



THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Volume 50, Number 1

Spring 2020

We Must Continue the Fight for a Better World!

BILL BRANSON

VVAW clearly sees a future for itself. As veterans of the military, as veterans of Vietnam, we will fight to see that the Peace Agreement is fully implemented, without US interference. As hard as the Vietnamese fought against us as we burned down their homes, we will fight for our goals. It is our obligation! We will fight for our own rights here in our backyards; the right to health, peace, and freedom. We will fight to help our brothers and sisters whose lives are made miserable by ignorance and greed. – VVAW National Collective, Winter Soldier April 1973.

Fifty-three years ago when Jan Barry and other vets first marched under the Vietnam Veterans Against the War banner, they directed our demands to end the war at President Johnson.

Fifty years ago, when Nixon began his illegal invasion of Cambodia, the government response to the massive protests led to the slayings of students at Kent and Jackson States. We directed our anger and demands to end the war at what we knew would be the worst president in our lifetimes. The May 4th killings motivated many Vietnam vets to join VVAW. It was a catalyst for growth and greater activism.

Nineteen years ago, when George W. Bush started the war in Afghanistan, we said enough, never again. Seventeen years ago, when Jr. Bush invaded Iraq, we knew that president had surpassed Nixon as the worst president in our lifetimes, if not in the history of the US.

Then, that dark day in November, 2016 really lowered the bar. In every single aspect, Chump has proven that he is not fit for office. The litany of "greatest hits" keep on coming. The bungling of this administration is unprecedented. The mishandling



July 4, 1974 in Washington, DC.

of the COVID-19 pandemic alone could earn him his place at the top of the worst.

These are dark times. We know they are. Our generation is now among the targets of this president.

No matter what some of us have felt over the past five decades, the current administration proves that elections matter. We cannot let the pandemic halt or hinder the elections! We already know some states are purging voters and elections are being postponed or canceled. We must push for early and mail-in voting for all states.

We cannot let this fool destroy the United States Post Office. Many of us made our careers in the Post Office after we fought to stop our war. If the Post Office is de-funded and crippled, how will mail-in voting take place? This attack on the PO is not by chance.

We also cannot let this public health crisis be used as an excuse to gut the VA. In fact, if fully staffed and not attacked, the VA could be a leader in treating and helping to find a vaccine for the current pandemic.

The importance of public health is clear now more than ever.

Past struggles can provide lessons for the future. We built on experience from anti-war veterans in the original Veterans for Peace and the Abraham Lincoln Brigades. We took lessons from the social movements of our day - civil rights, Women's rights, Black Power, Chicano power, etc.

1970 and 1971 were key years in the history of VVAW. They seemed like the darkest times. But in response, we came up with Operation RAW, the Winter Soldier Investigation, Dewey Canyon III, and countless other actions to highlight the injustices of the war being fought in our names.

Fifty years ago we started a national newspaper to let people across the country (and in Vietnam) know what we were about. From the *First Casualty* to *Winter Soldier* to *The Veteran* you hold in your hands today, we still believe in the importance of providing a voice for our struggle for peace, justice, and veterans' rights. Our national newspaper provides us a platform to share our history, our

views, and our strategies with those who can learn from our mistakes and victories and take the struggle to the next level.

This current administration and the pandemic we are living through highlights the fact that we are a global entity that must work together. Stop the wars. Stop the sanctions. Remove the current administration.

All of us, vets and non-vets, whites and non-whites, workers and students, everybody, must continue to unite to solve the problems that the American system has failed to solve. No one will help us. The people must solve their problems and not rely on the benevolence of big-time politicians or large corporations. The power to solve these problems is ours. We have but to take it. – VVAW National Collective, Winter Soldier April 1973.



BILL BRANSON IS A MEMBER OF THE VVAW BOARD.

Update: The VVAW Thanh Binh School Library Project

CHUCK THEUSCH

March 23, 2020

We have made progress on the Binh Thanh Library, in spite of internal political tensions and the global consequences of the Coronavirus.

The original site has been approved after some efforts by another community to have it built at their school. Poverty and need being what it is in this part of Vietnam, the tensions between local Districts is understandable, if not a good thing from the perspective of sponsors such as our Library Project and VVAW.

