for instance, that the black market he witnessed in Vietnam and Thailand was a tiny part of a vast network of corruption run by American military officers, high-ranking sergeants, Vietnamese military, and shady businessmen and women that sold everything from rifles to explosives to trucks stolen from US military supply shipments. That rip-off campaign, he noted, mushroomed into reports of billions of dollars lost or unaccounted



John Ketwig in Vietnam, 1968.

for in Iraq and Afghanistan.

John Ketwig was on an unrelenting quest to dig deeper into what the war in Southeast Asia did to so many people, civilians and soldiers, Asians and Americans, and what to do about it.

"Please don't thank me for my service," he wrote. "I was playing in a rock 'n roll band when they

came for me, reciting songs about understanding and brotherhood and love. They took me against my will, stripped me naked and beat me bloody, and they sent me to the other side of the world where death fell out of the sky and exploded, and its shards tore up anything and anybody they hit. . . .

"Please oh please don't thank me.

If you want to express something, promise me you will get involved in the struggle to abolish wars. . . . Then, I will thank you."



JAN BARRY IS A POET, JOURNALIST, AUTHOR, AND ACTIVIST. HE IS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR.



## John Ketwig: Frequent Interview Subject

CAROLYNN KETWIG

I know how meaningful John's contributions to veterans' issues and VVAW were to him over the years. It seems he was doing constant interviews with students referred to him through VVAW. He would always ask that they let him know what grade they earned. John was so proud that their grades were exemplary.

Much of his participation with Veterans and peace issues was at conferences, live discussions at libraries, high school and college classrooms, radio interviews, Zoom, video, televised interviews (local shows, ESPN, Write Around the Corner on PBS), or recorded interviews (BBC).

*Here is a letter from one of the last students to interview John, along with his drawing*

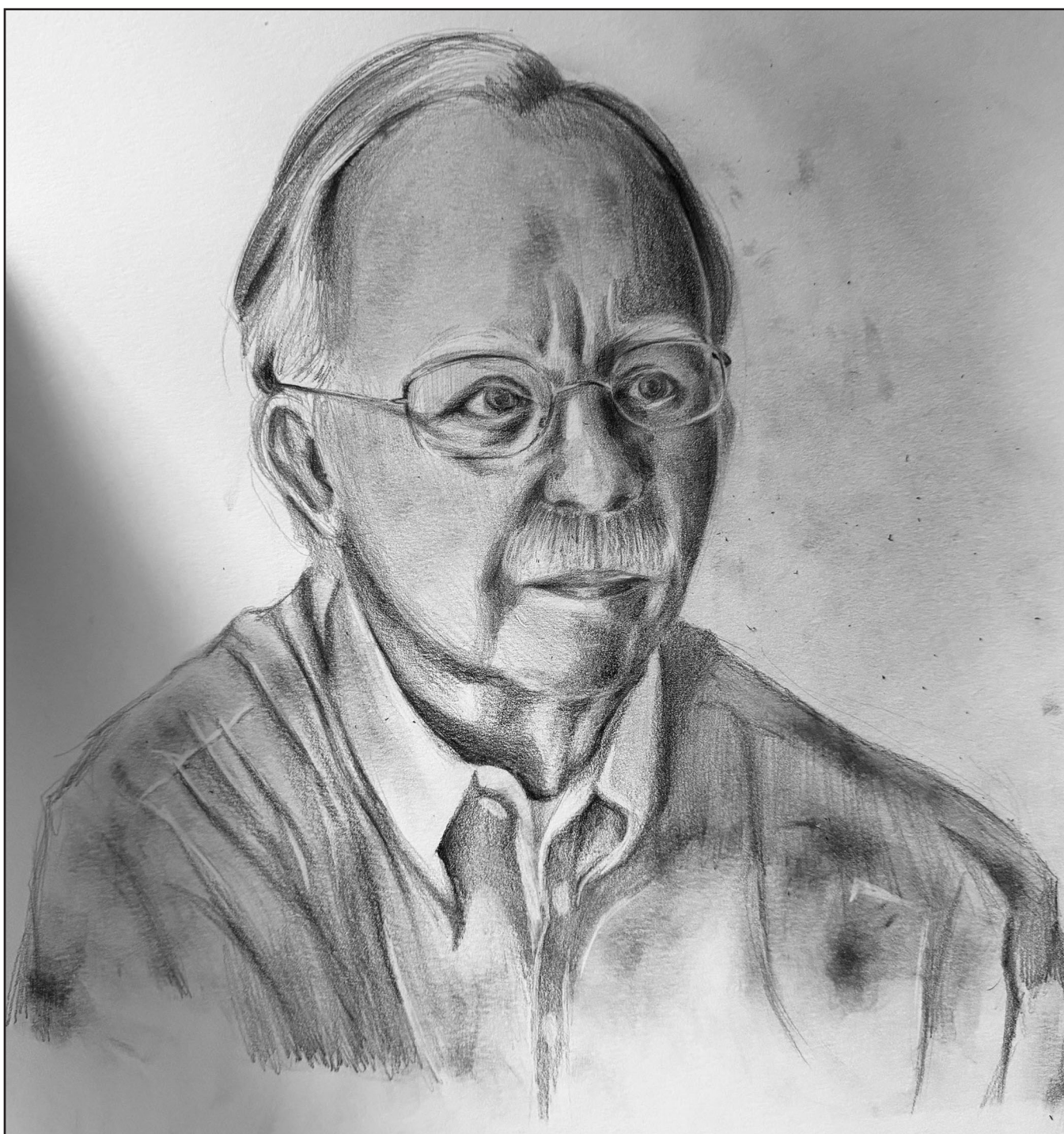
Dear VVAW,

Fortunately, the interview did already take place. Thank you for introducing me to Mr. Ketwig—we had a truly insightful conversation, and I loved getting to know him.

I am deeply saddened to hear of his passing. I would like to send my deepest condolences to his family and loved ones. My thoughts are with them during this difficult time.

I know that Mr. Ketwig was interested in hearing how my project turned out, and I am happy to share that with his help and guidance, it went perfectly. As part of the project, I also drew a portrait of him, which I have included.

Mr. Ketwig was a great,



*John Ketwig drawn by Quynh Phan.*

remarkable man, and I am very blessed to have had the opportunity to speak with him and learn from his wisdom. Our conversation left a lasting impression on me.

*With sincere condolences,*  
Quynh Phan  
NYU Department of Art and Art  
Professions



CAROLYNN KETWIG WROTE TO JOHN  
IN 1968 THROUGH ROCHESTER, NY'S  
OPERATION MORALE. HE WAS ONE  
OF FIVE SOLDIERS SHE WROTE TO IN  
VIETNAM.

# Veteran's Fast for Life

CAROLYNN KETWIG

From September 1 to October 17, 1986, Veterans Fast for Life (a water-only fast) took place on the steps of the US Capitol in Washington, DC. At the time, we lived in Maryland near Washington, DC. John wanted to support the Veterans and his own commitment to peace. John conceived the idea of an Authors' Action on the steps of the Capitol in DC to support the fasting veterans and as an anti-war action. This was his first attempt at such a task, and he carried it out. He called many authors to have their books displayed along with their personal statements. John made lifelong friends. The books started to arrive in our mailbox.

Their books were displayed on the steps of the US Capitol, their statements read, and then they were placed at the base of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. The National Park Service retrieved the books, and they were on display at the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

Years later, an event in DC focused on items left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and the Author's Action was represented.

*Sojourners Magazine* posted a picture of Authors Action with the display of books, the authors who attended, and John reading his statement, along with a short write-

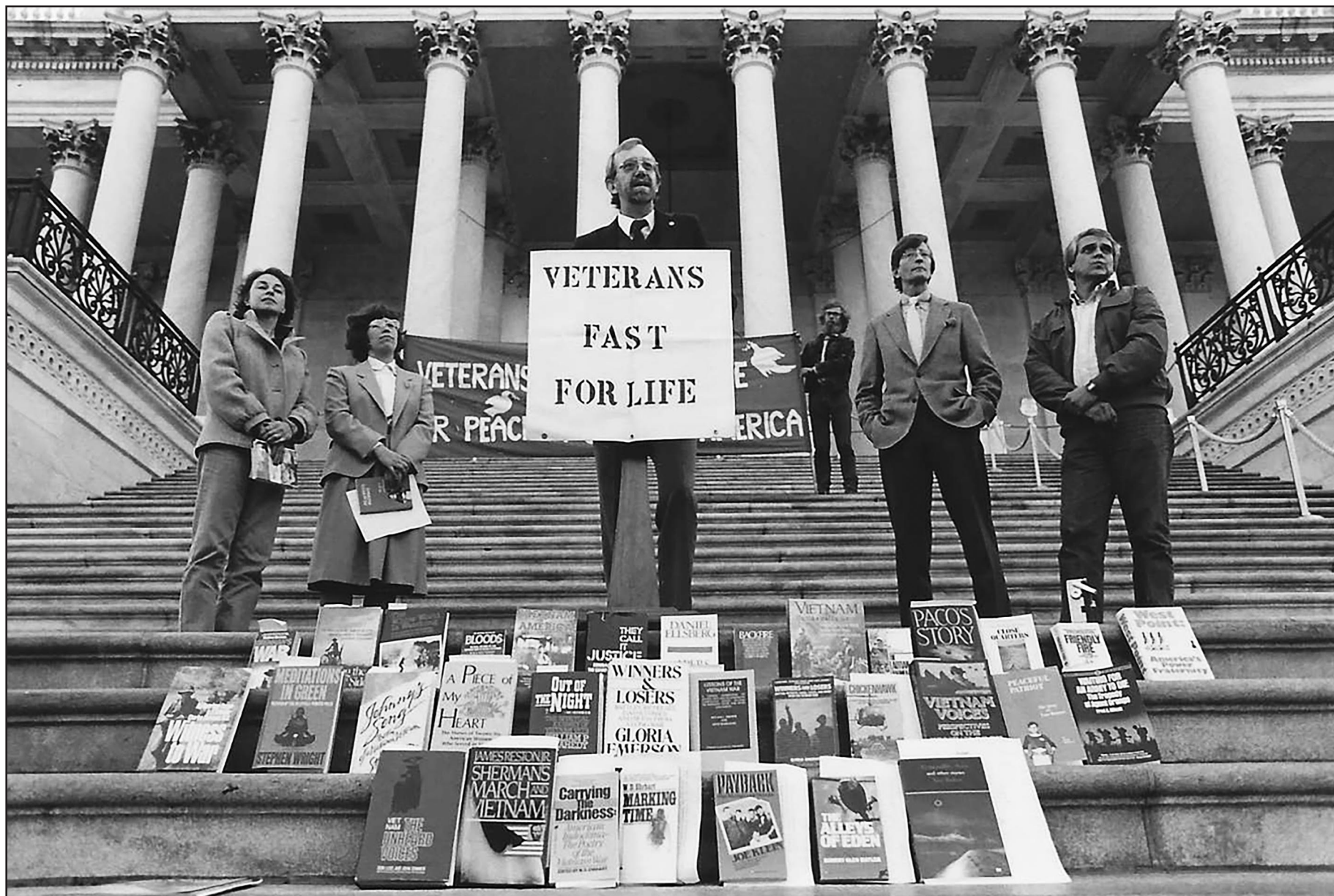
up about the event in their January 1987 issue.

*From Sojourners, reprinted in the  
Winter 1987 issue of The Veteran.*

## Vietnam Authors Join Veterans' Vigil

Forty-three authors and journalists who wrote about the Vietnam War have joined the Veterans Fast for Life in citing unmistakable parallels between the Vietnam War and US involvement in Nicaragua. Five authors recently joined the ongoing vigil on the east steps of the US Capitol, and another 38 authors sent their books and written statements. Pictured below are (left

to right) K. Bruce Galloway, Laura Jackson, Bonnie McKeown, John Ketwig and C.D.B. Bryan. Other authors included David Halberstam, Daniel Ellsberg, and James Beston Jr. Gloria Emmerson, whose book *Winners and Losers* won a National Book Award, said, "Nicaragua's history is not Vietnam's history, but what is so similar are the actions and duplicity of our own government, whose foreign policy is so shameful. But we are not a helpless people. We have the power to protest. It is up to us now."



*Author's Action on steps of US Capitol, Fall 1986. John Ketwig holding sign.*



# Thank You For Your Service

JOHN KETWIG

*From the Fall 2016 issue of The Veteran.*

*The following was a letter to the editor of the Roanoke (Virginia) Times on Veterans Day in 2014.*

Please don't thank me for my service. I was taken against my will, yanked away from all the hopes and plans I had for my life, and made to see and experience things that contradicted anything and everything I had ever been taught about right and wrong. I heard the screams of someone dying, far away from home, a fragile human being blown apart, for no good reason. I saw burnt, bloodied, maimed children. And men, and women. I smelled the scent of open wounds, of flowing blood and burnt flesh. I felt the splatter of someone's

loss of life as it exploded across my face, and no matter how many times I have washed my face over the past 47 years I cannot wash away that horrible stain. And you would thank me for that? I abandoned my morality. I lost my equilibrium. I cannot tell you much of what I learned, but it wasn't worth a damned thing in the civilian workplace, in my baby's nursery, or at the checkout of the grocery store. It is only a specter, a dense dark monster that pursues me in the night; that colors my view every day in ways no one else can see. Too many nights, almost half a century later, the horror twists my stomach into knots. Oh, I know, you thank me because you don't know anything else to say. You still hope that it was all about freedom and democracy and good things like that, and not just about profits and power,

authority and career advancement and some ancient goddamned illicit definition of the word masculine. It was about corporate profits and garish stripes sewn onto a sleeve, about genocide and the screwed-up notion that you can make a total stranger's existence better by killing or maiming him. I was playing in a rock 'n roll band when they came for me, reciting songs about understanding and brotherhood and love. They took me against my will, stripped me naked and beat me bloody, and they sent me to the other side of the world where death fell out of the sky and exploded, and its shards tore up anything and anybody they hit. I learned to lie as flat as possible on the mud, to will my body to become a puddle and sink down into the ooze. I learned to overcome the terror, the violent tremors, and I learned that

none of those things matter when your number is up. I learned it happens to the very best guys, in the very worst ways, and there's nothing right or righteous about it; they were just wasted. Please, oh please don't thank me. If you want to express something, promise me you will get involved in the struggle to abolish wars. Nothing else will say that you understand.

Then I will thank you.



*JOHN KETWIG WAS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW, AND THE AUTHOR OF "... AND A HARD RAIN FELL: A G.I.'S TRUE STORY OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM". FIRST PUBLISHED BY MACMILLAN IN 1985, IT IS STILL AVAILABLE AT MOST BOOKSTORES.*

# The Last Vietnam War: Who Won?

STEVEN JONAS

Ken Burns' self-styled documentary, *The Vietnam War*, has prompted numerous writers' commentaries on the film itself and the accompanying book, on the War, on the US role, on the aftermath, and so on. One question about the horror (primarily for the people of Indo-China, most especially Vietnam) that does not get asked too often has been "who won?" The conventional wisdom on the Right, the Center, and at least some of the Left, is that the US lost. Well, if one goes back to the history of the War and reviews the United States' original goals, it becomes very clear that, in fact, the US won. And here's the case for making that statement.

Ho Chi Minh (a nom de plume [how appropriately French, non?]), the once-and-future leader of a united Vietnam, made his first appearance on the world stage at the post-World War I Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Among other things, he attempted to approach one of the primary Conference leaders, US President Woodrow Wilson. He wanted to request support in getting the then-French colonial authorities to establish basic civil rights for the Vietnamese population. (France had conquered what became "French Indo-China," beginning in the 1850s.) But the racist Wilson's famous "Fourteen Points" of "self-determination" apparently only applied to nations occupied by white folks. (Wilson, racist, you say? Well yes. Among other things, it was Wilson who re-segregated the US armed forces, as well as the bulk of the US civil service.) Wilson simply fobbed off Ho Chi Minh. Vietnam reverted to French rule, with no changes to the status of the local population. Ho Chi Minh (now a nom de guerre) and his allies began an armed liberation movement during the 1920s.

During the Second World War, French Indo-China was actually administered jointly by the Nazi-

collaborationist regime of Vichy France and the Japanese, who had captured the whole of Southeast Asia in 1940-42. After the War, Ho Chi Minh and his liberationist forces asked the (non-French) Allies to prevent the re-establishment of the French colonial regime. They were rebuffed, as they had been in Paris in 1919. Then began the French-Vietnamese War, which ended with the surrender of the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Geneva Peace Conference and Agreement between the French and the victorious Vietnamese forces in 1954 followed this. The United Kingdom and the Soviet Union guaranteed it. Pointedly, the United States refused to guarantee, endorse, or even accept the Agreement.

Although the Ho Chi Minh-led forces had won the War, there was a pro-French puppet government in the South, headed by the "emperor" Bao Dai. And so, the Agreement divided the country into something that had never previously existed: a "North" and a "South." This was supposed to be a temporary arrangement, until national elections—elections that everyone knew would have been won overwhelmingly by Ho Chi Minh and his Communist Party—were to be held in 1956. The US interest, not at all in sync with the Paris Agreement, was led by the fiercely anti-Communist Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his equally fiercely anti-Communist brother, Allen Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

One of the primary goals of the Dulles brothers, and indeed their ideological successors who have dominated US foreign policy down to this very day, was to prevent the peaceful establishment of any form of socialism or anything that looked anything like it, in any country around the world. With the exception of Cuba, they have been largely successful.

As noted, the US refused to sign or recognize the 1954 treaty. The Dulleses knew that if the plan in it were allowed to proceed, the chances were very good that Vietnam would peacefully progress to socialism and be an economic success at it. If that happened, the same thing might well occur peacefully in many other Southeast Asian countries were democracy given a chance. At that time, it appeared there might be a democratic, peaceful road to socialism that could be emulated around the world. Not good for US-led Western Imperialism. When looked at from that perspective, yes, the "domino theory" about the potential spread of socialism was quite correct.

And so, in the view of the US leadership of the time, everything that could be done to prevent the democratic process from introducing socialism to a country and then possibly succeeding in a peaceful setting had to be done. And so, with the puppet Bao Dai in place, the promised elections were put off again and again. Eventually, a national resistance movement, labeled the "Viet Cong" by the US and its puppet, arose, and then US forces, first as "advisors," were sent in. Then what became the "North Vietnamese" army (again, remember that "North Vietnam" was an entirely artificial construct) was drawn into it, and what became the "Vietnam War" occurred.

And yes, in the end, the United States seemed to have lost militarily. Under enormous pressure at home, and an inability to actually win on the battlefield in Vietnam (all of course complicated by "Watergate"), President Richard M. Nixon began the military disengagement. The final pullout, with those haunting photographs of people leaving by helicopter from the roof of the US embassy in Saigon as the legitimate government of Vietnam led by its armed forces entered the city, occurred under President Ford. But, and this is the important BUT, if one examines what happened in terms of the original goals for the US Vietnam intervention, set by Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers in the 1950's, the US won: those goals were achieved. The Vietnam War was actually a US victory.

The peaceful establishment of socialism, as the result of a popular vote, no less, was prevented. Its spread by example and peaceful means to neighboring countries was prevented. The country is still trying to cope with the widespread use of Agent Orange by US forces, massive "carpet-bombing" of non-strategic areas, and unexploded ordnance. Vietnam today has a sort of market socialist economy, but the country was ravaged by almost 20

years of War, and two to four million of the best and the brightest of its people were killed. It is hardly the economic or social engine for the development of democratically installed socialism that it might have become had it been left alone. And so yes, in terms of the original American goals for the intervention, a win, a palpable win.

As for Ken Burns' film, in the Prologue he says that the war "was begun in good faith, by decent people." Well, no, Ken, it wasn't. From the time the ink was dry on the signing page of the 1954 Geneva Agreement, the United States, led by indecent people, was working to undermine it, which eventually led directly to the War. And no, Mr. David Greenberg, while you may say that "*The Vietnam War: An Intimate History* tells once again the painful tale of America's protracted, divisive and (most would now agree) futile involvement in the fight to keep *South Vietnam unconquered by the Communist North* [emphasis added]," the division into North and South was something brand-new to Vietnam and was supposed to be only an administrative one, until those elections could have been held by 1956.

The US role in Vietnam has to be seen in the context of the (eventually successful) "75 Years War Against the Soviet Union" (1917-92), and the serial prevention of the peaceful establishment of socialist or even moderately left-wing, anti-colonialist, governments, around the world (see, e.g., Korea, 1945, Iran, 1953, Congo, 1960, Brazil, 1964, Chile, 1973, Afghanistan, 1978-86, Nicaragua, 1980s, etc.).

Yes, indeed, once again, in terms of the original goals of US Imperialism, led in the 1950's by the infamous Dulles Brothers, for the US, the Vietnam War was a win, a palpable win.

*P.S.: Why the "Last Vietnam War" of the title? Well, in addition to the US war of aggression, there was the original French conquest in the 1850s-60s, the anti-French liberation movement of the 1920s-30s, the Japanese conquest in 1940, and the Vietnamese-French War of 1946-53.*



*STEVEN JONAS, MD, MPH, MS, IS A PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE AT STONY BROOK MEDICINE (NY) AND AUTHOR/CO-AUTHOR/EDITOR/CO-EDITOR OF OVER 35 BOOKS. HIS MOST RECENT BOOK ON US POLITICS IS THE 15% SOLUTION: HOW THE REPUBLICAN RELIGIOUS RIGHT TOOK CONTROL OF THE US, 1981-2022: A FUTURISTIC NOVEL.*

## Outside the Perimeter

Tighten boot laces,  
check canteens,  
ammo and grenades,  
rifle,  
let the dog out,  
finish tying my tie,  
put on my flak jacket,  
close the door behind me  
pick the newspaper up off the lawn  
and move out past the safety  
of the perimeter  
getting into the mini van,  
stomach tensed  
fear crawling in.