In a series of phone discussions, email exchanges, and video conferences, Tran Thi Bich Khoi, Chuck's Executive advisor (and wife) from Quy Nhon and the headmaster of Binh Thanh, Mr. Hao, worked with the

People's Committee Vice-Chairman of Giong Trom Tre District. Mr. Hao literally took the Vice-Chairman of the People's Committee to the ill-equipped reading room this school now has to see its size, poor condition, and severely limited resources. This is what resulted in the go-ahead.

While it is now temporarily on hold due to the impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we are moving forward with plans for commencement as soon as possible upon the re-opening of the school. Binh Thanh, like all the schools throughout Vietnam, has been closed since March 1 and will remain so until April 30, 2020, according to the current government directives.

Chuck's Mission #53, originally set for March 4-30, 2020, was



Future VVAW library.

postponed due to the travel limitations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan was to have met two times with the local leaders to kick off this project. It will advance as we will prepare a separate commitment document via the wonders of the internet rather than waiting until we can get to Ben Tre in person. The project may then commence work as local government restrictions on activities will allow.

Our Mission #53 trip is now scheduled for May 28, 2020. No matter what, life goes on, this small but meaningful project being an inspiration in its support thanks to VVAW and its timing, given the fates.

Axiomatic among humanitarian organizations across the globe is the fact that once someone identifies and begins a project in a geographical locale and human field of great need, it

will inspire more support among other missions. And so it is with the VVAW's Mission in Giong Trom Village's Binh Thanh School.

The Swim Strong Foundation of New York has developed a program for swimming safety and fun for kids of all ages. Its mission is the safe, yet fun, use of water and a healthy respect for its risks for kids as well as adults.

The connection? Because VVAW is sponsoring the Library at Binh Thanh, it led to the Headmaster bringing to our attention a risk that kids face throughout Vietnam, in particular areas such as the Mekong River Delta where this Project is located: the many drowning deaths of children. Indeed there is a mandatory swimming class at the school because of the frequency of injuries and deaths because of the

continued on page 3



PO Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355
www.vvaw.org
vvaw@vvaw.org

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
ASTORIA, IL
PERMIT NO. 9

Purple Heart: The Shrapnel Inside My Heart

Purple is not the color of my blood,
nor of my bruised, wounded heart.

Shrapnel constellates around
this beating life, but the metal
is not bronze, nor gold, but the
jagged lead of a VC mortar round.

My purpled heart's a time bomb
ever ready to explode, trip-wired
by the fine filament of my
many night-terror near-suicides.

Each pumping moment I hang
by a thread, dangling on a hangman's
noose, swinging between hope
and a survivor's black despair.

Please don't honor me with
Washington's profile, or with
three stars and two oak leaf clusters
with a purple and white ribbon.

Honor me with this metal
each moment pressing against
my chest, light as an infant's hand,
light as the page of an anthem—

as yet unwritten, or written with
my each new beat and breath...

—r g cantalupo

VVAW Wants Your Stuff

Cleaning out the garage this Spring? De-cluttering? The VVAW Archive Project wants YOU, or rather YOUR VVAW or anti-war related pictures, old copies of local leaflets, posters and newsletters, VVAW National Steering Committee minutes and correspondence, PICTURES! Back in the Day, we were more interested in doing shit than recording it for posterity. So, there are many gaps in our coverage of VVAW's outstanding events, our meetings, the work we did on "PTS", Agent Orange, solidarity with movements and countries under the gun of US oppression, War on the VA, etc.

If you have some stuff, let us know. We can pay for shipping, if necessary. If you want to keep the originals, we can copy and send them back to you. Give us a call at (773) 569-3520 (warning, it's a robot), or preferably, email us at vvaw@vvaw.org!



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 the library in Vietnam we are sponsoring. If you would like to put VVAW in your will and don't know how, contact the National Office at vvaw@vvaw.org. VVAW is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Thanks to Jeff Danziger, Billy Curmano, and Eric J. Garcia for their cartoons. Thanks to Chuck Theusch, Billy Curmano, Paul Nichols, Laurel Krause, Jack Mallory, Allan Meece, and others for contributing photos.