—Ken Sauvage



# The Weight of the Matter

RAY KEMBLE

*Author's note: Fire Support Base Monterey Jack is a fictitious name. After the passage of almost 60 years, the author is unable to remember the base's actual name.*

*Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out a window and he'll fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot, like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret. Ripeness was all.—Joseph Heller, Catch-22*

I've never been a fan of war stories. Most seem boring, many are exaggerated, and some just aren't true. Only a few ever feel real to me. After I left the Army and moved to a mountain town in Colorado for grad school, I soon found myself surrounded by such stories. When people found out I was a Vietnam vet, another grad student who was also a Vietnam vet insisted I go with him to the local VFW meeting. I eventually went, but I sat there uncomfortable, listening to the kinds of war stories I never liked.

It's been more than 50 years since I left the Army, moved to Colorado, and went to that VFW meeting. Looking back, I realize I was impatient with the older veterans' stories because my own memories of Vietnam were still fresh. Their stories from long ago didn't match mine, which were still clear in my mind just months after coming home.

I ended up in the Army not out of patriotism, family tradition, or because I was drafted. I ended up there by accident. In the summer of 1962, with the Vietnam War already underway and college ahead of me, enrolling in my college's ROTC program would let me finish my studies without interruption and, at the same time, keep me out of Vietnam. I did the math: 1962 plus 4 years meant 1966, and I thought the Vietnam War would be over by then. After graduation, I would owe the Army two years of service, but as an officer. It was a trade-off I was willing

to make. So, I signed up for ROTC. Looking back, I would come to regret that decision. In 1966, after finishing my undergraduate studies and earning my B.A., the Vietnam War was still going on. As graduation approached, I learned that my ROTC performance had earned me a regular commission instead of a reserve one, which meant I had to serve an extra year. I felt honored and accepted the regular commission. I was lucky, though, because the Army sent me to South Korea for a year. When that tour ended, I returned to serve my second year at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, as the commanding officer of a basic training company. By then, I knew I didn't want a long-term Army career, so I wrote to the Pentagon asking for an early release from my three-year commitment. Instead, they sent me orders for Vietnam and promised I would be discharged soon after I got back.

I arrived in Vietnam in December 1968. Before I left the United States, I trained at Fort Sill to be a field artillery officer. When I got to Tan Son Nhut, I was assigned to the 2/33rd Artillery in the 1st Infantry Division. Our headquarters was at the old Michelin plantation in Lai Khe, on Highway 12, about halfway between Saigon and the Cambodian border.

I felt pretty secure in my job as a lieutenant and soon-to-be captain of field artillery. My Battalion, the 2/33rd, was stationed well inside the heavily wired and guarded perimeter of the 1st Division's large base at Lai Khe. The 1st Division's base was considered a comparatively safe place, spoken of as being *inside the wire*. Aside from the occasional need to take cover during rare enemy mortar attacks, I saw my year in Lai Khe as a time when I was safely out of danger.

During the second half of my year in Vietnam, I was made the CO of the 2/33rd's HQ battery. In this new role, I was nominally responsible for the Battalion's forward observers—nominally, because I maintained

their personnel files; but functionally, my FOs spent their days with the Division's infantry companies situated at an assortment of fire support bases outside the wire.

Occasionally, I'd visit my FO's. I recall one time in particular when I called the Lai Khe tower and asked if there was room on a helicopter departing that day to make a resupply run to the Division's fire support bases. I was told I could have a seat on a helicopter heading out later that morning. Our first stop would be the Division's most distant base, FSB Monterey Jack, a half-hour's flight away.

As we neared Monterey Jack, the helicopter pilot received an urgent call. An infantry patrol a few miles beyond Monterey Jack had been heading back to base when it was ambushed. Several soldiers were badly wounded—four from small arms fire and one from an old WWII stick grenade. We were ordered to change course and help evacuate them back to Lai Khe.

Though we were only a few miles from the ambush site when we got the call, two other helicopters had already reached the area. They were loading the more seriously wounded. As our helicopter set down, an Infantry sergeant stood akimbo in the wind-whipped grass and hollered at us to help with the less seriously wounded. He also asked if we could clear the field of any discarded weaponry and other odds and ends. We clambered out of our helicopter and helped the injured to board. We then hastily began collecting the many scattered items. Without intending to, we formed a haphazard line from where men were finding items back to our waiting helicopter.

I started getting all sorts of things handed to me: web gear, a flak vest, an empty ammo canister, some clothes, and a clipboard with a map covered in plastic. Soon, I got into a rhythm—receive, secure, pass, receive, secure, pass—when an item with a different "feel" was handed to me: An *arm*. Torn

from some infantryman's shoulder. One of the crewmen had found it lying in the grass and, maybe thinking about what it meant, wrapped it loosely in a piece of clear plastic. I stopped before passing the arm, because it had weight, its own unique weight. The realization froze me ...

"Dammit, sir," the crewman next to me snapped, "Come on, ferchrissake, sir, pass me what you got. We all want to get the fuck outta here!"

I don't know how to finish my only war story. It's not about bravery. What happened at Monterey Jack almost 60 years ago has stayed with me. I held a severed arm for less than half a minute, but the memory has lasted my whole life. What lingers is not just that it was an arm, but the heavy, terrible weight of it. Even now, I still feel that weight in my mind.

So I'll end here: it happened, and I still carry it. I remember Joseph Heller's World War II novel, *Catch-22*, especially the last chapter when the dying airman Snowden, moaning "I'm cold, I'm cold!" finally shares the intuitive secret that had the reader wondering since the novel's first chapter: Man is matter.

Ever since Monterey Jack, whenever I pick up something like a book or a loaf of bread, the memory returns. My hands remember the heavy weight of a human arm, a feeling nothing else can match. For 57 years, that sensation has stayed with me, the sense of holding something that was so recently part of someone else.

Snowden was right. We are made of matter. The real lesson is that when we forget how physically fragile we all are, we are capable of terrible things.

But that's a story for another day.



RAY KEMBLE, A NATIVE NEW YORKER, WAS A CAPTAIN WITH THE 2ND BATTALION, 33RD FIELD ARTILLERY, 1ST INFANTRY DIVISION, 1969-70. HE CURRENTLY LIVES IN DENVER.

## Quan Loi

Like many grunts  
I laced my dog tags in my boots.

Soon enough,  
Dented, scratched, bent,  
Locked in the curl  
Of my blood types circle,  
Crimped in my non-religion—  
Engraved upper case,  
Sheltering in the sum

Of my service number,  
Even my name retains bits  
Of crimson dust.  
Day after day, patrols  
Jungle, ambush, monsoon

Our blood and sorrows  
Etched in Quan Loi's dusty red—  
One by one our countless steps  
Become our mud-laced epitaphs.

—Marc Levy

## Rubbed Across the Body of the Text

Memory or mystery  
    Whatever was is  
We grew up in the past  
    Lost the little war faraway  
First person painful  
    Some sort of truth with razor wire  
Tanglefoot and concertina  
    As seen on television  
Scraped into scraped out  
    Scrawl of an idea  
The silly soul of a notion  
    That worships at the mall  
It was all those words at once  
    And not in sentences  
Nothing alphabetized  
    Marching away from me  
Like it was not over ever or  
    Coming back for the wounded Viet  
Moaning loudly in the underbrush  
    In the dark  
Every morning at the mirror.

—D F Brown

## Doggerel

Missiles produced at great expense,  
used by our Department of War,  
leaving fewer for our Defense  
those missiles were intended for.  
We wonder why Trump bombed Iran.  
The answer is: Because he can.  
He's bombing boats 'round Cuba, too.  
It's hell what Congress lets him do.

—Al Wellman

## Colonialism's Preservationist

How many girls  
Did Jeffrey Epstein trade  
To preserve the world  
That colonialism made?

—Carl Nyberg



# My Apology at Nagasaki

MIKE HASTIE

During the almost three hours I spent at the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum on October 24, 2018, I looked closely at all of the horrifying photographs that were on display, taken a few days after the United States Government dropped the Atomic Bomb on Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, at 11:02 in the morning. I also took my own pictures while I was there.

While I was walking around, I started reflecting on the two and a half years I lived in Japan from February 16, 1947, until May 18, 1949. I was 18 months old when I arrived, and four years old when I left. My father was a career Army officer and World War II combat veteran. My family lived in Tokyo. During our time there, my mother hired a 16-year-old Japanese girl to help take care of me. Her name was Sumiko. I always lovingly called her "Sim-e-co." According to my mother, she practically carried me on her hip for over two years. We were inseparable during the days she worked at our home. When I left Japan, she had turned 18.

After I had been at the museum for an hour, about a hundred Japanese schoolgirls suddenly arrived. They were all dressed in the same blue-and-white uniforms and looked as though they were probably from a private school. The first thing I noticed was that all of the girls were very quiet. They rarely talked to each other, and when they did, it was a whisper. As the girls gathered around the graphic

displays and went from one display to the next, I started looking at their faces. Gradually, those facial expressions went from politely solemn to dazed to stunned to finally shocked. I saw girls with their lips pursed, eyes purposely closed, mouths open, and having their hands in front of their faces.

All of them maintained their public composure, which was no doubt part cultural. However, after a while, many of them just looked depressed. Watching this human behavior started to affect me, as my own emotions started to feel profound shame. I wanted to crawl into a deep hole. I no longer wanted to be seen by the Japanese who were all around me. I suddenly went off to myself in a corner, and just stared at the floor. When I finally looked up, I noticed five of the girls standing about twenty feet away, in a line together, not saying anything to each other. After looking at them for a few moments, I knew what I needed to do.

I walked across the room and approached the first girl on the left. I asked her if she spoke English. She motioned to me that she did not. I went to the next girl and asked her if she spoke English. She shook her head. I went to the next girl and asked her the same question. She also motioned no. I went to the fourth girl and repeated the same question. She pointed to the last girl on the right. When I asked her, she said yes. I told her I was an American, and that I was dreadfully

sorry that my government had dropped the Atomic Bombs on their country. By this time, I could feel the long-stored-up emotions inside me, but I had a mission: to speak to these five girls who were all looking at me. I also told this girl I had always felt deep shame for what my country had done, and asked her to please tell the other four girls what I said. I touched her on the arms, with tears in my eyes, and as I walked away I heard her tell them what I said. It was when

I returned from this trip that I came up with the word: "Hiroshame-a." It took me until this day to finally realize I was also talking to Sumiko.



MIKE HASTIE WAS AN ARMY MEDIC IN VIETNAM. WHEN HE CAME BACK FROM VIETNAM, HE PICKED UP A CAMERA TO PHOTOGRAPH THE LIE OF HIS CHILDHOOD. HE FEELS THAT LYING IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON IN WAR AND THAT LIBERATION FROM DENIAL IS EVERYTHING.

# March 1961

RICHARD BRUMMETT

It was March of 1961, and I was in a bit of a panic. While I was surreptitiously listening to late-night radio news, a story came in about a battalion of Marines aboard a ship off the coast of Indochina. They expected to soon be in Laos to save it from an army of Communists. I knew that trouble was brewing in that bit of Asia, and I knew I had a right to a piece of it. My father, the Marine, and his brothers had fought the Japanese in the Pacific. I had developed the feeling that without a similar experience I would never be considered an adult, no matter any other accomplishments.

My panic was from the fact that I was only 14 years old and so would miss out on the war of my generation. They just HAD to wait until I was 18. Well, they did. The word was that, because Laos lacked a coastline, it would be a difficult war logistically. Better to focus on the long, slender country just a bit southward.

That's what happened, and when I made it to 18, there was indeed a war waiting for me. There was one major problem. Living with a career Marine throughout my childhood should have made me accustomed to being barked at regularly. Never did I adapt to that, and to his barely repressed disgust that his only son was a sissy.

In the end I wimped out. I joined the Army.

I tested well, and the Army recruiting sergeant said that, as a volunteer with high scores, I could have just about any job in the Army.



David Burnett, the Time/Life photographer, assisting the wounded Brummett across Highway 9. Photo by Võ Huỳnh, NBC News.

Would I like to go to the language school in Monterey? "Thanks," I said, "but I'd rather have tanks." I figured that being 6'4" and only 155 pounds, I would be an inadequate infantryman, but being a tanker would be possible yet sufficiently dangerous so I could hold my head up high if I made it home alive. A site on the internet claims that 27% of all the tankers sent to Vietnam died there, so I made the right choice.

After tank school at Fort Knox,

I volunteered for Vietnam. This was somehow unacceptable, and so the Army sent me to an armored cavalry squadron in Germany. The day after I arrived, I walked into the orderly room and volunteered for Vietnam again. That time it worked, and after 70 days of adventure-filled leave time, I eagerly set out for the war.

I ultimately spent two years in-country during that war and another year in this century. Managed to be lightly wounded by the VC as a driver of an M48A3 tank in 1968 and a bit worse by the NVA in 1972 as a civilian photojournalist.

What we did to the Vietnamese was a horror show: random murders, beheadings, rapes, burning villages, etc. My parents never accepted my eyewitness accounts, and indeed grew angry when I tried to tell them why I had turned against the war. My mother insisted that the Communists were duping me. The Marine was enraged. It ultimately led to a permanent break between us.

Looking back on all of this from the distance of 58 years makes me wonder how I could have been so stupid. But it also explains why countries can wage war. Young males, even wimpy ones, can be depended upon to willingly, or with just a bit of urging, go forth and kill perfect strangers. Strangers who also sincerely wished to kill them.

Despite my disgust at the war crimes our West Point-educated Captain had us commit and the general horror that was the whole business, I have trouble imagining what sort of person I would be now if I had never set foot in Vietnam.

And that is sad.



RICHARD BRUMMETT, A LIFE MEMBER OF VVAW, SPENT TWO YEARS IN THE NAM AS A TANKER AND PHOTOJOURNALIST. HIS WAR ENDED IN 1972 AT THE DMZ IN AN 82MM MORTAR BARRAGE WHILE ON ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES.



A wary eye on the DMZ as the 5th Cav awaits an NVA battalion that never did show up. Photo by Richard Brummet.



# The GI Bill's Broken Promise to Black Veterans: A Black Veteran's Perspective

CHARLES HENDERSON

My name is Charles Henderson, and I am a veteran who served in the United States Army during the war in Afghanistan. I was inspired to write this piece because there remains a tremendous lack of public knowledge about one of the greatest injustices committed against African American veterans in American history: the systematic denial of GI Bill benefits to a million Black World War II and Korean War veterans. It is a story that many Americans have never been taught, while others continue to ignore or deny the painful realities of our nation's history.

As a Black veteran myself, I was shocked that I had never learned about this subject in grammar school, high school, or even college. It was only within the last several years, through conversations with some of the last surviving Black World War II and Korean War veterans, that I began to understand the true extent of this injustice. Listening to these men describe how they answered their country's call, fought with courage and honor, and then returned home only to be denied the very benefits they had earned was both heartbreaking and infuriating.

One experience stands out above all others. Last year, members of my American Legion Post, Harold Washington Post #1987, together with George L. Giles Post #87—the oldest African American American Legion post in the United States—helped a 94-year-old Purple Heart Korean War veteran finally receive the VA benefits and disability compensation he had been wrongfully denied decades earlier. Think about that for a moment. A man who was wounded in combat while serving his country had to wait more than seventy years to receive benefits he had already earned.

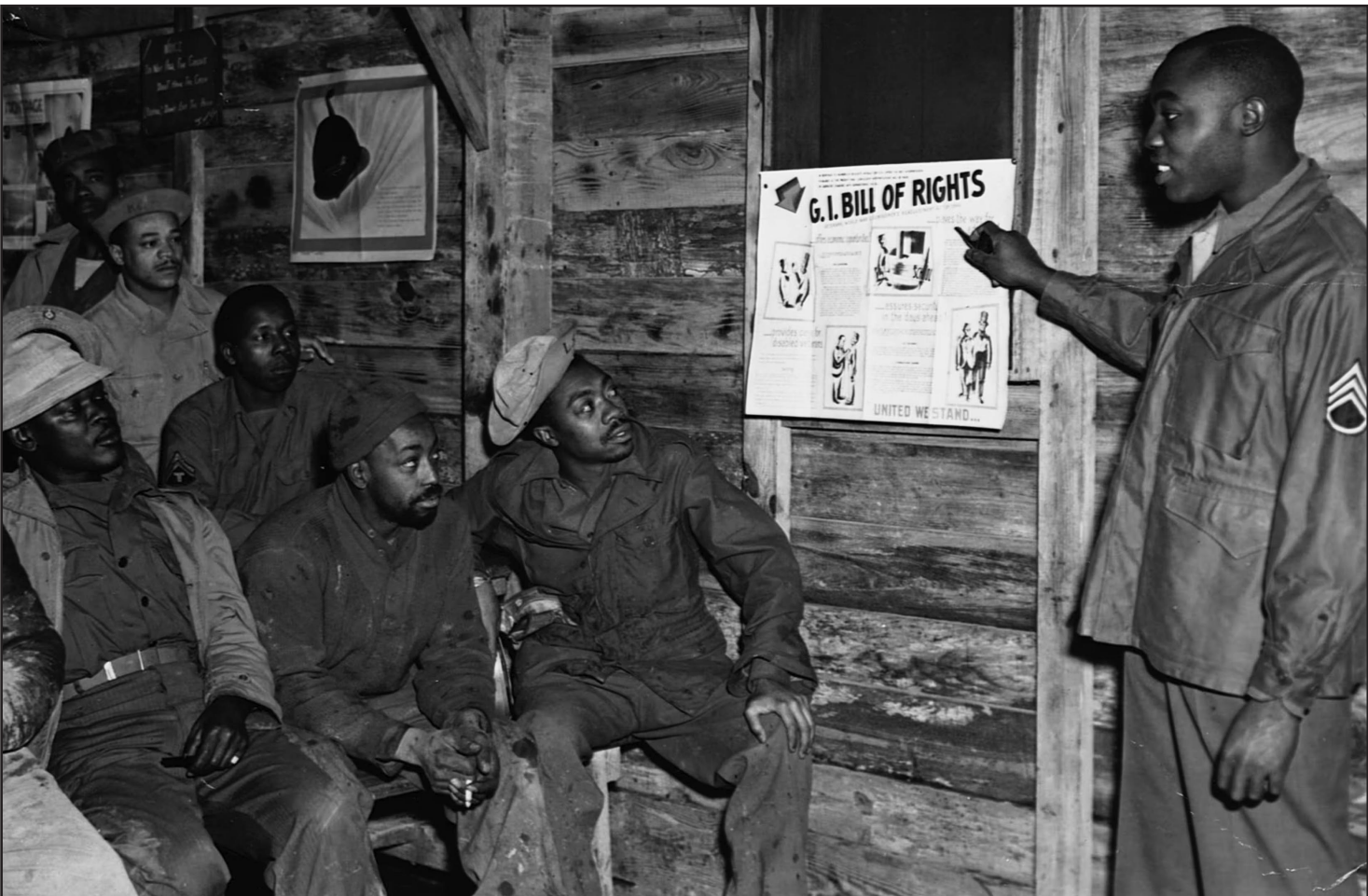
I found myself asking one simple question: How could this happen?

The answer is equally simple and painful: racism.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, is often celebrated as one of the greatest pieces of legislation in American history. On paper, it promised returning veterans low-interest home loans, college tuition assistance, business loans, and unemployment benefits. It helped millions of veterans build prosperous lives after World War II and is widely credited with creating America's modern middle class.

But for many Black veterans, the GI Bill became a promise broken.

The legislation contained critical loopholes that allowed discrimination to flourish. One of its principal House



sponsors was Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi, an outspoken segregationist. Rankin insisted that much of the administration of GI Bill benefits be left to state and local governments, institutions that throughout the South—and even much of the North—were deeply committed to maintaining segregation and white supremacy.

As a result, local officials, banks, colleges, and housing authorities were given tremendous discretion over who actually received these benefits. White veterans often found doors opening before them, while Black veterans found those same doors firmly shut.

Veteran organizations such as the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), whose leadership at the time was overwhelmingly white, largely accepted this system. Rather than challenge discriminatory practices, many allowed them to continue. The result was devastating. Too often, the unspoken attitude was, "Let me get mine," while Black veterans were left behind despite having worn the same uniform and risked their lives for the same country.

Perhaps nowhere was the impact greater than in homeownership.

White veterans used VA-backed home loans requiring little or no down payment to purchase homes in newly developed suburbs across America. Those homes appreciated dramatically over the following decades, creating wealth that families passed down to their children and grandchildren. Homeownership became the foundation of middle-class prosperity for millions of Americans.

Black veterans, however,

were routinely denied those same opportunities. Racially restrictive housing covenants, discriminatory lending practices, and redlining kept many African American families from purchasing homes in growing suburban communities. Instead, they remained confined to overcrowded urban neighborhoods or economically depressed rural communities.

The denial of housing opportunities was not simply a Southern problem.

In New York and northern New Jersey, for example, approximately 67,000 VA-backed mortgages were issued after World War II. Fewer than 100 of those loans went to non-white borrowers. These numbers reveal that discrimination against Black veterans existed nationwide, not just below the Mason-Dixon Line.

Owning a home has long been one of the most effective ways for working-class families to build wealth in America. Equity accumulated over decades allows parents to help their children attend college, start businesses, weather financial hardships, and pass assets from one generation to the next. When Black veterans were denied access to VA home loans, they were denied more than housing—they were denied an opportunity to create generational wealth.

The GI Bill significantly created the biggest racial wealth gap in modern American history. That continues to exist today.

Sometimes I find myself wondering what African American communities across this country would look like today had Black veterans received the same opportunities as

their white counterparts. How many more Black-owned homes would exist? How many more businesses would have been started? How many more families would have escaped poverty? How many children and grandchildren would have inherited financial security instead of economic struggle?

These are not abstract questions. They are deeply personal.

In recent years, I discovered that my own grandfather, who served honorably in the United States Navy during World War II, was denied his GI Bill benefits. Learning this changed how I viewed my own family's history. I often wonder how different my father's life—and ultimately my own—might have been had my grandfather been allowed to receive the education, home loan, and opportunities he earned through military service.

History is not just about dates and events. History shapes families, neighborhoods, and futures.

The consequences of these discriminatory policies remain visible today. Nationally, African American families continue to have significantly lower homeownership rates than white families. In Chicago, my hometown, approximately 34 percent of Black households own their homes compared to roughly 72 percent of white households. While many factors contribute to these disparities, the unequal implementation of the GI Bill remains one of the most important and least discussed causes.

This history should be taught in our schools, discussed in our communities, and remembered by future generations. It is not about creating division or assigning blame to individuals today. It is about acknowledging historical truth and recognizing how public policy can have consequences that last for generations.

I hope that by sharing this story, more Americans will learn about the sacrifices made by Black World War II and Korean War veterans—not only on foreign battlefields but also in their long struggle for justice at home. Their service deserves recognition, and their experiences deserve to be remembered.



CHARLES HENDERSON IS A VETERAN, OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY (AFGHANISTAN), VETERANS FOR PEACE – CHICAGO CHAPTER, HAROLD WASHINGTON AMERICAN LEGION POST #1987, VETERANS RIGHTS ACTIVIST, CHICAGO HISTORIAN, AND PODCAST HOST, FROM WAR TO ACTIVISM.



Veterans Day, Milwaukee, 1977.



# In the Eye of the Hurricane: Da Lat, Vietnam

NADYA WILLIAMS

During the American war, there was apparently one place where hostilities were "not allowed" between the many conflicting sides: American, Viet Cong, and the militaries of both the north and the South—that was the remote hilltop retreat city of Da Lat, north of Saigon. For the first time since the annual Veterans For Peace (VFP) tours to Vietnam started in 2012, this unique haven of peace will be on the two-week itinerary. In keeping with the original mission of the delegations, the February 13 to 28, 2027 tour group will visit the essential humanitarian projects that VFP supports: for Agent Orange/Dioxin victims, unexploded ordnance (UXO) removal, and others—but have this unusual addition toward the end for a little "down time."

The February tour members will be on lucky tour number 13 since VFP started the trips in 2012 (COVID canceled three years: 2020-2023). As always, these trips are open to all, vet and non-vet alike. Tour leaders will again be Vietnam veterans: Chuck Searcy, who has lived full time in Ha Noi since 1995 and co-initiated the UXO removal project, and state-side vet Paul Cox, a former combat Marine who is the current National Secretary of Veterans For Peace. As always, each tour member must make a mandatory donation of \$1,000, which will be divided at the end of the two weeks and disbursed to the projects on the itinerary. All told, \$360,000 has been donated over 16 years—by tour members and many others outside of the trips. In fact, participants find fundraising quite easy. When they put out the word to fellow vets, family, friends, community groups, etc.,



Tour Leader Chuck Searcy at Friendship Village - a treatment center for Vietnamese military victims of Agent Orange-Dioxin.

that they are going to bring people-to-people reparations, donations appear. Bringing more than the \$1,000 minimum is even better. But how did Da Lat end up in the Eye of the Hurricane—escaping the violence raging around it? "A temperate resort full of Indochina-era charm, "the city of eternal spring" was apparently, by tacit agreement, used for R&R purposes by both sides in the war," according to *The Guardian* newspaper of London. During the 100 years (1858—1954) of French colonialism, Da Lat quickly became a retreat for Europeans to a year-round cooler climate in the Central Highlands. Known for its beautiful gardens and unique architecture, the country's last king, Bao Dai, had

several palaces there as well. Da Lat's only major involvement in the war came during the 1968 Tet Offensive. A fierce battle raged for nine days, from January 31 to February 11, with the allied forces of ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam—the South) alongside USAMPC (US Army Military Police Corps) units stationed in Da Lat, fighting against the Viet Cong. The hilltop city is also known as an area for scientific research in the fields of biotechnology and—believe it or not—nuclear physics, due to a small reactor built by America in the early 1960s, and later upgraded by the Soviet Union in the early 1980s! It produces medical isotopes used for treating cancer and other diseases at

major hospitals country-wide. Quirky Da Lat is also famous for avocado ice cream and bánh tráng nướng. Hard to imagine, but stories are told of enemies meeting enemies from 1965 to 1975 over beers and maybe ice cream in a beautiful neutral space that we can now enjoy as well in peace. For more information on the February 13-28, 2027 tour, go to the Veterans For Peace, Vietnam Chapter 160 website: [www.vfp160.org](http://www.vfp160.org)



NADYA WILLIAMS HAS BEEN AN ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF VFP SINCE 2003 AND SERVES AS DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS FOR SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER 69.



VFP tour group at the Headquarters of Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange (VAVA).







### War Letters: August 1973 to March 1975

CLAUDIA KRICH

*I was co-director of the American Friends Service Committee's program in Vietnam from March 1973 until July 1975. We ran a civilian physical rehabilitation center in Quang Ngai, near My Lai, in central Vietnam. We also reported on the war. These are excerpts from letters I sent to my parents and brother, that have never been published.*

#### August 23, 1973

We've been having some hard weeks here. Several people have died; several are still sick. One little girl died probably of hemorrhagic fever—a terrible thing that strikes suddenly, and a child may be dead within two hours. This girl took four days. An eighteen-year-old woman died of burns when her hut caught fire from crossfire warfare. A 25-year-old man was burned over 90 percent of his body when he stepped on an unexploded napalm canister while working his field. He may live but will lose his right hand. Tonight the GVN (Government of [the Republic of] Vietnam), is firing a lot of artillery into the countryside, maybe an eighth or a quarter of a mile from us. The war is certainly not over. There's heavy fighting in many places.

We are now working on the hospital's prison ward, as our doctor has taken over responsibility for it. We talk to prisoners about how they got injured. A young woman in her twenties came in today. She's hemiplegic after being severely beaten during interrogation. A fifteen-year-old girl has serious kidney damage after being kicked in the stomach. And a fifteen-year-old boy has internal pains, for the same reason.

#### August 26, 1973

Today is Sunday and election day here. At four o'clock this morning, the Rural Development Cadres (a police force funded with USAID money) were out on the street banging on tin lids, making an incredible racket, and calling people through megaphones to come out and vote. At 4:00 a.m. I know there has been no enthusiasm about it at all.

On Friday, our short-term doctor and I (as interpreter) were asked to come to the emergency room of the actual hospital to help. They had no

doctors at all, and the huge shelling in Binh Son that morning and the day before had produced a lot of casualties who were beginning to arrive. We couldn't figure out what they wanted of us, so they took us in to see two patients already on the operating tables. One was hit by a mine, with fragments entering the abdomen and other parts of his body. The other man was almost too much to look at. He had been hoeing and stepped on a mine. Usually those take off legs, but somehow he must have been bent over because it blew away his chin and lower face. He just had nothing there at all. Somehow he had already lived for 24 hours and was breathing, even though he had no mouth. They wanted our generalist doctor to somehow do surgery on him, but he couldn't. I'll never forget the man's eyes desperately pleading with me for help.

#### September 12, 1973

There was a new boy on the burn ward yesterday. He had been injured the day before. He's 11 years old, and his job is finding and collecting shell casings and reworking them into objects for use or beauty to sell. This boy found a White Phosphorus bomb shell casing and took it home. At home, he took his heavy cutting tool and whacked into it. Unfortunately, it was full, not empty, and exploded in his face. Now the only part of his face still visible is his mouth and part of his nose. I thought for sure he'd die, since White Phosphorus is even worse than napalm. But our physical therapist thinks he might live.

#### November 18, 1973

We had the biggest flood since 1964. Downtown, the water was over my head and swirling dangerously fast. At the hospital, it reached up to my hips and was moving fast. We spent the afternoon hauling children, families, and belongings from the pediatric ward to a nearby two-story ward. We carried sick, smelly, poopy little kids in our arms and on our backs. The drinking water was polluted beyond being saved by boiling; the electricity was out. Some of our workers were sitting in the rafters of their huts while water raced through their houses, ruining everything.



*Girl double leg above knee amputee.*

#### December 19, 1973

One of our newest patients at our Center is a five-year-old girl missing both legs below the knees. Her older sister, who brought her in, is recovering from an injury to her back. It seems an older sister had a soldier boyfriend she intended to marry, but she broke off the engagement, and the boyfriend was furious. He insisted she marry him, but she refused. So one day he came to their house, gathered them together for a "discussion," pulled a grenade off his belt and dropped it in the middle of the group, killing himself, his girlfriend, three other sisters, and injuring the two we met.

#### February 11, 1974

We have a patient who is a single leg above-knee amputee. While he has been getting treated here, his wife went home to work the rice fields, and she was blown up by another mine and lost both her legs above the knee. The rest of the family is scared to work the field, so they have no rice or money.

Some soldiers shot an 18-year-old young woman for fun and burned 29 houses. Apparently it was revenge for the killing of some local officials. She'll only lose one foot. I told her how lucky she was, then caught myself and started laughing. She completely understood what I meant: losing a foot is almost nothing. Losing a leg or two above the knee, or being a paraplegic—that's worth feeling sad about. Looking around our Center, you just start thinking that way. Missing just a foot, she won't have much trouble walking, but she'll have trouble getting married since some men think a woman missing a limb can't get pregnant, and if the Center closes someday, she'll have trouble getting a replacement leg.

#### July 26, 1974

We have a patient from Saigon, a 26-year-old woman who was arrested and jailed for 10 months, during which time she was severely tortured with pipes, clubs, and electricity. Upon

release, she could no longer walk and had lost feeling in her legs due to beatings to the back and torture with electricity. She had been arrested for demonstrating in Saigon. What exactly does that mean? Well, for instance, after the "election" held in South Vietnam last week, right in Quang Ngai City, amazingly enough, there was an anti-government demonstration. Eight people sat down in the street and several hundred gathered around them. A large number of armed police appeared and hauled away the participants. I was surprised that anyone even had the nerve to demonstrate.

#### February, 1974

We had a tear-gassing the other night, with some soldiers on a truck playing games. They just tear-gassed us and everyone else on the street—horrid stuff. The PRG (Viet Cong) use lemon and peanut oil to counter its effects. It works, too.

One very old man patient told us he was drunk and went out walking at 5 in the morning in his village. Both sides occupy his village, so a local GVN policeman on duty was quite jumpy. He saw the man and shot him with his pistol. The old man had to have one leg amputated. Well, he did break the curfew.

A more typical story is of children, old people, and teenagers whose legs are blown off by ARVN mines planted helter-skelter all over rice fields and pastures. They never warn local people, and they don't deactivate the mines when they leave an area. These mines are both old, unexploded ones and brand-new ones.

One man was a Special Forces soldier who was sleeping in a villager's house. He didn't know that another group of Special Forces soldiers was sleeping in a house next door. He didn't mine the area around the house he was sleeping in, but the others did. In the morning, he got up early, stepped

*continued on page 18*



*Young man one leg below knee one leg above amputee being pushed by younger child.*



War Leters

continued from page 17

outside, and stepped on one of their mines. He lost both legs. But being a soldier, he went to the military rehab center, not ours.

May 12, 1974

Yesterday I almost got blown up. Not really, though, probably. Nhuan, our social worker, and I were coming back from visiting a patient in Duc Pho in our old little old Honda car. We came to a bad spot in the road and had to slow down. There was a huge explosion to our left, and Nhuan told me to floor the gas pedal and get out of there. I did. An M79 grenade had been shot toward us, either trying to hit us or just scare us, probably the latter, since they missed. These were GVN soldiers shooting toward their own road, just for fun. Happens all the time. After the initial explosion, we weren't particularly scared. After all, a huge bus that barreled toward us ten minutes later could as easily have killed us. Nhuan's older sister was killed three months ago when she was gathering wood and stepped on an M79 grenade.

August 31, 1974

The prison ward at the hospital is very empty, maybe three patients at a time. When I asked the guard why there were so few patients, he said it was because there were fewer prisoners. At the time, I laughed, but I recently asked a friend who was released from prison six weeks ago how many prisoners are in the Interrogation Center. She said only 400. Several months ago she told me there were 900. Included, however, in this 400 figure are 50 young students from Saigon who were arrested in 1971 and brought to Quang Ngai in April, 1973 to help empty the Saigon jails. She said these young men are almost all paralyzed in the legs from being constantly shackled and not allowed out of their tight cell area. The other prisoners can see these young men but cannot talk with them.

March 16, 1975

We just came back from a funeral. Our Quaker staff member died Friday night, shot by PRG forces. He was an amputee but still a member of the "Self-Defense Forces." On Friday around 8:30 p.m., we heard two explosions. Then people on the street were firing guns and running, shouting, "The Communists are coming in." Everyone is scared because Ban Me Thuot was just taken over by the PRG, or maybe by local angry tribal people. Anyway, the PRG did come in and threw two grenades into a police post 150 yards from our house, injuring several people and killing two. A few minutes later they shot into a group of Self Defense Forces, killing three, including our staff member. One PRG soldier died too, and his body was left on display by the GVN. A



Woman suffering seizure after being tortured with electricity in Quang Ngai Interrogation Center.

week ago, some PRGers shot into a police station at the other end of town. They're just showing everyone that, in fact, they can come into the city whenever they like.

The ARVN are now massively bombing Ban Me Thuot to "save" it, just like Quang Tri.

March 25, 1975

We're in Saigon now. Vietnam is about to change hands. A city called Tam Ky, on Highway 1 just North of Quang Ngai, just became PRG-controlled this morning. We're trying to get back to Quang Ngai to see the final events, but so far we haven't been able to get there. We're told there are still foreigners in various newly PRG-controlled cities. It's unbelievable how cities, whole provinces, are becoming PRG—places that never have been before. And with very little violence. The ARVN are just running away as fast as they can.

There are hundreds of new foreign press people in Saigon, all waiting for The Event. The murder of *Agent France Press* correspondent Leandri has infuriated the press. It's pretty sure he was murdered during interrogation in the police station in Saigon, though police say he was accidentally shot while they meant to shoot his car wheels. Three shots in the side of the head.

There's a 10:00 p.m. curfew, 3,000 arrests a day in Saigon, things polarizing fast. It can't last long. Local soldiers just set up a roadblock at the end of our alley, catching 17-year-old young men for the draft, and checking everyone's papers. They're also searching house to house for Communists, as if they'd ever recognize them.

The GVN reports hundreds of thousands of refugees, but we don't believe it. For example, the number they give for Quang Ngai—refugees—would double the current

population. It's impossible. Seems to be propaganda aimed at getting the US Congress to provide more funding.

March 31, 1975

The speed at which panic spreads and creates chaos is far greater than that of any military offensive. This situation cannot fairly be called a military offensive. Over and over again, in place after place, the PRG are hard-pressed to keep up with the retreating GVN. Da Nang fell into chaos through panic.

We're told the PRG came in earlier than they planned to, simply to help by establishing some sort of government to end the looting and killing. The American Embassy, along with everyone else, has been amazed at the panic among soldiers and refugees. In Da Nang, we understand that the local civilians were not the people panicking, but rather mostly the military retreating from Hue and Quang Ngai, and refugees from Hue.

Refugees ruined their own "escape" routes by overrunning the airport and causing it to shut down. The harbor was the same scene. Thousands of refugees overran boats, pushing and shoving and killing a few people.

We predicted a week ago that Saigon would begin to panic just about now, and certainly with the fall of Da Nang. Our prediction is earlier than most Vietnamese, but I think it's correct. Panic is an incredible weapon. Food prices are beginning to reflect the fact that Saigon is being choked from its food sources. We are told that luxuries are cheaper, though a typewriter we priced today wasn't. Tonight I'm beginning to feel the uneasiness that eventually took us out of Quang Ngai. Foreigners: targets.

I think if the process were slower, there would be fewer refugees, because the panicking people might be able to stop and realize that the retaliation

they fear—the bombing and artillery of the GVN on its own territory when it's taken over—is becoming less and less of a danger as they retreat farther and farther South. And North.

The situation in Saigon is the most important one, since it will be the final stage. There are different views on what could and should happen, but I have yet to meet anyone who wants to salvage Thieu and his friends.

If Thieu manages to stick it out to the end, the last fight will surely be bloody, not so much because anyone will fight for Thieu but because of panic, like Da Nang but worse. What people say about Thieu is that if he tries to leave, he'll be killed, and if he stays, he'll also be killed. Second, Thieu may resign or be killed. Then the liberal opposition may take over, strengthen the government, include the Third Force people, and honestly implement the Peace Agreement and help bring peace. From what we've heard, this solution is fine with the PRG, though it's not the total victory of the first possibility. It's presumably a much less bloody last stand, perhaps even bloodless. Third, Thieu may resign or be killed, and then a rightist coup may take over. This would be difficult in various ways. One, it might be just the same and create further confusion and panic. If it's a slight improvement, the PRG may lose some of the energy being generated by fast victories so far, by losing their war enemy, Thieu. Or, a new regime might get support from the United States, which might resume funding.

No one doubts that this is the end of the Thieu regime. People only wonder how it will go and if they'll survive it. The race is on. Can the opposition Third Force groups get rid of Thieu before the whole situation falls apart?

Marshall Ky seems to be after the job. General Minh is also most interested. General Minh, according to one source, would hope to strengthen what's left of the military, increase its morale (how?), and then negotiate with the PRG, keeping separate territories but giving everyone the freedom to travel. I think the PRG would like to see this happen, since it would, among other things, give them greater protection against attacks from the US. But the people's panic may not allow such a solution.

To be continued in the Spring 2027 issue of *The Veteran*.



CLAUDIA KRICH IS THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK *"THOSE WHO STAYED: A VIETNAM DIARY,"* WHICH WAS RELEASED IN APRIL, 2025. SHE DIRECTED A MEDICAL RELIEF PROGRAM BASED IN QUANG NGAI, VIETNAM FROM 1973 TO 1975.

Too Close To the Viet Nam Shore

Viet Nam Dead ahead.  
Starboard turn, 90 degrees.  
We fall in line, taking our place  
on the Tonkin Gulf gun line.

Guns blasting from ships ahead.  
Gun smoke fogs the view,  
Stretching long my very first hour,  
Standing my first battle station watch.

Watching our ship sailing too close  
To the Viet Nam shore.  
Oh! Look how beautiful it is  
Over there.

But  
Bombs are blasting on the beach.  
Three boys running on the sand,  
Until our five-inch gun guns them down.  
Three boys' bodies splatter across the ground

Bleeding their deaths  
Before my eyes,  
Sucking out my sanity,  
While the Captain's vanity  
Soars.  
Scoring us a shiny killer's badge.

How can grown men be so blind  
That they pay no mind  
To the bare-naked fact  
That children are dying at their hands?

Why can't they understand  
We are really just killing each other;  
"Those people" are our sister and brother.  
Their parents, our father and mother.

When will we evolve  
And learn how to solve  
Our complications with discussions  
Instead of hurling percussion grenades?

—Mushroom Montoya



# AWOLs: The Introverted Resisters?

MIKE WITTELS

On August 23, 1966, late afternoon, still hot, the sky a crisp Kentucky blue, I was thrown in the Ft. Knox stockade for having disobeyed orders to put on a uniform and report to work. I was thrown into the Box. There I was made to stand until evening, "break down," and shout out my name and serial number on command every hour. White bread and raw cabbage three times a day. A stainless steel sink attached to the back wall had one spigot, which doubled as a drinking fountain.

After four days, I was released into the general population and moved to Medium Security. Over the next week, I learned that about 95% of the inmates had been busted as AWOL, sometimes for the second or third time. Several said, "Once an AWOL, always an AWOL." Most were just kids.

A few had pressing reasons for AWOL, although the Army didn't see it that way: a sick wife, child, or parent, and the soldier didn't know how to get time off. Or had tried going through channels but failed.

The non-AWOLs were in for car theft, assault, bad checks, etc. One was in for bigamy, discovered after both wives claimed spousal benefits.

Medium Security prisoners were taken out on work details in groups of five every weekday. We were guarded by PGs (Prisoner Guards) armed with shotguns loaded with nine steel slivers, not birdshot. We had been told by the tall, eccentric confinement officer, who spoke like a revivalist preacher, that if we tried to escape from a crew, we would be shot. During my time, two prisoners were. One probably cracked up: he tried to get away by running up a hill. The other, just 18 years old, was shot dead, and he wasn't even trying to escape; it was just a misunderstanding. He had three days left on his sentence.

When I entered the stockade, it was at capacity, with about 240 prisoners, but growing. Soon, prisoners were sleeping on the floor between the bunks and even in the latrine. After a couple of months, they erected huge tents in the exercise yard to house the overflow. New prisoners were coming by the busload almost daily. By February 1967, the population was 600. The reason was the growing unpopularity of the Vietnam War. Many GIs had taken off because they didn't like being in the Army, being bossed around, or being away from home, their wives, or their girlfriends.

Word was you could get a general

discharge under honorable conditions as unfit or unsuitable by going AWOL three times. The first time you'd get a six-month sentence, suspended after about six weeks. Then back to duty. Another AWOL, another 6 months, but suspended and back to duty after two or three months. Third try: discharged after a couple of months. Sometimes, though, depending on several factors, including length of absence, you might get a Bad Conduct Discharge, under conditions Other Than Honorable.