Veteran Staff
Jeff Machota Joe Miller
Bill Branson Jen Tayabji
Ashley Buckley

VVAW: 50 Years of Struggle

**The Legacy of
Vietnam Veterans Against the War**
by Alynne Romo
A VVAW Publication

Available for \$14.95 through VVAW's website
www.vvaw.org/store/.

Right now due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the VVAW store is temporarily closed. Please hold off on ordering any merchandise until it is once again safe for VVAW National Staff to mail stuff out to you. Thanks for your understanding.

VVAW Merchandise

**HONOR THE WARRIOR,
NOT THE WAR**
Vietnam Veterans Against the War
Fighting for Veterans, Peace and Justice since 1967
www.vvaw.org



Mail order and check to:
VVAW Merchandise
c/o Dave Kettenhofen
3550 East Lunham Avenue
Saint Francis, WI 53235

- VVAW T-Shirt
White (M, L, XL, XXL) - \$18.00 _____
Sand (M, L, XL, XXL) - \$18.00 _____
Black (white logo) (L, XL, XXL) - \$18.00 _____
- Shipping for above items
\$6.00 for first item, \$2.00 for each item after _____
- VVAW Embroidered Patch - \$6.00 _____
- VVAW Button - \$1.00 _____
- VVAW Enamel Pin - \$3.00 _____
- VVAW Bumper Sticker - \$3.00 _____

• Shipping for above items
\$2.00 for first item _____

Total Enclosed _____

Ship to:
Name _____
Address _____
City, State, Zip _____

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.

National Office
P.O. Box 355
Champaign, IL 61824-0355
(773) 569-3520
vvaw@vvaw.org

Below is a list of VVAW coordinators and national staff. If you need a speaker for an event, class visit, or interview, please contact the National Office at (773) 569-3520 or email vvaw@vvaw.org and we will put you in touch with the nearest VVAW member.

VVAW National Coordinators:

| | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Bill Branson | Joe Miller |
| Ann Hirschman | Meg Miner |
| Brian Matarrese | Marty Webster |

VVAW National Staff:

| |
|------------------------|
| Charlie Branson |
| Dave "Red" Kettenhofen |
| Jeff Machota |

Notes from the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

My last two columns were about Jane Fonda, and they were quite serious, as they of course needed to have been. So I'm toning this Boonies column down a bit and will subtitle it "Some Marines I Have Known." Stories will be nostalgic, often sad, sometimes even a little funny. My only hope is that our Marine brothers and sisters will find them to have been worth the reading.

The first one was Jim Long, a high school classmate. Jim was an all-conference athlete, prom king and one of the most popular kids in our class. Needless to say, we had little in common. After college he gets drafted, and – wouldn't you know? – he draws the unlucky number and gets called for the Marines. A few months later he's on a plane for Vietnam, but the plane gets delayed for a few days in Hawaii and by the time it's ready to continue someone at local HQ decides that they need his MOS right there. So he spends the rest of his active duty time on a beach in sunny Hawaii.

Several years later we're talking, and I – after a few beers of course – am giving him a hard time about that. Jim listens patiently, and when I'm done he says, "Fine, Paul, you did permanent party in Vietnam and I did mine in Hawaii. But I did one thing you didn't have to do. I went through Marine Corps boot camp in the 60's." That shut me up right away. I mean, we weren't talking about a Gomer Pyle sitcom here.

Speaking of lucky numbers, I had a gentleman on probation (non-violent misdemeanor) who had the same experience. When his number was called, he walked up to the sergeant, showed him his paperwork, and said "Sergeant, here's my draft notice. That means US Army, not Marines. Learn to read." The sergeant's reply was "Oh, I'm sorry sir....Now get your f'in jarhead ass over to that f'in line before I kick your f'in ass all the way to f'in Vietnam." All I could think of to say was, "So what was your first clue that it was going to be a bad day?"

I should note that this Marine returned from Vietnam with some serious PTSD, which no doubt contributed to whatever behavior brought him into my office that first time. All I can say is that unless he went out onto Main Street and shot someone, there was no way that I would have petitioned him back into court to revoke his probation.