A few had received orders for Nam but didn't comply. When apprehended, they were charged with missing troop movement, avoiding hazardous duty, or desertion. Still, those charges were usually reduced to simple AWOL, especially if they stated a willingness to go. In fact, all someone had to do to get out of the stockade immediately was to volunteer for Nam. He'd be taken there under armed guard.

Prisoners were not kept for more than six months at a stretch. Most were sent to the parolee barracks within a couple of months of being locked up. There they were not under guard, so could just walk away, and many did. Those sentenced to longer than six months (through a GCM) went to Maximum Security, then were shipped to Leavenworth.

Few prisoners said out loud that the Vietnam War was the reason they had gone AWOL or even a factor. But it was. I think of them as introverted resisters. They didn't articulate the real reason they were trying to get out, perhaps out of fear of being called cowards.

Or the real fear of getting more serious punishment, although I did hear some say they didn't see any point in "getting my ass shot off for nothing."

But it wasn't just the prisoners. One day during my six-week stay in solitary (for refusing a "promotion" to minimum security status, because it was touted as a step back to duty), an MP officer I hadn't seen before stopped by my cell. I expected the usual derogatory comments, but he said he was on temporary assignment to the stockade and, "This war in Vietnam is a bunch of bullshit. Fighting for democracy, hah! What democracy? We don't even have it in this country." He added that the MPs, to which he was now assigned, were the worst of them all—brutal and sadistic. "Why, the way they treat these guys in here is just going to make them run away, and I don't blame them."



Mike Wittels in Basic, Ft Knox, Sept. 1963, when he was on ACDUTRA as a reservist.

About two-thirds of the AWOLs had joined, but rarely out of patriotism. Mainly they had been trying to get away from something they didn't like: job, no job, marriage, home, or other situation. Many had wives, as in their communities, a man was expected to get married by 18. A good percentage had been raised in foster homes, shuffled from place to place. A few had enlisted in exchange for having criminal charges dropped, although this practice had officially been discontinued. Some had been high-pressured or conned by recruiters.

Company commanders were required to report absences after discovering them at morning roll call. Base headquarters then alerted the MPs, who contacted the police in the AWOL's hometown. If cops stopped a truant for a traffic or other violation, they checked their list and turned him over if his name was on it.

After 30 days, the GI was administratively listed as a deserter. This meant his company commander could request a replacement, and the FBI would be notified.

If he was gone only a day or two, an AWOL might try to alibi his way out, but that rarely worked. A short first offense would bring an Article 15 punishment, say, extra duty or a fine.

Several I talked with or overheard had been turned in by wives or girlfriends, usually after an argument, or by a relative who wanted the kid to "man up." Some were reported by civilians seeking to collect a perhaps mythical \$25 reward.

If arrested off base for offenses covered by civilian law, the GI was

usually tried by the appropriate court but could be handed over to the MPs.

Just to refresh your memory, AWOL, or Unauthorized Absence (UA) in the Navy, is defined in Article 86 UCMJ as the status of "Any member of the armed forces who, without authority (1) fails to go to his appointed place of duty at the time prescribed; (2) goes from that place; or (3) absents himself or remains absent from his unit, organization, or place of duty at which he is required to be at the time prescribed." After 30 days, he/she is dropped from company rolls and, for administrative purposes, declared a deserter.

That rarely leads to a conviction for desertion (UCMJ Article 85). For the charge to stick, the prosecution normally must show intent to stay away forever: deliberately destroying one's uniform or ID card, or changing one's name or SSN. Or making written or oral remarks of intent to remain absent, or failure to turn oneself in when given the chance, or moving to a foreign country and remaining absent for many years.

Desertion also includes quitting one's unit, organization, or place of duty "with intent to avoid hazardous duty or to shirk important service." In time of war, a deserter can be sentenced to death. For legal purposes, "time of war" is not simply when US forces are engaged in battle, as they have been continuously since 2001. For desertion cases, it is probably only when Congress has officially declared war: WWII (December 8, 1941, to September 2, 1945), but not since.

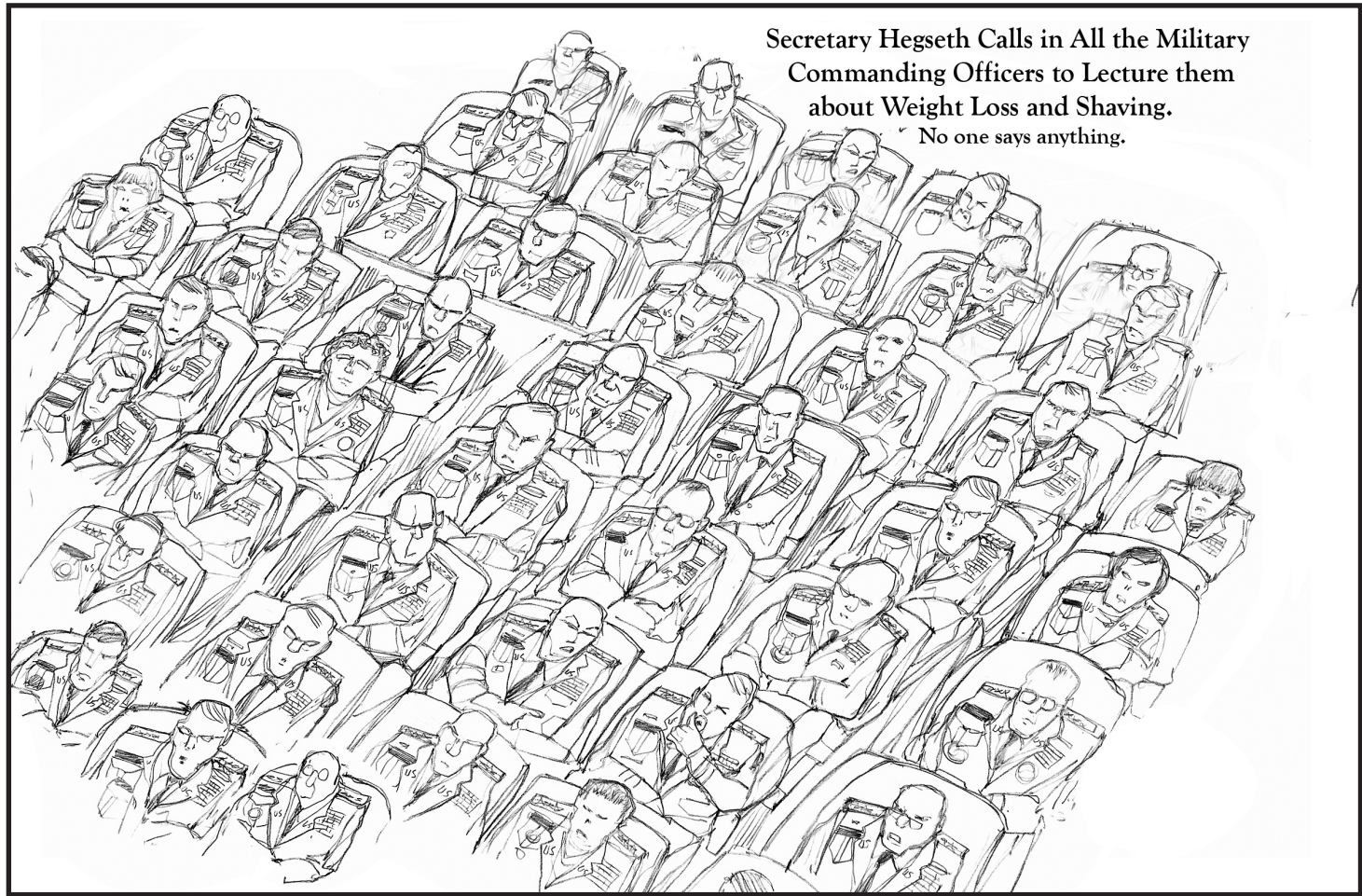
The DoD lists 503,926 deserters between July 1, 1966, and December 31, 1973. And at least 1.5 million shorter-term AWOLs. The rate grew from 3,177 cases (1.6 percent of the military) in FY 1965 to 79,027 (7.4 percent) in FY71.

The DoD Special Discharge Review Program defined the Vietnam era as August 4, 1964 (Tonkin Gulf Resolution), through March 28, 1973 (when the last American ground troops were withdrawn). The official termination date is May 7, 1975, when US forces completed their withdrawal. During this period, there were over 507,000 incidents of desertion. The program reported, "There were about 444,000 individual deserters. The Army had at least 367,000 incidents and 322,000 individuals."

In any case, despite the potential penalties, a whole lot of troops said NO in the most personal way they could.



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# They Were Not Supposed to Grow Old

DON LIBBY

The promise was the same. The country wasn't.

They came home. That was supposed to be the good part.

There was a poem. There is always a poem.

In September 1914, six weeks into a war that would kill seventeen million people, a British poet named Laurence Binyon sat down and tried to make meaning out of slaughter. He was 45. Too old to serve. He watched a generation walk into the machine and he wrote this:

*They shall not grow old, as we that  
are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the  
years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in  
the morning  
We will remember them.*

It is a beautiful poem. He meant every word. A century later it is still recited at ceremonies across the English-speaking world. The words still move people. They moved me.

That's the problem.

I was at Da Nang in 1967. Cam Ranh Bay in 1969. I knew boys who didn't come home, and I knew more who did.

The ones who didn't come home got Binyon's promise, in a way. Frozen at nineteen, twenty, twenty-

two. Remembered clean, before the country had a chance to change its mind about them.

The ones who came home got something else. We got to grow old. That was supposed to be the mercy. Nobody told us what growing old would cost.

They grew old in VA waiting rooms. They grew old carrying wounds the government spent decades refusing to connect to the war. Agent Orange moved through their bodies like a slow sentence. Diabetes. Neuropathy. Cancer. The VA called it unproven. The men called it dying.

They grew old homeless. On any given night in America thirty thousand veterans sleep outside. Many of them Vietnam era. They went with songs to the battle. They came back to parking lots and shelters and the underside of bridges.

They grew old alone. The numbers are not secret. They never were. Seventeen veterans a day don't make it home after they're already home. The country learned to say the number without feeling it. A statistic is easier to live with than a face.

They grew old waiting. For benefits. For acknowledgement. For someone in Washington to say plainly what was done to them and why. Most

are still waiting. Some ran out of time.

Age wearied them. The years condemned them. Binyon never wrote that version. Nobody did.

There is a wall in Washington. Black granite. Five hundred and eighty four feet long. Fifty eight thousand three hundred and twenty names.

No words.

Binyon's fallen got words. Solemn drums. Proud thanksgiving. Glory that shines upon our tears. A nation's grief wrapped around them like a flag.

Ours got names. Just the names. As if the count itself was the only honest thing left to say.

I have stood at that wall. I have watched people find a name and press their hand flat against the stone. Some of them shake. Some of them don't make a sound. There is nothing to say that the wall hasn't already said better.

I have found names I knew. Boys I ate with. Boys I laughed with. Boys who were twenty years old and certain they were going to live forever because that is what twenty feels like. Their names are cold to the touch. The stone doesn't give anything back.

It has no promise in it. No consolation. No age shall not weary them.

Just the names. Going down into the earth.

I have never left that wall without leaving something of myself behind. I don't think I'm supposed to.

Binyon asked us to remember them at the going down of the sun and in the morning. We can do that. We have done that. But remembering is not enough and it never was.

Here is what I would write instead.

They grew old hard or they didn't grow old at all. They were wearied by the years and condemned by the country that sent them. They were not frozen in glory. They were worn down in silence. And we who are left carry that silence like a second wound.

We will remember them. Not as the nation wishes they were. As they actually were. That is the only tribute that costs anything. That is the only one worth making.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning.

We will remember them. On our terms. Not theirs.



DON LIBBY, SERVED IN THE AIR FORCE FOR 4 1/2 YEARS AS AN AIR OPERATIONS SPECIALIST AT DANANG AB 1967 AND THEN AGAIN AT CAM RAHN BAY IN 1969.

## Letter to the Editor

MEG MINER

President Trump's dismissive comment on the length of the USS Abraham Lincoln's deployment is yet another example of the contempt he has for service members. He doesn't think they've been at sea long enough, eh? I can't help wondering if he could last even a month without a trip to Mar-a-Lago. I doubt he could go a week without a trip to a golf course.

What a callous comment to make

considering there are sailors on that ship who have tried to kill themselves.

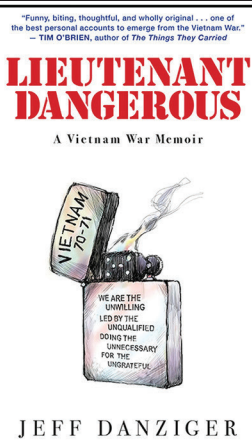
Secretary Hegseth is just as dismissive of the reports about the problems the Lincoln's crew have faced, insinuating they are fake news. Those reports came from family members using the appropriate chain-of-command to voice their concerns for the conditions their loved ones are living and fighting in.

Trump and Hegseth continue to casually disregard the humanity of the people they put in harm's way—military and civilian alike. They've dug us such a deep hole that it's hard to see how we can ever get out.

Their "Overseas Operation" in the Gulf region sounds a lot like Putin's "Special Military Operation" don't you think? We'll be lucky if it ends in four years.



MEG MINER RETIRED FROM THE AIR FORCE AFTER A CAREER THAT BEGAN IN THE POST-VIETNAM WAR ERA AND ENDED IN THE GULF WAR ERA. AFTER THAT SHE HAD A CAREER AS A LIBRARIAN AND ARCHIVIST. MEG FOUND A HOME IN VVAW FOR HER EVOLVING IDENTITY AS AN ANTI-WAR VETERAN WHEN THE US INVADED AFGHANISTAN.



### New Vietnam Memoir by Cartoonist Jeff Danziger

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Pennsylvania, July 4, 1974



# A Forgotten Anniversary?

JOE MILLER

*From the 1994 issue of The Veteran.*

*Note: After watching the new film The Odyssey. I sought out this 1994 article from The Veteran because the film resonated so deeply with what I continue to feel as my personal "responsibility" (silence) for the Vietnam War and all the human costs.*

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 many might I have saved? When thinking about the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, I sometimes wonder who among those nearly sixty thousand might have turned around and refused to go off to war if he or she knew the truth (or untruth) of the war's origins, as I did.

Then I remind myself that this story, or its main outlines, has been part of the public record since early 1968, when Senator Fulbright held hearings on 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 to be supported blindly (and replaced 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 passage in 1964. 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 fallen took over, sending blood and flesh after blood and flesh, until we just got tired of it all.

How many might 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 old post-World War II sense of national omnipotence and righteousness. Vietnam has been redefined under a barrage of trance-inducing books and articles written by self-serving journalists, scholars, politicians, and novelists. Young people are being told fairy tales by Mother Goose wrapped 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 again put forward 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 that drew many of us into an orgy of death, destruction, and dislocation for more than 10 years. The residue of that period is still with us, and no number 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 became known as the Gulf of Tonkin "incidents." 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 Maddox, 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, whose objective was to provoke shore station 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 was intended to aid efforts to break Vietnamese and Chinese codes, a task of the US Naval Security Group (NSG) working under the National Security Agency (NSA). The temporary intelligence

team aboard the Maddox for this mission included Vietnamese and Chinese linguists, a couple of whom had worked at the NSG detachment 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 excitement. This time, however, the response was more intense than anticipated. The North Vietnamese sent boats to repel the invading American warship. The Maddox sent out a call for help, and fighters from my ship, the USS Ticonderoga (CVA-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 Vietnamese 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 US pilots on the scene, Commander James Stockdale from our ship, claimed there was no attack. This was ignored. It was enough for the Johnson-McNamara team in Washington to claim that an attack had indeed taken place. This was just what they had been looking for to justify increased American involvement in Vietnam. This was the second lie.

These two lies were the basis for upping the ante in Vietnam. On August 5, 1964, US air attacks were carried out against military installations in northern Vietnam. These were called "reprisals" for the "unprovoked attacks" against our ships in "international waters." Lies, lies, and more lies. Then, on August 7, the US Senate (with only two dissenting votes) adopted the "Tonkin Gulf Resolution." This would function for the next six years as a blank check, allowing the Johnson Administration to increase the level of direct US involvement in a combat role. Then the Nixon Administration arrived on the scene, and the damage had already been done. No one wanted to hear that US 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

dynamics of war-making had taken over, and other lies were used to continue the war until 1975.

For me, this anniversary brings pain at the thought of so many who died in a war against the Vietnamese people's struggle for national unity and independence. All the result of cold warrior's lies. This pain is especially acute, since I 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 when I worked at the NSG detachment at Linkou Air Station on Taiwan. After the so-called "incidents," I spoke with one of them and was not horrified at the time. After all, I was still part of the intelligence "club" who felt more important because we knew what others did not. Unfortunately, this sort of silliness still attracts young people into the lying business.

My personal horror grew as questions drove me to learn more about Vietnam, as the numbers of dead Vietnamese, Americans, and others piled up day by day and week by week. How many might have been saved if people like me spoke out much 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 accepted the lies, even those of us who knew they were lies! We should certainly remember all those who died or suffered serious injury while fighting in the war, or fighting against it.

While many may prefer the euphoric memories of Woodstock, these should be balanced by the memory of murdered civil rights workers, Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner, as well as the memory of the Tonkin Gulf, August 1964.



JOE MILLER SERVED IN THE US NAVY, 1961-1968. WITNESSED THE GULF OF TONKIN "INCIDENT" IN 1964.

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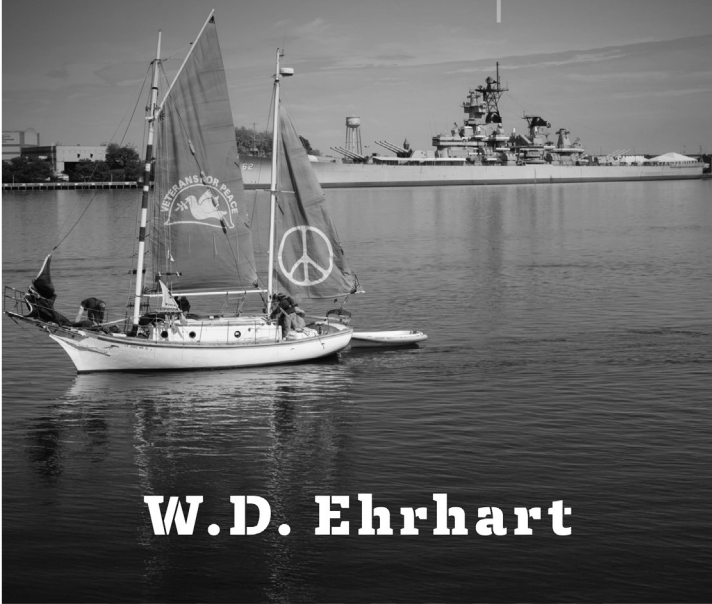
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# Profit Knows No Accountability

ALLEN MEECE

In 1964, my Navy destroyer, the USS Edwards, DD-950, dropped anchor five miles offshore of South Vietnam. Obie and I, my torpedo-man friend, went up to the open bridge and looked through the lookout's big mounted binoculars and saw green, jungly hills rising behind a little fishing village by the beach with thatched huts and three outrigger canoes pulled above the high tide line.

The five-inch-diameter gun barrel rose higher and pointed at the smoke back in the jungle. Bam! The big gun went off and made a puff of smoke in the jungle about seven miles away. We blew up something and/or somebody; we didn't know who or what we were shooting—Classified Information. I had no problem with Vietnam worth killing anybody over. The Navy had lied to me; this wasn't a conflict, it was war. And they wouldn't let me out of it.

That was Veterans' Day, 1964, during the Vietnam conflict.

Veterans' Day was originally named Armistice Day when the First World War ended on November 11, 1918. It was a horrible war, full of poison gas and gangrene and mud and starvation for all. They called it The Great War. And they said it was so bad that it would be The Last War. But new people-haters came along and demanded a new hell for nice people.

The "Vietnam American War", as the Vietnamese rightfully named it to differentiate it from their previous colonial war against the French exploiters, finally truly ended when the US President made a speech in front of a college crowd at Tulane University in Louisiana on April 23, 1975.

President Gerald Rudolf Ford, Junior, delivered a very simple announcement to the assembled professors and students: "...this war is finished." The long drawn-out atrocity was over.

America's guilty exit from Vietnam, Republic of, was an

armistice. President Nixon signed the Paris Peace Accords and walked away from the bad but profitable deal we had made with ourselves.

There were no official winners nor losers. Congress had ignored the US Constitution's mandate and bravely refused to declare that that war was a war. That would have made this "ruckus in a rice pot" more important, and Russia and China might have joined in and really hurt us. It was a Presidential Play. Congress allowed presidents to act like Napoleons.

All that was offered at the end of the ten-year obscenity was scared collaborators lining up on rooftops in Saigon, praying to escape the Wrath of Cong by flying away on helicopters to Navy aircraft carriers.

The hollow South Vietnamese government collapsed, and the people's tanks flowed into Saigon but kindly did not purge all the capitalists, only the worst. The violent hatred was over. But not Imperialism, unfortunately.

"...this war is finished," Ford had said. He followed that short summation with words to the effect of "Work for our bright future. Forget about the war."

I will not forget my comrades-in-arms who paid the final price, or who are still suffering the moral consequences of fighting on the wrong side. Time does not heal the subconscious mind. It needs treatment to accept and work through the deep regret of killing other people.

I will not even try to forget my relative, Mac Hughlen Meece, who used to hunt squirrels in Kentucky. He was a marksman, so the Army gave him a thirty-caliber machine gun. The Twenty-Fifth Infantry stationed him in the doorway of a Fourth Cavalry chopper that was surveilling guerrilla activity around the Cu Chi tunnel networks on May 5, 1966.

But this time, it was the shooter who got shot. He did not survive

his wound and made his transition from the physical dimension to the spiritual. He had been in-country for two months. He was a teenager, nineteen years old, one week short of his twentieth birthday.

He will not be forgotten; his name remains engraved in the sixty-five tons of polished granite of the Vietnam Wall beside the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool in the District of Columbia.

All those lives, all those wounds, those trillion inflation-adjusted dollars did not change the Vietnamese people. They are still semi-socialistic after earning the right to run their country their way.

Twenty years of horror and no gain. Millions of losers, no winners. Oh! Except for the profiteers. They won big in the lucrative Combat Economy game. Ahh. THAT must be why obscene wars go on too long and too often. It's a long-range digital game of numbers with no physical risk, especially if the player claims bone spurs in his heels, which makes it too painful to walk in a military setting with other people.

I hoped Americans had learned something from the Nam experience. But, according to the rules of the game, there is no profit in waiting for combat to come to you. Peace might prevail forever if you leave it alone.

So the Afghanistan invasion was started. It was just an "operation," nobly named "Operation Enduring Freedom." This armed invasion of a foreign nation posed itself as a simple posse going after Osama bin Laden, the main suspect in the destruction of Manhattan's World Trade Center.

After twenty years of "military conflict", nearly two-and-a-half thousand American military personnel were killed in combat in Afghanistan, and twenty-one thousand were wounded by weapons of mass destruction there. That's a heavy toll for something not called war.

But finally, one person, nearing Veterans' Day of 2021, some President, shook off the war fever, gave up, and walked off without a brass band or apologies. The walk-away was small and semi-secret, a secure operation, a tactical military evacuation. The exit party wore drab camouflage-style clothing, not dress uniforms. Once again, terrified local collaborators screamed and ran after the deserting American aircraft. One Afghani grabbed a wheel and fell off at two hundred feet.

Once again, much was lost, and nothing gained (except war profits), by gun barrel diplomacy. We went into Afghanistan twenty-five years ago. Today, in 2026, it is still controlled by a religious, radical, militant, political party called the Taliban, the Seekers.

Massive international killing is a deadly, globally serious curse. It demands nothing less than a formal Declaration of War with legal certification and liability to the United Nations. Governments can no longer be casual about wholesale death.

It is time the United States of America leaves behind such uncooperative nations as China, Russia, and Israel and gets honorable and re-joins the International Criminal Court and dares to answer for its bad behavior.

China, Russia and Israel. What a club for the "land of the free and the brave" to belong to.



ALLEN MEECE, USN, 1962 - 66, USS EDWARDS, DD950. ALLEN HAS WRITTEN THREE BOOKS THAT ARE AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.COM: TIN CAN, ABOUT A YOUNG SAILOR IN THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENT; BRAVE NEW MARS, ABOUT A BILLIONAIRE MAKING MARS INTO HIS OWN CORPOCRACY; DRIFTING IN PARADISE, POEMS ABOUT THE KEY WEST UNHOUSED EXPERIENCE.

# Memories of LBJ at Pope AFB

JACK MARQUESS

Memories/recollections are thoughts that float in the mind. People who study the mind's memory will tell you that we often slightly change the story's content each time we retell it. Except for one, the memories of my story have not changed because they are few, unique, and very memorable. However, the experience of those who were there—well, I'll let you discover that as you read below.

A couple of weeks or so—I can't specifically remember—before our company, 147th LEM, was scheduled to ship out, I took a ride with a buddy (Joe Carroll, as I remember) after chow. I liked to wander the forested roads in Ft. Bragg. We ended up at the entrance to Pope AFB. An airman was hitchhiking. I picked him up. He quickly told us an incredible story. He arrived at the base early because a battalion of the 82nd Airborne was to be deployed to Vietnam. Once he got there, they were told that LBJ would be there to give a sendoff speech. You can imagine what that meant to both the Army and Air Force commands—and how it trickled down. Turns out, some of the troops were drunk, and, according to the airman, some had just come back—some heckled LBJ during his speech. LBJ watched the planes depart, then took off in AF-1. A few hours later, the planes returned, and the battalion returned to their barracks. Our airman then had to do maintenance on his craft. He missed the bus back to his barracks and chow. Besides being bewildered, he was hungry and afraid he might miss chow. He thanked me several

times during the ride. I dropped him off in time.

Decades later, I am watching *Bill Moyers Journal* on *PBS*. I got the impression that he was there at Pope. (Moyers was not; he resigned in December 1966.) Moyers said that when LBJ returned that day to AF-1, he despondently sat down and looked at the floor for quite a while. Finally,

*Times* article which quoted *The Armed Forces Journal*. That version, which I condensed and rewrote, provides illuminating and humorous details.

Only hours before LBJ's arrival did the 82nd command learn of the visit. The battalion was at a nearby picnic ground having a farewell party (probably an all-night banger). For LBJ's speech, command got units

after Tet (January 30, 1968). The unit's actual deployment took place a day or two later.

The Incident happened February 17, 1968. Pope AFB, NC, was LBJ's first stop on a tour of military bases that ended in California. His mission was to rally the troops. Six weeks later, on March 31, 1968, LBJ announced he was not running for president that November. Perhaps Bill Moyers' story was accurate even though he was not present.

In early March 1968, my company went over with all our repair equipment and vehicles via the USS Barnett. The USS Barnett was the first ship to rescue the crew of the USS Indianapolis in WWII. The sinking of the Indianapolis was a US Naval HQ scandal (documentaries were made). Its courageous captain, Charles McVay, was scapegoated through a court-martial. Many of his crew stood up for him. The captain of the Japanese sub was given special permission to testify. He told the jury that he would have sunk the ship no matter what evasive actions were taken. McVay was nevertheless found guilty. He committed suicide in 1968. Congress passed a resolution exonerating McVay; President Clinton signed it in 2000. The deadly fog of war and memories go on and on. Eventually, some truths become visible, but are seen by few.



JACK MARQUESS, RA US ARMY 1965-1968, RADAR MECHANIC 23G20, ETS DECEMBER 17, 1968.

The deadly fog of war and memories go on and on. Eventually, some truths become visible, but are seen by few.

he reportedly said, "We've lost ... send those boys back ... turn the planes around ..."

For years, I equated Moyer's story with the reason our scheduled November 1967 VN deployment was suddenly canceled just a few weeks before departure. I thought that if Hanoi had been informed of Johnson's action, Tet might have been averted; Tricky Dickie would not have bombed; Pol Pot would not have destroyed the Cambodian population. It weighed heavily on me. I have told several people of the experience with Nov. 67 as the date of the occurrence.

It was only when I started to write this article on August 24, 2026 that I discovered it was really February 1968, not November 1967 (I never kept a diary). I read a 1976 *New York*

that had just returned from Vietnam to replace them. Not all of them had been informed of the charade. After his speech, LBJ told command that he wanted to go down and be with the men as they boarded their planes.

According to the February 27, 1976 *New York Times*:

*Brig. Gen. Donald Blackburn, assistant commander of the 82d Airborne, "thought he was going to have a heart attack" and the division commander, Maj. Gen. Richard Seitz, "turned pale" when President Johnson decided to mingle with the GIs.*

Blackburn was fearful that if LBJ saw them board, the troops might break out of the plane and start rioting.

The 82nd Airborne Battalion, a STRAC unit, was being sent as reinforcements less than three weeks



# Oath Above Politics

JOSEPH MORAN

*"Oh war! Thou son of hell, Whom angry heavens do make their minister."—William Shakespeare, Henry IV Part 2*

*Chapter 6 from What Had to be Done/What Has to be Said: A Combat Medic Remembers the War on Vietnam on the 50th Anniversary of Vietnamese Reunification.*

The medic creed reads: "To provide to the utmost limits of my capability the best possible care to those in need of my aid and assistance. To this end, I will aid all those who are needful, paying no heed to my own desires and wants, treating friends, foes, and strangers alike, placing their needs above my own. To no man will I cause or permit harm to befall, nor will I refuse aid to any who seek it. I will willingly share my knowledge and skills with all those who seek it. I seek neither reward nor honor for my efforts, for the satisfaction of accomplishment is sufficient. These obligations I willingly and freely take upon myself in the tradition of those that have come before me. These things I (we) do so that others may live."

The creed derives from the Hippocratic Oath and the passages that say I will share my knowledge with all who seek it, and into whoever's house I enter, I will enter to help the sick. Sadly, there were instances where the words of this creed were discouraged by other soldiers. I didn't care; the creed was more important than politics.

I had frequent opportunities to provide medical assistance to civilians. When we pulled into or outside a rural hamlet, its kids were the first to greet us, begging for candy, gum, or a Polaroid photo. They knew that a medic was present, and it was safer for kids to approach me and vice versa than adults that might be suspected of being sympathizers. In more urban areas, adults could approach with less suspicion.

All the medics I knew took the creed seriously. The medical services provided to the Vietnamese by US medics, corpsmen, nurses, and doctors were among the few instances in which we could show goodwill and win the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese people.

The Vietnamese healthcare system was primitive by US standards at the time. Trained medical doctors were few, and many relied on herbal remedies and a shaman. In most situations where Vietnamese citizens came or were brought before me, the most I could offer was an analgesic, topical ointment, bandage, and healing hands.

Here are a few of my memories of assisting civilians. An older Vietnamese woman was brought to me by her son for an abscessed abdomen. I gave her an antiseptic ointment, sterile wipes and wraps, and an analgesic. With a wide grin revealing shiny black teeth, she clasped her hands and bowed

at my feet.

We were encamped in an area that had several abandoned stores. It was monsoon season, and there'd been a hard rain. Word got out that we were nearby, and two kids came running to report a man had fallen off his motorbike and "di di mau" (come quick!) I ran in the rain probably for a quarter of a mile to find a young man with a compound fracture of the arm and probably broken ribs. The ulna bone had pierced his skin and was visible. I applied a splint to immobilize the arm and administered morphine.

I needed to take him to a hospital, and we were in the general vicinity of the Army's 3rd Field Hospital, northwest of Saigon. I could not believe the medical staff there would refuse service because he was not one of ours, but how would he get there? I could only say a few things in Vietnamese and tried to explain to several people gathered that he needed transportation to the hospital. One woman spoke French, but Sergeant Laferriere was not nearby. I then found a person who could speak French and limited English, and he interpreted for someone who might drive the man there on his "cyclo," a three-wheeled taxi. The man wanted to be paid, but how? I had only a few dollars in GI script and no Vietnamese Dong.

What I did have, and the driver eyed, was the ruby ring given to me by my parents. I could have run back and asked my guys for something less valuable, but I ended up giving him the ring and scribbling a note to the hospital saying I was a medic and that they needed to take care of him. At that moment, I guess I was thinking it was, "What had to be done." Today, if that driver or a family member is alive and has my ring, I hope they remember the story behind it.

Our brigade surgeon, who was responsible for assigning medics to the various 199th units, was also a great teacher. He wanted us to develop medical skills beyond just being medics. When we returned to Long Binh for resupply, he would invite us to assist him on his various medical missions. I would not be surprised if some pursued medical careers as a result.

During a resupply stop at base camp, the Major asked me to join him on a visit to a nearby village where a young boy had suffered serious burns. The Major, his driver, and I drove in a jeep for fifteen clicks (kilometers) to a rural village, dense with housing made from our war refuse and tin cans pounded flat and made into shacks. We arrived at a small open-air building that may have served as a medical facility for the community.

The boy, about 12, lay on a makeshift table with his sorrowful mother and sister camping beside him. He had mistakenly thrown gasoline instead of water from an Army fuel canister onto a fire. The wind blew the gas and fire back, producing second and third-degree burns. Portions of

his arms were charred, and the smell of burnt human flesh is unique and unforgettable. The Major had been coming for two days to remove a yellow salve coating from the previous day and apply a new coating. I assisted him as we scraped off the old layer and lathered on a new one. The burns covered almost his entire frame. How much suffering he experienced is hard to tell because third-degree burns will deaden nerve endings. Generally, burns of over 50% of the body are fatal.

Peering through the open windows, children and adults from the village looked curiously at the Americans attending to one of their own. His sad mother and sister placed mats near his bed and stayed with him through the entire ordeal. Several of the room's openings had no windows, and we shooed flies from his body, eyes, and mouth. I felt immense sadness as I assisted tenderly in wrapping his blistered body with Vaseline gauze and silently prayed my first earnest prayer: "God, please let him die." I accompanied the doctor one more time before returning to my platoon, and as we drove back to Long Binh, the Major said his chances were slim. I received word several days later that he'd passed away the next day, but we did "what had to be done." If our forces had not been in Vietnam, there would have been no canister of gas to throw.

I did not see the worst of such cases, caused by napalm. It is often used in combination with gasoline or jet fuel; napalm has a gel-like consistency, allowing it to stick to targets. Once ignited, it can burn at more than 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit (2,760 degrees Celsius). This weapon is effective against fortified targets, as its use reduces the importance of precision. This increases the risk of collateral civilian damage, as the world bore witness to in that famous, horrifying photo of the girl referred to earlier.

My prayer for the boy leads me to the subject of religion. I thought, "Why so much suffering, not just in the boy's case, but all over Vietnam?" Maybe there's a reason. I once read about a Holocaust survivor. He recounts a prisoner at Dachau concentration camp asking the same question: why the terrible suffering? Another prisoner responded, "there is no why here." When I was a child, I was occasionally brought to a Christian Sunday school at my mother's church, where I learned that God is everywhere, all-powerful, and all-knowing. He appeared AWOL in Vietnam. These experiences left me with questions about many religious teachings; today, I identify as an agnostic, humanist, and pragmatist, and I belong to a Unitarian Universalist church. I have stopped blaming God for the sins of man.

As a medic, I came to understand how fragile life is and now cherish every day as a gift—one that many others, equally deserving, were

denied. My focus is not on the afterlife but on the present, making the world a better place while living. My pragmatism leads me to the view that if someone's beliefs bring inner peace and motivation to do good in the world, I am all for it.

Many Vietnam veterans became more connected to traditional religion after their service. My wife is Jewish; I have friends that represent the best of Islamic, Jewish, Baha'i, Hindu, and Christian ideals, and I am the better for it. I am not anti-God but define God in a different way, closer to what Alcoholics Anonymous refers to as a "higher power", a force for good bigger than myself.

The issue of being suspected of sympathizing with either side of the conflict is well conveyed by Le Ly Hayslip in *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace*. It was brought home to me by an experience with a beautiful young girl named Lan, meaning "orchid" in Vietnamese. Lan had the attention of every soldier when we periodically passed through her village. One day she approached me with a problem. I was told that her bà, or grandmother, was seriously ill and was asked to see her. She made it clear that it would only be safe to do so on a certain day at nighttime. Doing this would have put both Lan and her family, as well as me and my unit, at great risk. I believed Lan was being truthful about her grandmother and her concern about the risk if the VC found out. Suspicion of collaborating with us could result in Lan and family members being interrogated, tortured, and executed. I also understood the problem of my being seen visiting her grandmother during the daytime, but the night belonged to the VC. What should I do? I decided the best thing was to show Lan my dictionary of Vietnamese medical terms and go from there.

What I learned was that the woman had a mild fever, stomach cramping, and was dehydrated from diarrhea. I advised that she eat a bland diet of rice, bananas, and coconut water, all of which were available. Under these conditions, it would be hard to determine if the cause was bacterial or viral, but I gave Lan a ten-day supply of an antibiotic and some salt tablets.

Injury, pain and sickness are not bound by nationality, culture and language. I found acts like these created more goodwill than the point of an M-16.

*"This war has stretched the generation gap so wide that it is threatening to pull the country apart."—Senator Frank Church*



JOSEPH MORAN WAS A MEDIC 199TH LT. INFANTRY FROM 1968 TO 1969. HIS MEMOIR *WHAT HAD TO BE DONE/WHAT HAS TO BE SAID* IS AVAILABLE AT AMAZON AND OTHER BOOKSELLERS.







Gunship by James Wachtendonk.

### Price of Survival

Memory of war  
paints the window,  
blocking the light  
and muffling my voice,  
isolating me  
in this little dark room.

My soul was ripped and wounded  
by the same bullets  
that pierced my body.  
Scar tissue stays always tender  
and pain is never far away.

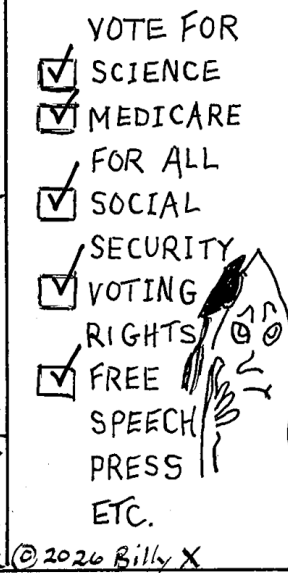
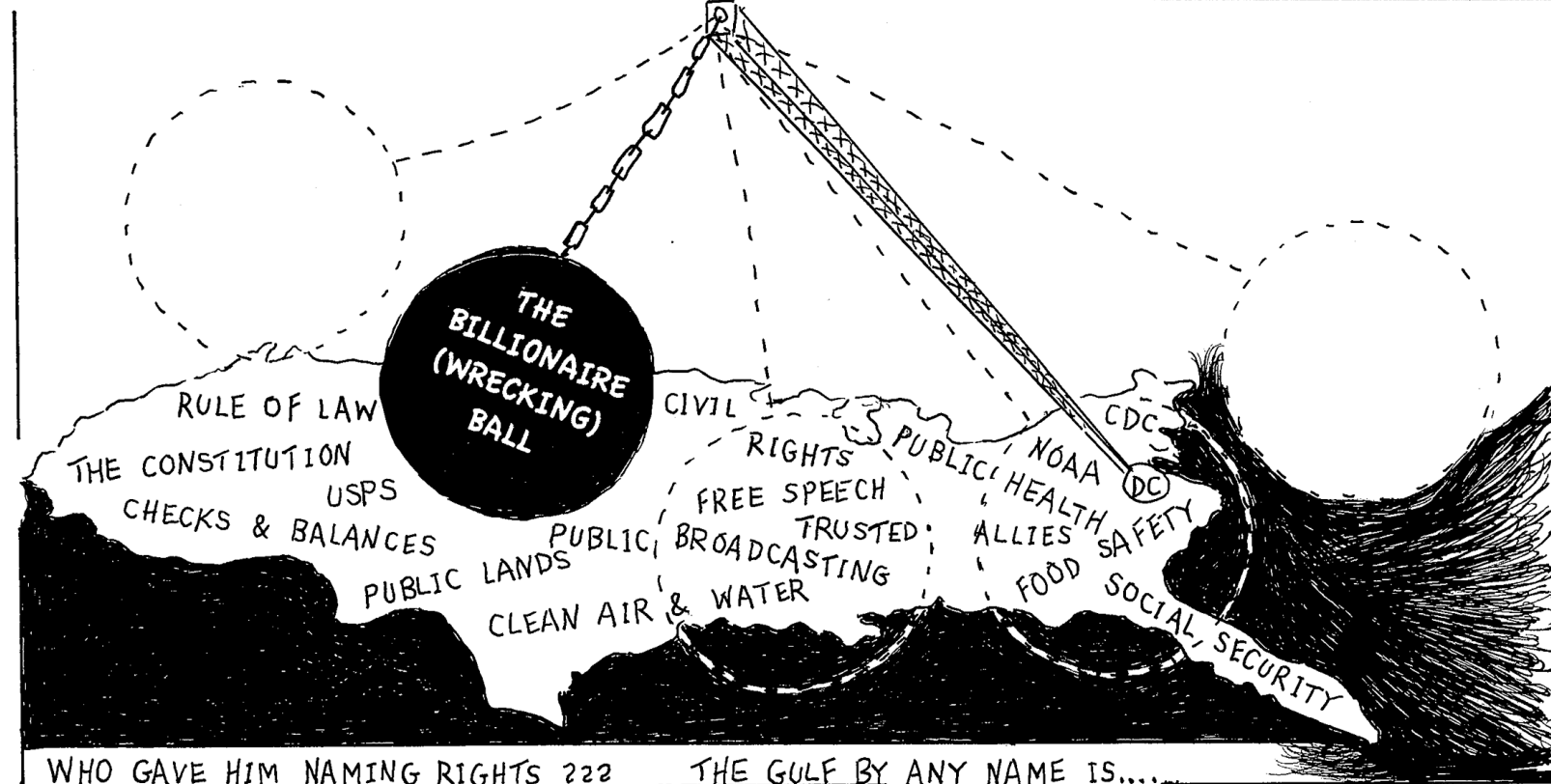
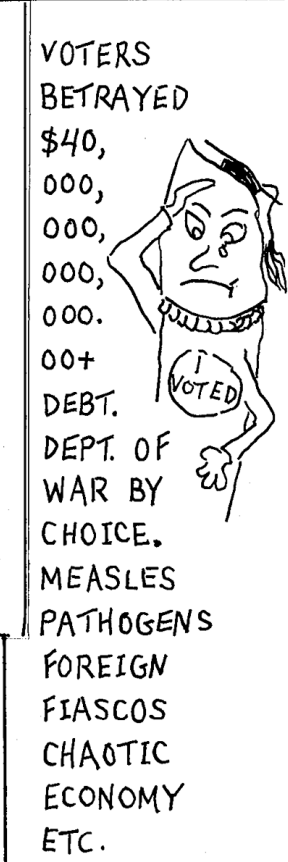
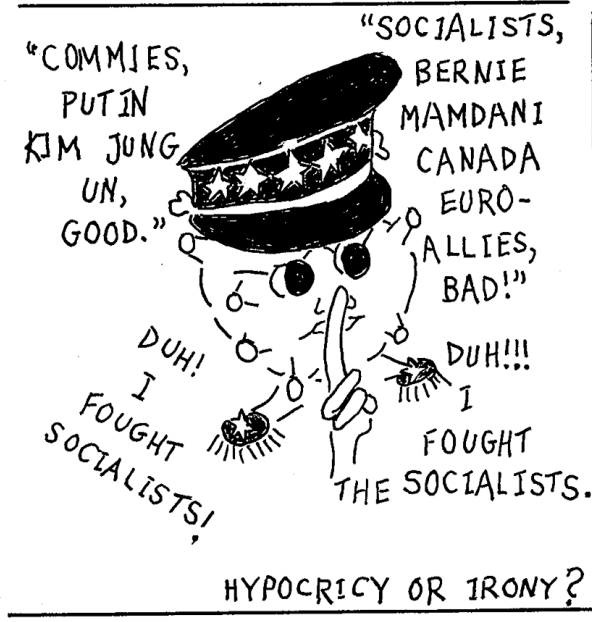
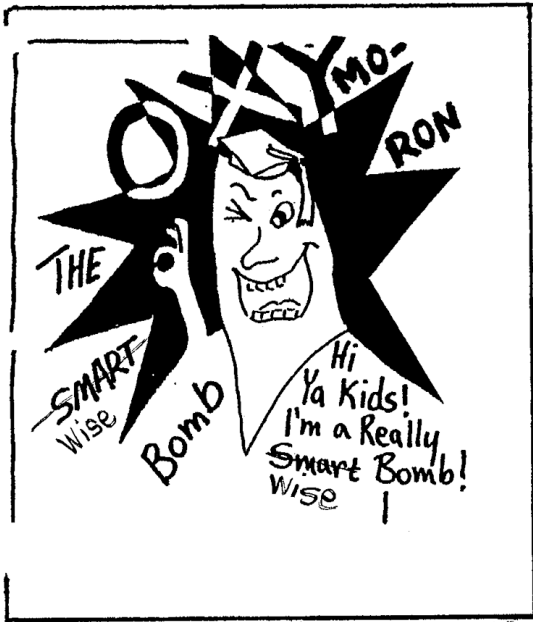
I survive,  
and in survival find strength,  
but knowledge creates a barrier,  
a perimeter stronger than concertina and trip flares,  
you cannot cross.