Then there's Bob Harrison. Bob was a Khe Sanh Vet, went to college after separation and a couple of years later showed up at my office to apply for a probation officer job. At one point during the interview, he mentioned that he'd been awarded a Purple Heart, but added quickly that it had been "no big thing," so I let it go. A year after I hired him, he walked into my office, closed the door, and showed me the telegram which the Marines had sent his parents after that "no big thing" wound. I can't quote it, but what it pretty much said was that he might die. Fortunately, he came through it all right, but I still think of that telegram. What I think of

is, what if my parents had received a telegram like that, especially after they had learned that I had volunteered for Vietnam. I could never forgive myself (Bob had not volunteered for it. The Marine Corps took care of all of that).

Finally, there is Ken Fernandes, another Vietnam vet. We're talking one day, and I said, "Ken, there is no doubt in my mind that the United States Marine Corps is the finest fighting force on the planet. But I'd put my guys in the 3/5th Armored Cavalry Regiment right up there with anyone. His response was "Well, Paul, don't you think there would be something wrong with you if you didn't?"

Thanks, Ken. And thanks, Marines. Semper Fi.



PAUL WISOVATY IS A MEMBER OF VVAW. HE LIVES IN TUSCOLA, ILLINOIS. HE WAS IN VIETNAM WITH THE US ARMY 9TH DIVISION IN 1968.

VVAW Library Update

continued from page 1

low water table, and kids' access to "swimming holes." There have been, as is all too frequent, several drownings in the last year of kids from the school.

Whether or not we get a "Swimming Hole" funded, we will be presenting the copyrighted Swim Strong teaching programs, translated into Vietnamese, to address this deep local concern at the VVAW Library. Coupled with English Language supplemental instruction and computers, the Library will be a major development in Giong Trom's educational infrastructure and "eyes on the world" features.

The universal nature of this

library's impact in this community cannot be overstated. It is "Why We Build."

The local authorities are hardworking and dead set on getting this Library and associated programs up and running. Mr. Hao has passed on higher positions in the District education administration notwithstanding several chances to "move up." He prefers working in the trenches with the teachers and kids rather than from the skies with the high-end administrators.

Ms. Thao, English educated in London, returned to her village where she was born, a case of coming home to help the people of her home town

rather than moving to a major city or abroad for greater opportunity. That is the same personal story of the architect retained to build the VVAW Project. This is EXACTLY what we look for in our local people who will make the project a success.

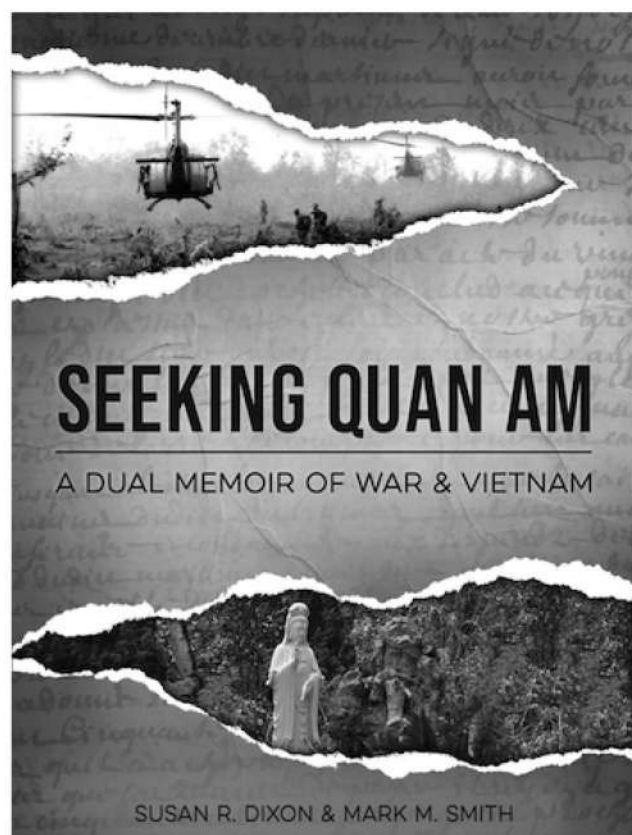
Many thanks to VVAW for this major sponsorship of the kids of Giong Trom. We will keep you advised of the timeline for the groundbreaking, construction, dedication, and handover. When the global issues settle down we will be able to provide a timeline for travel to VVAW members, families and friends.