—Ken Sauvage

### The Profound Truth Is In Your Face

One of the last experiences I had before leaving Viet Nam, was to unzip two body bags that had two American soldiers inside who had shot themselves in the head, because that was what the United States Government was doing to itself as a result of the unfathomable Lies of the Viet Nam War. This history will repeat itself in Iran, because World Empires have no wisdom. Most people in the United States will not believe what I have just written, because whenever the truth threatens one's core belief system, there is an urgent need to deny its reality. That Is Why History repeats itself.

—Mike Hastie







# THE VETERAN

## SECTION D

Volume 56, Number 2

Fall 2026

### Vietnam Perkasio: A Combat Marine Memoir

LORRIE GOLDENSOHN (REVIEWER)

*Vietnam Perkasio: A Combat Marine Memoir (Revised Edition)*

by W.D. Ehrhart  
(McFarland, 2026)

W.D. Ehrhart's *Vietnam-Perkasie: A Combat Marine Memoir*, now reissued unchanged, but with additional photographs, was originally published in 1983, a decade and a half after Ehrhart's 1967-68 tour of duty in Vietnam. The strength of this book was and remains its narrative mastery, its two-tier blend of the time of its vivid happenings: happenings which occurred to a teenager, which were absorbed and held in the retentive mind of the plus thirty-year-old war veteran who wrote the book we continue to hold in our hands, now some forty years after its original writing. If I can disagree with the author, who claims that his book "comes from the point of view of the 18-year-old living the experience rather than the voice of the author recollecting the war in later life," it seems to me rather that the viewpoint owes its immediacy to an exceptional memory harnessed into skillful design, and is inevitably the doubled voice of both the teenager and the mature war veteran writing.

Composing a narrative, by the very nature of writing, demands that we have a two-time structure: the time in which events happen, and the time in which they are spoken about and written down. Any narrative is only more or less immediate and spontaneous, and none can evade the processing of recall, or the oppressive subjectivity of memory. Immediacy in a memoir is always dependent on the sharp, truth-sensing selectivity of the speaker, which in Ehrhart's case is enhanced always by what every one of his five senses can bring to bear on what he describes.

As an example of what I mean, take this detail, chosen from a patrol through an abandoned Catholic girl's school in Hue City in 1968, during Ehrhart's final combat exposure. "We searched the place, finding nothing but clothes, books, school papers, Vietnamese fashion and movie magazines, and toilet articles. Very

little had been disturbed...In one room, I found a small fingernail clipper shaped like a guitar and covered with an orange enamel glaze. I put it in my pocket." Where is it now? Why was it remembered among these scenes of carnage and threat? Because it unaccountably and authentically was. Its very incongruity is testimonial. Or a tug at the heart of the adolescent male coming upon the vestiges of a lost adolescent femininity.

Nor does Ehrhart neglect what literary accomplices like metaphor and simile can provide—always with grim comic timing: an NVA soldier dies in a slump "with his back against the wall and his feet flopped out in front of him like a Mexican taking a siesta"; a hot, exhausted march in tropical heat "an endless game of slinky toy, unconsciously husbanding what little energy was available."

Above all, the operations of cosmic irony are evident everywhere—and of symbolic displacement. Showing us the breakdown of moral objections to killing, he explains to a new supervising officer: "We're United States Marines, sir, I said. We kill people." He gives us a boyhood memory of handling snakes with easy familiarity and no malice toward the serpent. But in Vietnam, Ehrhart says to a buddy, "I killed a snake today." When asked further about it, he replies: "Right by my hooch. It was just lying there, curled up in the sand. I beat it up for a while, and then I cut its head off." But Ehrhart remembers how he treated snakes at home, as a kid: "We used to catch snakes [...] with our bare hands. Dive right in the water after 'em. Take 'em home and keep 'em for pets. Funny. I don't know why I killed that snake today. Wasn't bothering anybody. Certainly not me."

Doesn't that snake stand in for the civilian women and children that in agony he confesses to a Navy chaplain that he had killed and abused as a United States Marine? Decades later, with these experiences still burning in him, Ehrhart writes a book showing how he, a diehard patriot, came to believe he was fighting a war that made no sense, political or ethical,



Bill still has the nail clipper.

and that, stage by stage, brutalized him as a human being.

The world that W.D. Ehrhart reopens in this book is familiar to the readers of *The Veteran*. Unlike this reviewer, its veterans will recognize acutely and appreciate bits like Ehrhart's analysis of what happens to the rods and cones of exhausted eyes in strained night watches, or the perverse deficiencies of an M16, or his description of what it's like to build shelter out of sandbags and canvas pup tents and to improvise latrines under heavy and constant fire. Other vets will slide into the acronym-loaded language describing vehicles and weaponry without needing glossaries. As the good intelligence scout the Marine Corps trained him from the age of 17 to become, there's a trim efficiency in Ehrhart's deployment of detail. It figures that graduating from Marine boot camp, Ehrhart was "A rifle sharpshooter...First in class from intelligence school. First in class from language school." His prose registers both targeted precision and military compression, knowing how to tuck in an event without burdensome explanation. Hence, there's a pop, and an indrawn breath as a small signal explodes into a cumulative significance about a war, or war itself. Yet the man who in his postwar life became a poet as well as historian also has a sense of the ridiculous that lightens, as well as broadens the moral

good sense of what he's saying.

The narrative feat that Ehrhart performs is to ride a bicycle with a passenger: as the cyclist, he provides all the familiar, instantly recognizable tools, dress, and habitat of a war and its terrain, covering the boys and men in the process of fighting it, in mind and body; for the passenger, the neutral observer like me—maybe a wife, mother, daughter, or old college professor who never saw it, and would like to understand what happened over the course of a tour of duty—Ehrhart carries them through what is still a story with an extremely painful arc.

In his *Preface* to the new reissued edition of *Vietnam-Perkasie*, Ehrhart demonstrates that he knows how to benefit from good editing. The drag of the miserable, humiliated final sentence that constitutes the conclusion of Ehrhart's memoir—which a friend had suggested was the right ending for his memoir—enables Ehrhart to pinpoint the huge, essential sorrow of his and our terrible war brilliantly.



LORRIE GOLDENSOHN WROTE *AMERICAN WAR POETRY; DISMANTLING GLORY: 20TH CENTURY BRITISH & AMERICAN WAR POET AND ARTICLES ON VIETNAM WAR POETRY.*



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Bill Ehrhart at Con Thien.



# Getting Shot At: Essays on War, Conflict and Culture Clash

JOE MILLER (REVIEWER)

**Getting Shot At: Essays on War, Conflict and Culture Clash**  
by **W. D. Ehrhart**  
(McFarland, 2026)

*I want to mourn the loss of John Ketwig, a great writer of reviews for The Veteran. He would likely have been the reviewer of this work.*

How does one write a coherent review of a book of 81 essays that span the worlds of politics, history, and art from November 11, 2022, to September 1, 2025? Let me tease a little by quoting from the blurb at the back of the book:

"This essay collection offers perspectives on a wide range of contemporary issues, including, war in Ukraine and the Middle East, the challenges facing American constitutional democracy and debates about what should be taught in school as well as approaches to such subject matter...."

In fact, there is so much more here. There are moving essays about being with friends, old and new. The essays about Bill's deep friendship with Daniel Ellsberg, how it began

and deepened, are very powerful, describing a bond that lasted to the end of Ellsberg's life. His early connection with Jan Barry, a founder of VVAW, as they worked on the first collections of poetry by Vietnam veterans, continues to this day. H. Bruce Franklin, veteran, author, and teacher, also became a close friend of Bill's, and he is profiled here as well. I felt friendship was an important theme throughout the collection. No matter how angry he might feel about so much going on around him, the importance of friends always comes through.

Of course, the anger in many of the essays is palpable. While he is careful about some aspects of the Israel-Palestine situation, he pulls no punches in criticism of Netanyahu's continued destruction of Gaza and the Palestinian people. This includes angry references to those who mindlessly take a "pro-Israel" stance. We see this in many essays throughout the book. Several essays are about friends in Gaza, poets, and others.

Given that these essays cover the period after Trump's first term and the beginning of his second, we should

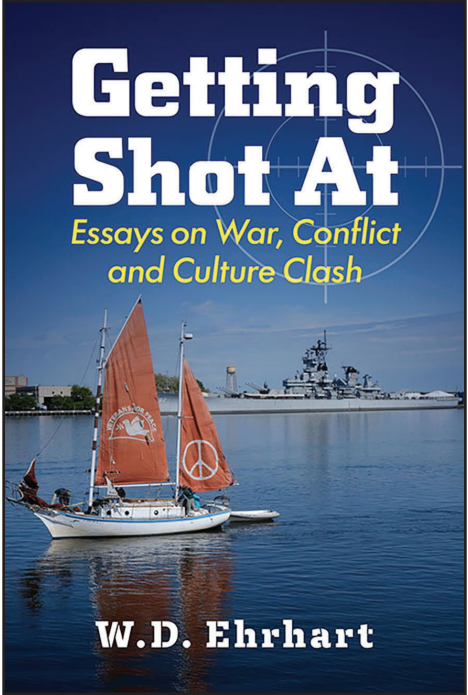
expect Trump (Dolt.45, as Bill calls him) to be a central topic. The reader will not be disappointed. The anger I first witnessed in Bill at a conference in Wales in 1988 appears in most of the essays on US politics. Justifiable anger, to be sure! It is also directed at the Democrats, with powerful critiques of the Biden administration, especially on Middle East policy. He criticizes Biden for running again in '24, though he recognizes the bind the Dems were in at the time. He basically predicted that Trump would win, given what was happening in the country.

The last 23 essays were written after Trump won again. The range of despair, frustration, resignation, then the choice of "Hope" is reflected in these essays.

Bill is participating in protests, holding close to friends, and continuing to write.

The final essay here is from September 2025, but we all know that W.D. Ehrhart is still writing. Still fighting. Still a voice for the voiceless!

(By the way, Bill and I are kindred spirits...we both have flip phones - Essay 46)



If you want to hear Bill discussing this book, here is the link  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaJ8CK3TM5Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaJ8CK3TM5Y)



JOE MILLER IS A NAVY VETERAN, 1961-68; AND A RETIRED ACADEMIC WHO TAUGHT POLITICAL SCIENCE.

# The Vietnam War: A Military History

STEPHEN SOSSAMAN (REVIEWER)

**The Vietnam War: A Military History**  
by **Geoffrey Wawro**  
(Basic Books, 2024)

A history of America's Vietnam War would be an extremely short book if it were not for feckless presidential careerism, stupendous Pentagon miscalculations, repeated MACV operational blunders, and nearly everyone's stubborn refusal to learn from the obvious.

America's peace movement figured out the truth from the very beginning, as usual, but their understanding and good admonitions did not go unpunished, as usual.

Vietnam was a war of choice, and that's the first sentence in Geoffrey Wawro's relentlessly critical *The Vietnam War: A Military History*. He might have added that it was a war about regime preservation, even though no one in Washington much liked the regime or its successors.

This is the Vietnam War book I would first recommend to a new friend or send to an interested adult child or grandchild. And the one I would first recommend to a younger veteran of a different war.

While the book's subtitle suggests a purely military focus, Wawro is at his best in illustrating the irrational disconnect between failures in the field and in diplomacy, on the one hand, and the responses to those failures, on the other.

He also shows that North Vietnam's always-increasing strength in the south was well known at the

time, despite officials' repeated false claims of progress. Wawro catalogs many behind-the-scenes admissions by high officials that we could not win the war, but it would have taken too much courage to do the right thing.

Geoffrey Wawro does not attempt a definitive military history, but he has the chops to do so. He is the director of the Military History Center at the University of North Texas, and had access to some materials not available to earlier historians. He writes little about Navy and USAF operations, but he does praise the USMC for prioritizing civilian protection before MACV changed its mission.

Some of his research was done in Vietnam. Like David Dellinger's insightful *Vietnam Revisited* recollections (South End Press, 1986), Wawro's history has a balanced, not romanticized, view of the NVA and NLF. Wawro depicts them in general as quick learners, able and willing to adapt to difficult circumstances, unlike most of our Army commanders. He also shows that they were at times naive and callous.

Most of Washington's strategic and operational decisions were variants of doing more of what had already proven not to work. Told at one point that bombing wasn't making North Vietnam negotiate, and wasn't slowing troop movement south, McNamara's reply was to ask what then should we bomb next? His only tool was a hammer.

Gen. Westmoreland publicly acknowledged our war as a war of attri-

tion as early as April 1967, a five-alarm admission that should have woken up the press, persuaded the White House and public to get out, and motivated more service personnel to join VVAW. That was the month when Muhammad Ali refused to be inducted, articulating a deeper understanding of the war than LBJ did.

Talk today of subjugating Iran through attrition shows a comparable hubris and ignorance, I think. That talk focuses on Iran's limitations, ignoring our own, in the Westmoreland tradition.

To his credit, Gen. Westmoreland did not share Sec. Hegseth's macho impetuosity, but he was a slow learner, if he ever learned at all in Vietnam. He is depicted here as having, in effect, Douglas Haig-level numbskull stubbornness. LBJ and Nixon are, of course, not spared Wawro's intolerance for prioritizing career over others' lives and over the national interest.

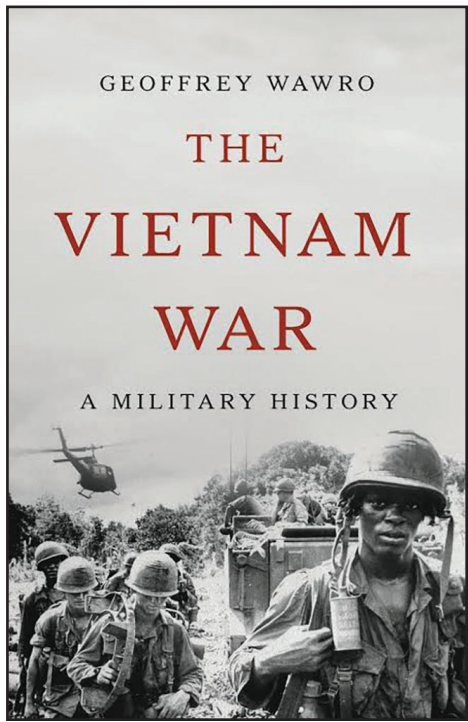
How many ambush casualties should it take to realize that the enemy only exposes itself to search and destroy patrols when it has a decisive advantage?

Why would generals and politicians think that America could win a war of attrition, while the Pentagon was constantly saying that they did not have enough troops, and while the war had to be financed by borrowing? A history of our current war against Iran will likely ask similar questions.

Wawro periodically reports the war's dramatic economic cost. The White House had budgeted \$10.5 billion for the Vietnam War in 1967, but later discovered they would need \$22 billion. The federal deficit in 1967 was \$9 billion, then in 1968 it was \$23 billion.

The economist Michael Hudson affirms that the cost of our war, using borrowed money because of politicians' tax aversion, created 6% inflation, and so badly increased the national debt as to lead the US to abandon the gold standard, thus starting the relentless accumulation of our national debt due to what is called printing money. Our trade deficits in the late 1960s, Hudson says, were entirely due to our military spending abroad.

The absolute numbers might seem quaint today. Trump's barely reported one-month 2025 operation



against the Houthis apparently had \$1 billion in direct costs. As I write this, the Pentagon says that Trump's Iran war directly costs about \$1 billion every day.

I was very moved by Wawro's account of the poorly directed November 1967 battle of Dak To, woven with his account of the confused and indecisive Washington strategy meetings that same month. Surely no field manual has ever advocated assaulting carefully prepared defensive positions up steep and unfamiliar terrain covered by thick jungle, for land not worth keeping.

When the Dak To combat was happening, I was hardly aware of it, in Ft. Carson, Colorado, even though I would arrive in Vietnam the next month. After I left the Army and read widely about the war, our command decisions at Dak To seemed inexplicable.

Sometimes hubris and stupidity seem like war crimes all by themselves.

The most painful pages here for me covered the 9th Infantry Division's brutal Operation Speedy Express, begun two months after I left the 9th and was discharged. The scale of that brutality would not surprise anyone in VVAW. For others, the grim facts are in Wawro's *The Vietnam War*.



STEPHEN SOSSAMAN WAS A FIRE DIRECTION COMPUTER IN THE 1/84TH ARTILLERY. HE IS AN EMERITUS PROFESSOR AT WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY IN MASSACHUSETTS, NOW LIVING IN BURBANK, CALIFORNIA.

## Babies and Poppies

in this cleansing  
Palestinian poppies have been destroyed  
but unlike the children they may return  
standing red, green, white and black like flags  
with the warm rain of the next Spring

in this holocaust  
a father with sad eyes peers from bags  
drooping above his moist cheeks  
bruises cover the body of his tiny son  
held tightly against his bloody blue thob

in this genocide  
the sacrifice of brown-skinned children  
hated as unimportant vermin  
is written in red on the blackboard  
soon to be erased from our memory

—Larry Kerschner



# A Photographer's View

ED WHITE (REVIEWER)

***Khe Sanh: Never Before Seen Photographs of the Siege***  
**by Per "Swede" Odman**  
*(Rifleman Press, 2026)*

When we think of the Vietnam War and how we witnessed the war through photographs in the media, we often think: the napalm girl; the VC prisoner being shot in the head by a General; My Lai; or the helicopter on top of the CIA apartment building in Saigon. Swede Odman shows us a specific siege and time.

Swede has an unusual story of how he got to Khe Sanh. He was in the Swedish Army in 1965, age 22. After seeing a film on Vietnam in the theatre, he was "eager for adventure." He got a US Green Card, flew to New York, and joined the Marine Corps. Really.

After training on Paris Island, Swede shipped to Vietnam at Christmas of 1967, and to Khe Sanh. For about a month, he patrolled around the combat base, not aware of the buildup of NVA in the surrounding neighborhood. There were about 5,500 Marines and Allied soldiers on the Base.

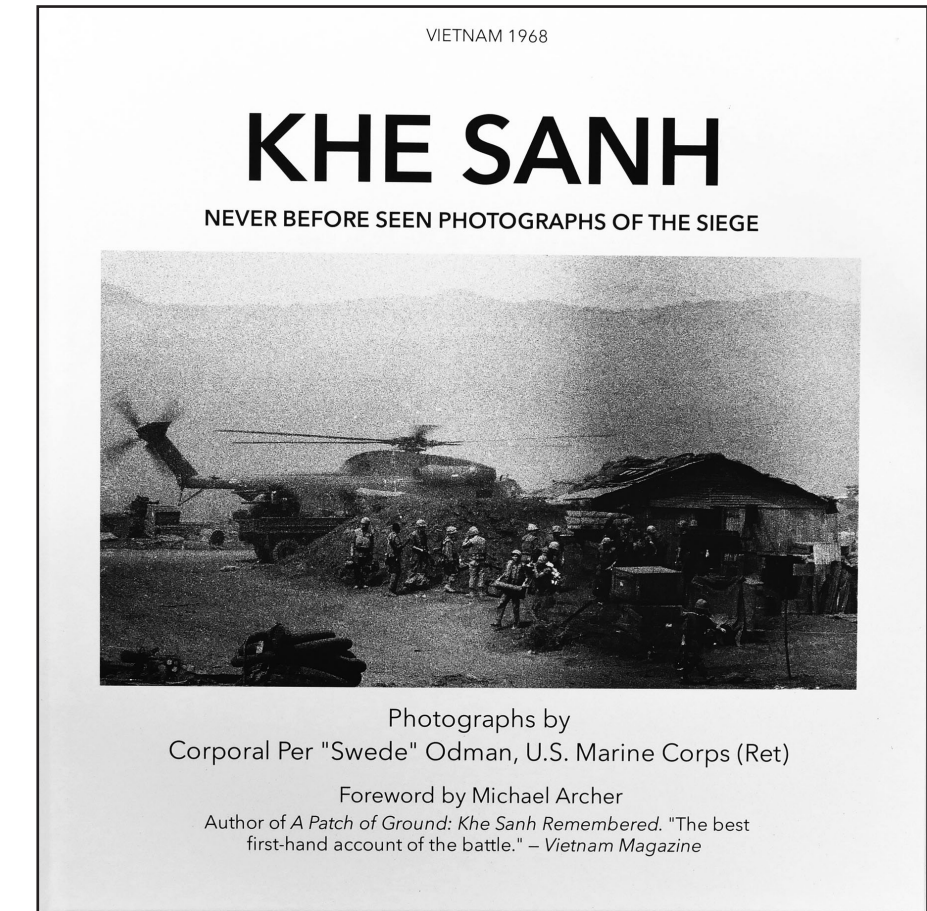
January 21, 1968 changed everything. The Tet Offensive began in South Vietnam, with the intent of the North to make Khe Sanh another

Dien Bien Phu. After a 77-day siege, 274 Marines died, and 2,500 were wounded. Perhaps two to three NVA divisions surrounded the Combat Base.

President Johnson committed to support the operation of defending the Base until July 9, 1968. At that time, the Marines withdrew completely. Swede's platoon was sent to Danang for guard duty. It was then that he was critically wounded and almost left for dead until a twitch was observed in his body; he was medevacked to the US.

Swede's black-and-white photos show scenes of preparing sandbags, planes taking off, planes destroyed, areas destroyed, 105mm crews firing, bunkers, and destruction after incoming fire. He also photographed daily life scenes of haircuts, laughter, and the Post Exchange during the lull in bombing.

Swede had accumulated skill with a camera on his prior trips to West Africa. On his way to Vietnam, in Okinawa, he picked up a Pentax SLR along with equipment and film. After filming, he sent the color slides back to his parents in Stockholm. As happened, he lost his camera and equipment in the transition. After months of recovery and living in



Washington, DC, he was reunited with the film he sent his parents. And the book shows his efforts.

The body of his work shows the compelling story of the siege of Khe Sanh. The core message of the daily pounding, the rhythm of surviving, and the grimness of war.



ED WHITE IS A MARINE COMBAT VETERAN WITH MEMBERSHIPS IN VVAW, VFP, AND VVA. HE TEACHES A VIETNAM WAR COURSE AT TRITON COLLEGE IN ILLINOIS; HIS LECTURE, "THE LESSONS OF VIETNAM," CAN BE VIEWED ON C-SPAN.

# Split Right Down the Middle

JOHN CRANDELL (REVIEWER)

***McNamara at War: A New History***  
**by William Taubman and Philip Taubman**  
*(W. W. Norton & Company, 2025)*

One's thought after having read the new book regarding Robert McNamara and Lyndon Johnson's war in Vietnam, the details of McNamara's character while serving as defense chief and his later anxieties, is that the time spent was a complete waste of one's effort.

An article regarding the book was included in the February 26th edition of the *New York Review of Books*. The first two-thirds of the article was author Ben Rhodes' extraordinary capsule analysis of American exceptionalism, as evidenced by the country's invasions of Southeast Asia and many other locales. Only the final third concerned the book per se, and now I know why.

Four months after Pearl Harbor, Army Lt. Charles Thornton was assigned by the War Department to visit Harvard Business School in view of establishing a program for training statistical program officers for the Army Air Corps. Unfortunately for us, the lieutenant recruited Robert McNamara to create such a training school. "Tex" Thonton later founded Litton Industries, eventually settled in California, and built the largest private estate in San Marino, with a landscape that has since become a setting which Henry VIII would have envied. And anyone who has read Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* might appreciate McNamara's future immolation of Tokyo, working under the purview of Curtis "Strangelove" LeMay in World War II.

For service members who first arrived in South Vietnam before Tet, all had been assigned there by the nation's Secretary of Defense under the boundless aegis of Lyndon Johnson.

Approximately twenty-seven months before Tet, Robert McNamara concluded that warfare to protect the corrupt South Vietnamese government from Ho Chi Minh was simply unwinnable. And during that time he kept his mouth shut about it while at the White House. The Battle of Ia Drang had just occurred. Perhaps the mind of the Secretary of Defense had been jarred halfway to reality.

*McNamara at War*, a psycho-

drama delving into both halves of the defense chief's psyche, has recently been published by W.W. Norton and Company. There seems to have been a limit or borderline to Robert McNamara's later regrets over mistakes made under his command. That being up to a certain point, though—and no further—as evidenced in the ending of Errol Morris' 2003 documentary *The Fog of War*, i.e., his refusal to express despair over his record wrought by indifference towards Santayana's theory of why history repeats itself.

The bibliography of William and Philip Taubman's book is in high contrast to the astounding array of official records cited by General H.R. McMaster in his masterful tome *Dereliction of Duty* published to wide acclaim in 1997. What can one now say in the twilight of our lives regarding what Taubman's publisher purports to be a work of history, which is in fact a full biography of one strange McNamara, including the full dish, a full rundown regarding his intimate relations with distaff members of DC's social elite?

Based upon diaries, letters, copious interviews, a raft of secondary sources (and no official records). The text presents a literary slide from the intricacies of grotesque warmaking to the personal relations of a former defense secretary living well past ninety years. Some among his legions had tossed death cards in the tropics; he recited poetry to his flames within their boudoirs (John Kennedy's widow included) while his wife declined from cancer. I thought that I was delving into a hardcover edition of *People Magazine*.

Aside from his romancing, twelve full pages of text are wasted on the establishment take on Lyndon Johnson's early life. In the summer of 1964, the new President began claiming to be vexed and torn about the prospect of sending combat forces into jungle warfare. Was that a ploy? Texas' military-industrial sector had long been a munificent contributor to his Capitol Hill operations. A year earlier, Texas had been considered critical by the Kennedy White House in winning reelection in 1964. And that is perhaps why the administration allowed McNamara and the Vice President to sidestep General Dynamics' theft of Boeing Aircraft's engineering in the

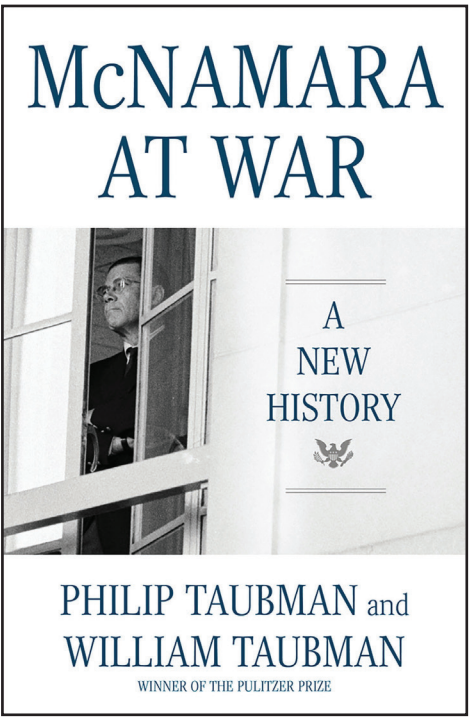
Pentagon's award of the massive TFX Fighter Plane contract to the former.

A unanimous military recommendation somehow got reversed in favor of Fort Worth at great cost to Seattle several months previous to JFK's death. An FBI report quoted Bobby Baker's assertion that LBJ had interceded in the contract decision, and McNamara countered that any claim of official pressure brought to bear about the TFX contract was "definitely and categorically wrong." Before a congressional committee, insurance agent Don B. Reynolds testified that "a Grumman Aircraft official, anxious to land a fat TFX subcontract, visited Baker's Capitol office, left behind a bulging blue flight bag containing \$100,000 in 'hundred dollar bills.'"

Later that year, Reynolds became far more famous for testifying before the Senate Rules Committee regarding Johnson's financial perfidy just as shots rang out on Elm Street. Nothing regarding the TFX scandal is mentioned in Taubman's biography of Big Mac. Nothing is rendered regarding Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson's financial dealings within the twelve pages of filler material on the earlier life of the dynamo from Texas.

Bobby Kennedy and Robert McNamara were driven together to Andrews AFB to meet the arriving Air Force One, which carried the body of JFK from Dallas. Exiting the limo, RFK raced up the airstairs and into the cabin to get to the ex-first lady. Minutes later, before Johnson could give a statement on live TV, McNamara made a beeline and engaged with him just as the new boss stepped onto the tarmac. At least the Johnsons waited to deplane until after the hearse carrying JFK's remains, his wife, and his brother departed the scene. The very next day, Kennedy's 1963 edict that a thousand US troops be brought out of South Vietnam by New Year's Day was reversed by the new President. Mac got on board with that instantly.

A hint: French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing once made an official state visit to Washington in May, 1976. As he and President Gerald Ford were being driven to a state dinner at Mount Vernon, the leader of France delicately inquired regarding the death of John Kennedy. Ford, who in 1964 had been appointed by LBJ



to the Warren Commission, replied that the assassination had not been the work of a lone gunman.

Towards the end of his life, McNamara admitted to a regret that he hadn't resigned following Kennedy's death, offering a plea for redemption in saying that he thought that he could handle Johnson. Rather, Johnson handled him instead (and boatloads more). Pressed by Morris as to why he didn't speak out regards the mistakes over Vietnam after Johnson edged him out of the Pentagon in 1968, whether he was damned if he did and damned if he didn't, he collided smack dab with his dividing line and the split in his psyche erupted: "Yeah, that's right and I'd rather be damned if I don't" (2001). Despite all of his years of kvetching and tears, he thereby reached his DMZ; he was not about to immolate himself—outside of the Pentagon or at the World Bank, and certainly not at the front gates of Arlington National Cemetery.

Over and over again, we keep making the same mistakes.



JOHN CRANDELL, AT CAMP ENARI, HAD ENOUGH AND WENT TO WAR AGAINST THE NCO OF THE FOURTH INFANTRY DIVISION POST OFFICE, POSTING A PAGE FROM TIME MAGAZINE SHOWING A DEPICTION OF THE CRO MAGNON "AUSTRALOPITHECUS" ON THE COMPANY BULLETIN BOARD. CRO'S AND THE NCO'S FACES WERE ROUGHLY SIMILAR. FIRST SERGEANT LOONEYPITHECUS DIDN'T LIKE IT AND SOON BECAME KNOWN AS LOONEY.



# Survival Has Consequences

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

*Survival Has Consequences*  
by Vicki Gardner  
(SML Publishers LLC, 2026)

Smith Mountain Lake in south central Virginia is an artificial body of water created in the 1960s by a dam and an electrical power facility to generate electricity for the area. Nestled among the Blue Ridge Mountains, the resulting lake has become a popular destination for swimming, boating, and fishing. Homes and neighborhoods have sprung up, including lakeside mansions with price tags in the three-million-dollar range. Author David Baldacci is one of the many celebrities with homes there.

In August of 2015, the local Chamber of Commerce hosted a variety of activities to celebrate the lake's 50th anniversary. Early on the morning of August 26th, the head of the Chamber was interviewed by a team from the Roanoke TV station WDBJ to inform viewers about upcoming events. The Chamber office is located in a popular retail plaza overlooking the lake, and the interview was conducted on the deck, just outside the office, overlooking the lake and its bustling entertainment facilities.

Vicki Gardner, the Executive Director of the Chamber and a popular local personality, was interviewed by Alison Parker, and Adam Ward was the cameraman. As the interview was underway, on-camera, a figure emerged from the shadows and shot Adam in the head, then Alison in the side, and Vicki in the back. Alison

attempted to escape, rushing toward a doorway, but the door was locked, and there was no escape. The assailant shot her multiple times in the head, then returned to Vicki Gardner, who was lying in a pool of blood. She played dead. The assailant stood over her, and she heard a click she thought would end her life, but the gun either misfired or was out of ammunition, and he ran away, got into his car, and escaped. He had broadcast the entire event from his cell phone. Later that day, in northern Virginia, police attempted to stop his car. He ran off the road and shot himself in the head.

Like so many others, including Vicki's husband, we were watching the morning news when the interview was interrupted by a POP and the picture went black for a few moments. We had no idea what had happened until news reports later in the day.

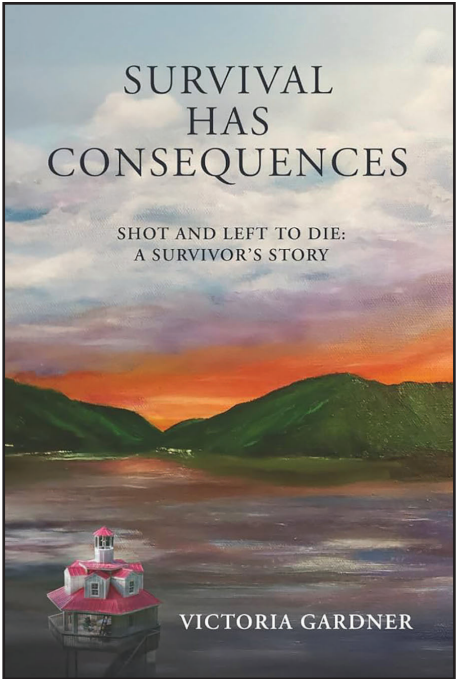
Vicki Gardner survived, but her injuries were life-threatening and devastating.

A few years ago, I met Vicki when she joined our writers group, and one afternoon, she told me the whole story of her recovery and the obstacles she'd had to overcome. She was working on a book about the incident, not to paint herself as a hero, but to make readers aware of those obstacles. Hopefully, none of us will ever learn about them first-hand, but she hopes that we might be prepared just in case. I'm proud to say we have become friends, and I have come to admire Vicki Gardner very much. Her book was published in January.

Okay, so what does this local

story have to do with Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and why am I reviewing her book for *The Veteran*? Well, I usually review books related to the Vietnam War or the history of that era, and I have been working on a novel about gun violence for the past few years. According to Gun Violence Archive, in the year 2025, gun violence in America accounted for 16,725 deaths and 31,646 injuries. There were 503 mass shootings. A significant majority of Americans support increased gun control legislation to address these tragedies. Still, until there are solutions to the problem, all of us and our loved ones are threatened. This book offers a thought-provoking study of the problem and the complex related challenges experienced by an innocent victim and her loved ones.

Vicki Gardner is a dynamic personality, and her shooting was covered by news accounts across the country and around the world. She is an entertaining and extremely candid writer, relying on her sense of humor and inextinguishable optimism to overcome a shocking array of obstacles the shooting had on her physical self, her mental well-being, her career, and her family. Most importantly, she describes the bullet's impact upon her spirit and the struggles she has undertaken to overcome that damage. The shooting was tragic and chilling, but Vicki Gardner's description of the aftermath is shocking, and her reactions are impressive and inspiring. I encourage every reader of *The Veteran* to become



acquainted with a unique personality I admire very much. Her story will have an impact on everything you believe about how a shooting disrupts a life, and how it affects the victim and everyone around them. *Survival Has Consequences* is available from Amazon and Barnes & Noble, and can be ordered through your local bookstore. Highly recommended.

*This was the last book review John submitted to us for publication in the spring issue of The Veteran, before his sudden passing earlier this year. We will miss John's insightful reviews.*  
- Ed.



JOHN KETWIG WAS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW, AND THE AUTHOR OF ... AND A HARD RAIN FELL: A G.I.'S TRUE STORY OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM AND VIETNAM RECONSIDERED: THE WAR, THE TIMES, AND WHY THEY MATTER.

# Vietnam War: Lesson Of a Lifetime

STEVE KRUG (REVIEWER)

*Vietnam War: Lesson of a Lifetime*  
by Charlie R Beasley Jr.  
(self-published, 2023)

This memoir is from 2023 and, mostly, details the remembrances of the author while in Vietnam as an Army Ranger.

In his introduction, entitled *An Exercise in Futility*, Beasley states: "Years ago, I was able to recover from the mental and physical trauma associated with working as part of a 5-man ranger team in the midst of thousands of enemy troops during the war in Vietnam. I will never escape the misery and the heartache of so many innocent Vietnamese women and children during that period of time." The intro goes on to sum up the horrors of the American war in Vietnam; Beasley states several times

how regrettable civilian deaths were and goes on to say, "I am going to be critical of decisions made by our leaders, so I need to let the readers know something from the beginning. I want everyone to know how much I love America and how proud I was to be a member of the First Cavalry Division. My allegiance is totally with this great country, even as I find fault with decisions made by our leaders at the time."

The intro goes on with some history of Vietnam, and Beasley states, "Some of our leadership in the US had for years been trying to promote the idea that the spread of communism in Vietnam would adversely affect the western world. Some of my college professors also tried to influence student thinking by promoting this same

idea that I did not agree with then or now." I assume this means Beasley went into the war not believing one of the main reasons for doing so given by our government.

Chapters 1-13 are Beasley's recollections of his training and combat experience. Chapter two starts "After College graduation what did a young male do with his life in 1969? If the threat of the military draft was hanging over his head would he volunteer for the draft just to get that part of his life behind him?"

Chapter 14 is entitled *What did we learn from that era?*

"The Vietnam era has to be considered one of the most controversial periods in American History. The war was unpopular at home but I was proud to be part of a group of young men

that were growing up so fast because their survival depended on it"

Beasley talks about the reception of returning soldiers ... "for the first time returning soldiers did not want to proudly proclaim they had fought for their country."

"These guys did not choose to place themselves in such grave danger that resulted in fifty eight thousand brave young lives lost."

The book ends with copies of certificates and medals.



STEVE KRUG IS A RETIRED MERCHANT MARINE CAPTAIN, WAS A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR DURING THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM AND IS A VVAW MEMBER.

# Lam Son 719

MICHAEL NELSON

When I first laid eyes on Dong Ha, one thought settled in me with stone-certainty: This would be my end.

It was the northernmost American base in Vietnam. From the top of our bunker, you could look out and see North Vietnam. Most of my time there is sealed away in my mind—another survival tactic, perhaps. To dwell on it meant dwelling in the knowledge that this was where I was going to die. I've told many stories about that place. They almost always start the same way.

I slept and worked in the left-hand slice of the bunker complex, behind a wall of corrugated tin. There was just enough room for a cot and a desk. The chaplain lived in the right portion; in the middle was the deepest and safest bunker in the compound. On top sat a machine gun.

The days followed a numbing routine: some paperwork, driving the chaplain where he wanted to go, preparing for Sunday services, and not making waves. It was pretty boring.

The nights were an entirely different story. The machine gun would fire, and flares would drop, all night long. The light show was spectacular. There was some comfort in knowing that if the Viet Cong were thinking of advancing, the machine gun was going to hold them back. When I saw *Apocalypse Now* for the first time, the arrival at the Do Lung Bridge affected me most—I was immediately transported back to Dong Ha.

I was told we were at Dong Ha because of Operation Lam Son 719. We were supporting the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) during the invasion of Laos. It didn't go well for them, or for us.

Afterward, the official line was one of victory.

"The biggest victory ever ... a moral, political, and psychological Dien Bien Phu"—President Thieu

"Tonight I can report that Vietnamization has succeeded."—President Nixon.

"In the aftermath of Lam Son



719, General Abrams and his MACV staff accelerated their efforts to increase the combat capability of South Vietnamese armed forces. Unfortunately, they would not have much time—the North Vietnamese were planning a major offensive in South Vietnam for 1972."—James H. Willbanks.

For me, the operation only

confirmed what I already felt: the war in Vietnam was a waste—of time, of money, and of lives.



MICHAEL NELSON WAS A CHAPLAIN ASSISTANT AT DONG HA AND MARBLE MOUNTAIN IN 1971. HE IS ALSO ON THE BOARD OF THE VETERAN ART INSTITUTE.



# Why Progressive Movements in the US Fail to Create Lasting Change

RICK JAHNKOW

What follows below is a response to Jim Wohlgemuth's article, "All I Have Are Rhetorical Questions," which appeared in the fall 2025 issue of *The Veteran*. Jim rightly asks how it can be that, despite the clear lessons that can be drawn from the Vietnam War, the US continues to send our youth overseas for futile, mindless conflicts. No doubt, such a question could be asked about why many other social and political issues keep resurfacing despite having been convincingly addressed long ago. I've asked this of myself ever since the 1980s, and here is what I've concluded.

## The Groundhog Day Syndrome and Progressive Movements in the US

In 2003, I wrote a critique of the US anti-war movement that included a reference to the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*. For those of you unfamiliar with the film, it's about a TV reporter, played by Bill Murray, who is sent to cover the traditional annual observance of a groundhog's emergence from its burrow on February 2. According to legend, if the animal does not immediately return to its den, it will portend an early arrival of spring.

In the film, the journalist wakes up the next day and discovers he is trapped in a time loop that keeps returning him to February 2. When he gets up every morning and goes about his business, he encounters the same people starting their day the same way as before. Unlike those around him, he is conscious of the time loop and knows exactly what to expect each day. Despite his awareness of the cycle, he can't figure out how to stop it, and each morning begins again with Groundhog Day.

The context for my reference to the film in 2003 was the beginning of yet another devastating war launched by the US and its allies. The peace movement, then, was like the Bill Murray character, having witnessed many similar beginnings of US warfare over the previous 50 years, yet still unable to prevent their recurrence.