After that, we kick in our long term commitment—"We Always

Come Back." The dedication is the beginning of the VVAW Project, not the end of the Project. It is truly a commencement of a new day in this war-torn region of old South Vietnam. Vietnam and America traveling into the future hand in hand.



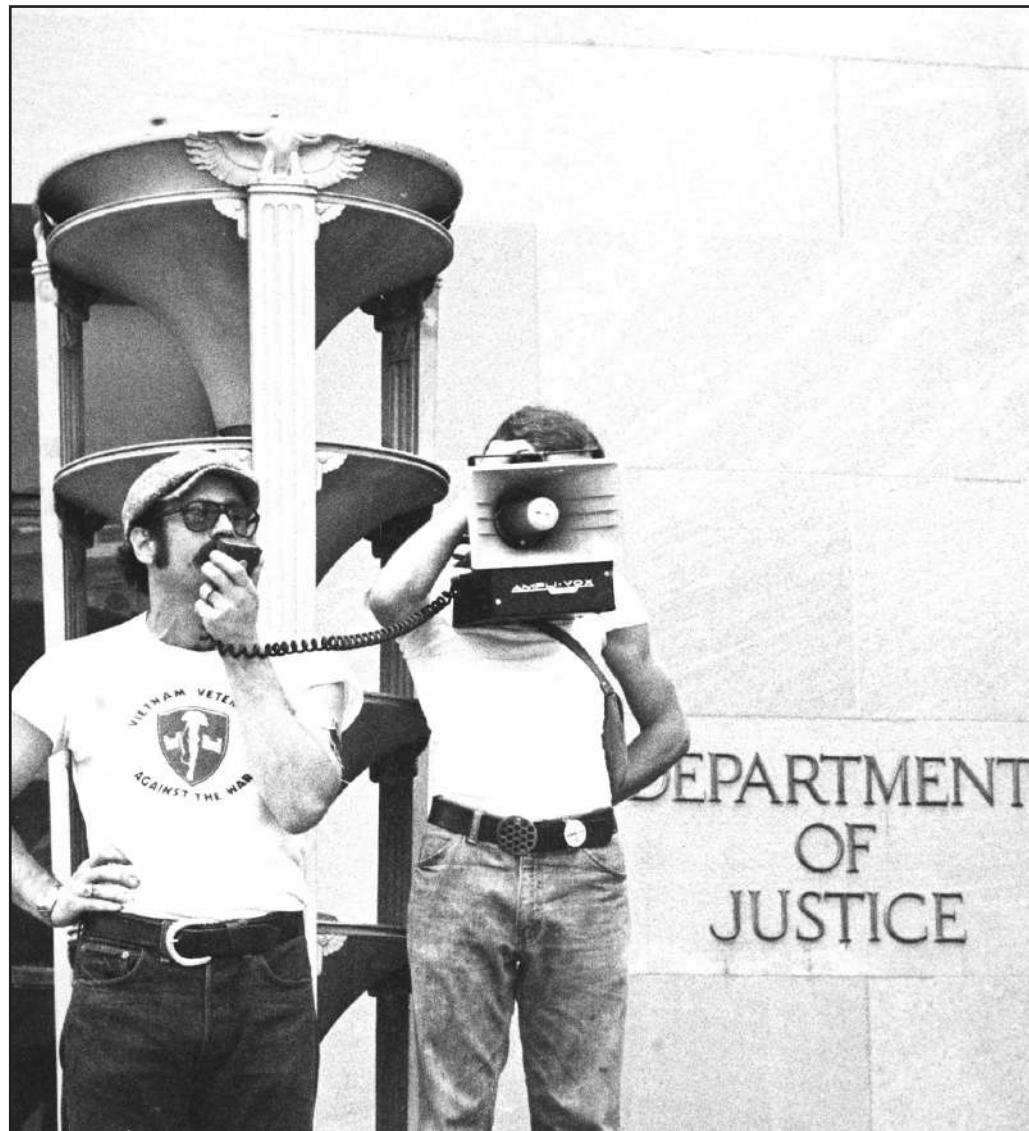
CHUCK THEUSCH IS A VIETNAM VETERAN OF THE US ARMY, 4/3 INFANTRY, 11TH INFANTRY BRIGADE, AMERICAN DIVISION, VIETNAM 1969-70. HE IS THE FOUNDER/CEO OF THE LIBRARY OF VIETNAM PROJECT.