Today, the Groundhog Day syndrome is as evident as ever. It applies in a much broader sense to where we currently find ourselves: experiencing a resurgence of some of the most regressive social attitudes and politics since the 1950s, ones that some of us thought had been banished by the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s. It's as though the compelling movements of that earlier time—against racism, poverty, gender inequality, war, and environmental destruction—never even happened. And instead, we're now witnessing a growing right-wing



Rick Jahnkow with the megaphone at an anti-draft registration protest in San Diego, July 1, 1982.

movement, led by an authoritarian president, that seeks a return to the oppressive social order of the 1950s. While it is true that other rightward swings of the political pendulum have occurred periodically over the last 50 years (e.g., the Reagan, Clinton, and Bush years), they never reached the extremes we are seeing now. Those who are greatly alarmed by this should engage in critical introspection about why these regressive cycles keep happening and figure out what can be done to prevent them.

### Finding a way out of the Groundhog Day syndrome

As a person born in 1950, I became active in the progressive movements that began in the 1960s and witnessed many of their accomplishments—for example, in voting rights, labor justice, gender equality, environmental awareness, and racial justice. In the decades since, I've continued to have an activist role in anti-militarism work, while also observing and analyzing the organizing patterns and strategies generally employed by US progressive groups. One thing that has stood out to me is that activists on the left in this country are very good at applying their organizing skills when it comes to immediately responding to problems like war, attacks on the environment, repressive legislation, police brutality, and discrimination; however, their actions mostly come only after the problems have risen to crisis levels. What I see missing from most progressive cause organizing in the US is deeper thinking about the proactive, long-term strategies needed to sustain their successes and prevent future crises. Granted, immediately mobilizing to put out fires can be necessary. Still, a strategy that focuses only on that type of reactive organizing is one-dimensional and a sure way to guarantee that the fires will keep

returning—i.e., the Groundhog Day syndrome.

So, what kind of long-term, proactive strategy should be on the agenda of progressive organizations? One answer can be found by looking at what entities on the other side of the political spectrum do. For example, the US military, right-wing organizations, and corporations all share a similar long-game strategy for maintaining their future power and influence. First, it emphasizes generational timeframes rather than election cycles. Second, it reflects an understanding that the norms and values taught to members of our society are determinants of their individual and collective behavior. And third, the military, conservative organizations, and corporations all emphasize the K-12+ school system, which is the second most powerful institution (after the family) when it comes to teaching and reinforcing norms and values. Schools, remember, are where young people are a captive audience for an average of 6.5 hours a day, five days a week, nine months of every year, for over 12 of their most significant, formative years. It logically follows, therefore, that the military would seek access to students in schools all the way down to the elementary level; that corporations would use schools for brand marketing; and that conservative groups would be working furiously to take control of curriculum content by using local school board elections and lobbying for changes in state education policies.

The need to develop a counterstrategy to the above should be obvious to progressive social change activists. Yet, there is little evidence that left-wing groups are actually making school system involvement part of their agenda (some exceptions are listed below). If they were seeking examples of actions they could

take, they'd merely need to visit the "Where Do We Go from Here" page of the National Call to Save Civilian Education at [www.savecivilianeducation.org](http://www.savecivilianeducation.org). The Call, issued in 2014 with a long list of signers, had the precise goal of encouraging such involvement by progressive organizations, foundations, and media. Yet, it is still largely missing from their radars.

Along game is a slow process that doesn't satisfy our culturally ingrained need in the US to see immediate results from everything we do. Nevertheless, if we are ever going to break free of the Groundhog Day syndrome, long-game approaches must be given as much emphasis as organizing rallies that demand "change now!"

Some organizations that focus on education, values development, and youth outreach:

- *Committee Opposed to Militarism and the Draft (COMD)*, [comdsd.org](http://comdsd.org).
- *Rethinking Schools*, [rethinkingschools.org](http://rethinkingschools.org)
- *Project on Youth and Non-Military Opportunities*, [projectyano.org](http://projectyano.org)
- *Teaching for Change*, [teachingforchange.org/](http://teachingforchange.org/)
- *Ya-Ya Network*, [www.yayanetwork.org](http://www.yayanetwork.org)
- *National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth*, [nnomy.org](http://nnomy.org)
- *Educators for Peace*, [educatorsforpeace.info/](http://educatorsforpeace.info/)



RICK JAHNKOW IS A CO-FOUNDER OF THE PROJECT ON YOUTH AND NON-MILITARY OPPORTUNITIES AND HAS BEEN AN ANTI-MILITARISM ORGANIZER FOR OVER 50 YEARS. A VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN DRAFT NOTICES, THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE OPPOSED TO MILITARISM AND THE DRAFT.

# Chicago Vietnam Veterans' Welcome Home Parade

MIKE WOLOSHIN

Chicago's Vietnam Veterans' Welcome Home Parade, held 11 years after the end of the war, on June 13, 1986, was the largest of its kind in US history and served as a long-delayed, overdue emotional and therapeutic healing event for Vietnam Veterans. The estimated turnout was 176,000 to 250,000 veterans and family members. The five-hour route ran from Navy Pier to Michigan Ave., to Wacker Dr., to LaSalle St., then south on LaSalle and east to Grant Park.

The VVAW Chicago and Milwaukee Chapters, along with some lapsed members and members of other Chapters, turned out in force, with an estimated 120 marchers. As we passed the reviewing stand on LaSalle St., where Mayor Harold Washington and General William

Westmoreland reviewed the marching vets, we chanted, "Since we're here, we'd like to say, thanks for giving us this day," to avoid embarrassing Mayor Washington and saying what we really thought of Westmoreland.

Like the rest of the VVAW contingent, I began marching from Navy Pier, then split off at LaSalle and Randolph to help staff the VVAW Hospitality Suite in the Allegro (formerly Bismarck) Hotel, which Bill Davis set up and staffed. After a couple of hours, I joined the Navy contingent as they marched by, then returned to the Allegro an hour or so later. I never made it to Grant Park for the final event.

The significance of the Parade was that unlike World War II vets, Vietnam vets faced political and social

neglect and lack of acknowledgment of their service. Like veterans of earlier eras, the VA had yet to recognize the issues of PTSD, TBI, Agent Orange, or Moral Injury.

VVAW Chicago took part in the early planning of the Welcome Home Parade, but internal debate arose over political undertones. Tensions arose as leadership veered to the right to invite General Westmoreland, Commander of US forces in Vietnam, despite heavy criticism of his military leadership, to lead the marchers. VVAW made the crucial decision that an anti-war veteran perspective had to be represented, rather than just boycotting the Parade. Ultimately, VVAW Chicago voted to set aside political differences to march in the Parade and invite other Chapters to

join in.

About 20 years later, there was a poorly organized, poorly attended commemoration in Grant Park, where I ran into Ray Parrish but no other VVAW members or other vets.

For a detailed examination of those issues, see *Welcome Home Parade - Honor the Warrior-Not the War*, by Barry Romo, *The Veteran*, volume 16, number 2, Fall 1986.



MIKE WOLOSHIN, AMH-2, USN, ATKRON 86, ONBD USS CORAL SEA (CVA-43), VIETNAM (YANKEE STATION) 1969-1970. MIKE IS A RETIRED ASSISTANT COOK COUNTY PUBLIC DEFENDER, AND ACTIVE IN VVAW SINCE JOINING IN 1971.



# Tyrant Trump's Crimes Are Not Covered by Absolute Immunity

JOSEPH GIANNINI

Some context: after leaving the Corps, I went to law school with the assistance of the GI Bill. In 1974, I was admitted to the State of New York Bar and remain a member in good standing. Though I am a retired criminal defense attorney, I continue to do Pro Bono defense.

Many officeholders have Absolute Immunity. These include: the POTUS, all judges, and all prosecutors. Law Enforcement Officers have Qualified Immunity. These immunities cover acts within the scope of their official positions. Crimes they commit are not protected by Absolute Immunity or Qualified Immunity. Misconduct that does not rise to a crime is covered. No statutes grant Immunity. Our judges created these concepts. Criminal Justice Systems are rigged to protect the chosen.

Unwritten rules apply to all of us: "no man is above the law," and we must act in accordance with "the rule of law." These rules are illegally ignored by Tyrant Trump and his "Cult of Maggot" followers.

Trump was indicted for crimes he committed while in office. On January 6, 2021, he attempted to change the outcome of the election he lost. He did this by inciting a horde of maggots to storm our Capitol. The DOJ stopped the case after Trump was re-elected

because they have a policy not to prosecute sitting presidents. The case should be reopened after he leaves office. Absolute Immunity does not protect anyone who commits a crime. Same for Qualified Immunity.

Trump is a convicted felon and a criminal at large for crimes he perpetrated on January 6, 2021. Not to mention his theft of Classified and Secret documents. Half were placed in a Mar-a-Lago bathroom.

On July 4, 1776, we declared our independence from the British Empire ruled by the Tyrant King George III. We then fought, against all odds, "The Revolutionary War" to protect our independence and fledgling democracy.

Today, two hundred and fifty years later, we are being ruled by the Tyrant Trump. Day by day, he lies and makes decisions based on his gut reactions. The worst? Joining Israel in an illegal war against Iran. Only Congress can declare war. World War II was the last time Congress did so. The United States has not won a war since. Our chosen leaders reveal, time and again, that they learned nothing from the American War in Vietnam. It is shameful that a Nam Veteran will never be elected as President of the United States. It reveals something bad about Americans.

In March 1966, we enlisted in the USMC by taking an oath to defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Beyond any doubt, Tyrant Trump is destroying our America. He has cowed Congress into not overseeing the crimes he is committing. He has weaponized the DOJ and the FBI to prosecute his perceived enemies. He has corrupted the SCOTUS. He has unlawfully used the Pardon Power to release convicted criminals. He has illegally sent armed, masked goons to harass, intimidate, arrest, and kill us. He is desperately attempting to rig the mid-term elections, because Tyrant Trump knows his rule is going to implode.

Our Declaration of Independence clearly states, in paragraph two, we have the right and duty to remove the Tyrant King George III and Tyrant Trump. Also, we are declaring our independence against "... the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these states ..." The more things change, the more they remain the same. We have the right to democracy. Even so, we must always fight to preserve it. We are in an existential war to determine the survival of our devolving democracy against the ascending tyranny over America.

Recently, I have been discussing Trump starting an illegal war with

several well-known attorneys. One is Victor Yannacone, Jr., who started the Agent Orange class-action lawsuit, and the other is Jim Henry, a famous investigative journalist specializing in international and national financial fraud. It's evident that when Trump illegally started the Iran War, he violated our Constitution, and he committed a War Crime. He is now a War Criminal At Large. Absolute Immunity does not cover his ongoing war of choice. We all agree that any member of Congress can hold him accountable by bringing a lawsuit against him for violating our Constitution. And he can be sued for Wrongful Death of any service member killed in the Iran War. We are going to follow through on this. How come no one has thought about doing this?

How come the mainstream media isn't talking about him being a war criminal? Normally, the DOJ would go after him. Not now because we have a Department of Injustice.



JOSEPH GIANNINI IS A FORMER MARINE GRUNT WHO FOUGHT IN 'NAM 1967-68 WITH THE 1ST BATTALION, 3RD MARINES.

## A Tribute to My Brother

KRISTIN ELISE LINDLEY

*A tribute to my Vietnam Veteran brother Capt. Forrest Berry Lindley.  
From his little sister Kristin Elise Lindley.  
Charlotte Hall Veterans Home Maryland—Veterans Day 2019.*

To my Brother Rusty in his world of Vietnam Veterans  
A wounded warrior waging battles in his nightmares  
And delusions in his daydreams of no redemption  
This madness, this anguish, this cry for help  
One of many Old Soldiers who survived or did they  
Living out their days of disillusion and demise  
From the wreckage of war and its eternal aftermath  
I remember a brother who was highly intelligent,  
A gentle soul, a curious mind, a subtle humor  
Until the years of unspeakable and unforgettable war  
The abandonment and deception and horror  
That invade the psyche and never let go –  
Even in one's wildest moments of denial  
I have seen brilliance dissolve into a dying ember  
Decimated like a bomb imploded to self-destruct  
While I was not watching, not being aware, not caring  
I have seen creativity and splendor and genius  
Give way to trembling nightmares and hollow hauntings  
Creeping like a soldier armed to fight and bare witness  
To death, to the enemy, to the antithesis of love and joy  
The defeat which war unravels and tramples to the ground  
Soldier of Vietnam, too young, too innocent, too raw  
To the atrocities, the madness, the destruction  
That war inflicts upon the body, mind and soul. . .

Angels of Charlotte Hall Veterans Home  
Rock me in your care, and roll me in my chair  
O Mamas – In the bosom of Abraham  
Nurses, aides, doctors – nurture, compassion and humor  
Caretakers of broken dreams and bodies rolling by  
Of those who walk and those who wheel  
And those who remember too much  
And those who are better off having forgotten  
Black and white and in between Veterans  
World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq  
Caring for sorrow and frailty and disease  
And madness and decay and death  
From wars that only soldiers have seen  
Caring for memories and nightmares  
That linger forever and seldom are wrong  
After war has ended in the politicians' minds  
Yet for the Soldier it is never over, never gone

At Charlotte Hall I weave my way through a sea of old soldiers,  
Wheeling and motoring themselves down the wide corridors  
Adorned with warriors' memorabilia and honor to thy country  
And the slumped-over soldiers wearily wearing caps  
Emblazoned with the name of their specific war  
Of that one unforgotten moment in warrior's time  
That sent them to the nursing home for Old Soldiers  
In baggy pants with briefs beneath, tethered to oxygen tanks,  
With missing limbs, and missing minds and missing a woman  
And some soldiers who never leave the bed at all  
And don't know if and what they are missing.



I remember fondly Nurse Toya from Alabama—her black face the sweet kindness of infinite compassion, her hands a gentle touch and a Mother's embrace—reaching out to Veterans of every color to feed and comfort those in need. Toya like the song of a Gospel prayer and the understanding that it is the Lord's duty to care for the sick and dying. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

I cry for the children of Vietnam Veterans who bear the physical and mental suffering of their parents plus the diseases that they have inherited from them—the cancer, the spina bifida, the infertility, etc. Soldiers bring home not only the wounds of war and the memories of horror, but also the bacteria, viruses and diseases that they carry within their bodies—in blood, sperm, sweat and tears. To pass down into the next generation. And the next. In a war of repercussions that never ends. Blessed be the children for they shall inherit the earth.

Soldiers of Charlotte Hall—upon this Veterans Day we salute you. Did your sacrifice make the world a better

place—or merely someone else richer and the powerful even more so? Were you lauded with praise, healthcare, a home and an education upon your return? Or were you forgotten in a series of forgotten wars that only remain in the minds of the soldiers and their families? Were you then placed in a nursing home high on a hill where the Angel Nurses care for you? I am your sister; I am your family—I care for you. I promise I won't let the world forget.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

And I cry out never more, never more!!! End the wars, end the wars!!! An ancient ritual with new technology. Imagine all the people living life in Peace. Like an eternal echo that resonates in people's souls until they covet no more. Until the world sees the destruction of war and the soldier's aftermath and all nations stop the wars. Imagine. Then there would be no more Veterans and their children, no more Old Soldiers, and no more Wounded Warriors.





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

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

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups

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

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert

actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and

respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!



## Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War



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

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

Our insignia is over 55 years old. The insignia, VVAW® and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.® are registered trademarks belonging to VVAW and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without written permission from the VVAW Board of Directors.

## Beware of VVAW-AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

### SUPPORT VVAW! DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.  
VVAW Membership  
P.O. Box 355  
Champaign, IL 61824-0355

#### Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Email address \_\_\_\_\_  
Branch \_\_\_\_\_  
Dates of Service (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_  
Unit \_\_\_\_\_  
Military Occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
Rank \_\_\_\_\_  
Overseas Duty \_\_\_\_\_  
Dates \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.  
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.  
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. \$250 is enclosed.

Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice and support the work of VVAW and its historic legacy. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is \$25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Total Amount Enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

*Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.*



Milwaukee, Veterans Day, 1977.



# RECOLLECTIONS

## Point Man

RICHARD FLEMING

Our point man died last month—we called him Bo.

I remember him first entering our hootch, a swarthy fireplug of a guy nearly as broad as tall. He carried an enormous seabag as if it weighed nothing and threw it onto the empty bunk next to mine. Over time we became friends.

He came from western Pennsylvania's steel country and had been working as an apprentice machinist in "the mill" when he got his draft notice. His boss told him that since steel was an "essential industry," he could get him a deferment, but Bo refused. He said that he wouldn't have felt right letting others serve in his place. The year was 1968, and at the time most of us felt the same way.

After he had been on a few patrols, our Sergeant picked Bo to "run point," the most dangerous position on the team. The point man chose the path the rest of us followed, and he was often the first to engage the enemy. He also needed to be constantly watching for booby traps and other dangers. A single mistake could cost the lives of every member of the team.

Being short helped because it made you less of a target, but a good point man needed more than that to survive. Bo seemed to flow through the jungle, moving slowly, carefully, and completely silently. He had a quiet "steadiness" about him. I never saw him panic; he was a man you could rely on.

These qualities made him an exceptional Marine, yet he was never recognized with rank or medals. When Bo entered our hootch, he was a PFC, and he was only promoted near the end of his tour. Perhaps it was his unassuming nature, but there might have been other reasons. Our six-man teams were usually led by sergeants, usually men who had been on multiple tours and had attended a variety of Recon training schools. They knew their shit, but officers recommended promotions, and at the time, our missions were nearly always led by sergeants.

The officers certainly didn't seem to have any problems promoting the office "pogues" who worked closely with them in the rear. Our Major's clerk went from PFC to Sergeant in less than a year. He must have been one hell of a typist!

It was the same thing for medals. As far as I knew, Bo never received any, but even if he had, he probably wouldn't have told me. He was the last person to "blow his own horn."

Officers seemed to write one

another up at the drop of a hat. On one patrol we joined another team led by a new lieutenant. Our mission was compromised, and we had to "beat feet" back to our extraction point. A few months later we watched as the lieutenant was decorated for "extraordinary bravery." After the award ceremony, Bo turned to me and remarked dryly, "I guess he ran faster than the rest of us!"

Bo was never bitter about the lack of rank or medals. Surviving one more day in Nam was good enough for him, but I, for one, sure would have liked to have seen him recognized for something. After risking his life on so many missions, he certainly deserved it!

Many years after I returned home, the phone rang, and I heard Bo's gruff voice for the first time in years: "Hey man! How ya doin?" He had somehow managed to track me down. It was so good to hear from him again.

He told me that after leaving the Marines, like so many of us, he had struggled to find work. When he returned from Nam, the anti-war movement was tearing America apart, and no one wanted to hire a Vietnam vet. The job at the mill that he had been promised would be "waiting for him" when he got back had been given to another, and a long time passed before he was finally able to find another. He told me that he also worked weekends at a local liquor distributorship. Remembering how many beers I had watched him put away, I told him he had finally found the perfect job!

The years passed, but we remained in touch. He hadn't changed a bit. He was still the same "salt of the earth" guy I had always known. The phone would ring, and I'd listen as he told me about his work, his growing family, and his beloved Little League baseball team. Over decades of coaching, Bo must have influenced hundreds of young ball players. The kids couldn't have had a better role model.

We rarely talked about Nam; I guess we both wanted to put it behind us. Occasionally, one of us would hear from someone we knew from the service. Many of whom seemed to have been seriously traumatized by their experiences. Bo and I assured each other that at least we were both fine. That was not completely true, of course, but that's what we told each other.

About ten years ago Bo mentioned some medical problems. He



brushed them off as minor, but I was concerned. It told him that his symptoms might be the result of Agent Orange exposure. I reminded him of the time we moved through a valley that that orange shit had sprayed. Everything had been killed off, the birds, the animals, even the insects. The trees were so brittle that their branches shattered like glass if you so much as touched them.

At the time we had been told that Agent Orange was harmless to humans. That was a bald-faced lie. The chemical companies making Agent Orange knew full well that they had created one of the most potent carcinogens ever developed. Still, they were making hundreds of millions of dollars a year off the hellish stuff, and they wanted to keep the cash coming in for as long as possible—even if people died.

Twenty years after the war, the courts finally held the chemical companies to account, and the VA set aside funds to compensate victims. When I told Bo that he was probably eligible for compensation, he said that he was doing OK, and that the money should be used to help others who needed it more. That was Bo for you.

Last month, the phone rang, and Bo's name appeared on my screen. I picked up, looking forward to hearing from him about ball games and family cookouts—but this was not to be. In a tearful voice, his wife told me that my friend had passed away early that morning. I was shocked. I had no idea

that he was that sick. She said that he had been seriously ill for a long time but hadn't told me because he didn't want me to worry about him.

Now I'm not going to pretend that Bo was perfect. He was a combat Marine who lived through a violent time. How he would have laughed if I portrayed him as some kind of saint!

And yet, unlike so many others, he hadn't allowed the war to change him. He was faithful to his friends, his family, and his community. He lived a life of service and commitment. He never thought of himself as someone special. He simply believed that you did what needed to be done, you looked after the people beside you, and you didn't ask what you could get in return. Perhaps that is what I will miss the most about him.

This Veterans Day, as we honor all those who have served our country, we should also remember that our nation is built on more than economic wealth and military might. The character and sacrifices of ordinary people support it. If America loses the values that men like Bo embodied, what will be left to hold our nation together? Semper Fi, Bo.



RICHARD FLEMING SERVED AS A RECON SCOUT WITH 1ST FORCE RECON CO. FROM 1968-1969. HE WROTE ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCES IN "CHASING CHARLIE-A FORCE RECON MARINE IN VIETNAM."

### Are US Forces Running Low on Ammunition?