This book will take you back, break your heart, and make you laugh and cry. I recommend it highly, especially for veterans and civilians who continue to suffer from the physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds of war.

Fred A. Wilcox, author of *Waiting for an Army to Die: The Tragedy of Agent Orange*

Available on Amazon in print for \$15, Kindle for \$9.99



July 4, 1974 in Washington, DC.

Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

Another Memorial Day approaches. Once again we have thoughts of someone important to us, of someone who died in combat. Or maybe he or she died afterward. The result of being in combat. Of Agent Orange. Or PTSD. Or of a lingering wound. Or of Gulf War or some other syndrome. Or of a broken heart. Some think of this more often or with more intensity than others. But we remember. It is noteworthy that those who memorialize the fallen soldiers may have and often do have opposing opinions of the worth of the war in which the fallen have lost their lives. Those of us who opposed that war see the waste in dying for that war's objective or lack thereof. Those who supported the war find meaning in the sacrifice made on the war's behalf. Those with either opinion or with no opinion do feel intensely about the dead.

I am of the opinion that almost all the wars and police actions undertaken by the US in my lifetime were wrong. (I still wonder if the US restoring the Aristide government in Haiti was a good thing. Or if Bosnia was humanitarian.) If those who we're to honor on Memorial Day died as a result of the many unjust wars we fought, what does that say? You made the ultimate sacrifice for the wrong reasons. How do you tell that to a gold star parent or spouse? This is a

person looking for meaning. This is someone who desperately wants the meaning to be noble.

Like any organization, there were some bad apples in the military. Most of us served honorably. We made the sacrifices that come along with being a soldier or sailor or a marine. We put up with it. We were brave. We provided a service to our nation's people. Unfortunately, we acted so while carrying out bad policy and/or fighting unjust wars, and that makes the sacrifice hurt one even more. You might say that - our political leadership being what it is - a certain number of people - one way or another - would have to serve. That means a steady stream of Americans put in harm's way. A certain percentage of that stream will die and become the honorees on Memorial Day.

This country certainly has no monopoly on offering up it's young in pursuit of a war that shouldn't be fought or drags on too long. Think of World War I when European governments prolonged the slaughter in those trenches. We are usually guided by civilians who move us around like chess pieces made to sacrifice for the king. In these modern days, it's not a king but one suit or another. Are any of these wars good wars? Those who made the sacrifices in World War II had righteousness on their side. Hitler can do that to you. The soldiers and sailors and marines that went may have

fought the Good Fight. Still, it had little to do with our rights and freedoms. The Wehrmacht wasn't going to be marching down Broadway. We had an ocean between us.

Over the last decades, the sacrifices of US military personnel have been more honored than since World War II. In a perverted way, respect for our sacrifices has been used by (civilian) hawks to push for men and women to sacrifice more in prolonged wars. Take Afghanistan. Negotiations with the Taliban stumble ahead. All sides in the conflict want something out of a peace treaty. One thing pushed by US negotiators to justify further military involvement is that the over two thousand plus who have died there can't be allowed to have died in vain so give us what we want in whatever damn treaty you sign. If they don't, we are willing to stay and continue this war - and lose a few more soldiers each month for whom we must stay and then lose a few more in an endless cycle.

It's not only American deaths that are used to promote war. We have tended toward fighting wars where we befriend some element in a civil war. When the war eventually tapers off or ends our allies are left to the mercy of whoever now controls the country. So the argument goes that we should sacrifice more for these allies. The reality is that we're going to leave

eventually anyway and leave our allies hanging. Again look at Afghanistan. We will leave a government that is too weak to fight off the warlords. Civilian cooks and interpreters and supportive soldiers that we worked with will be exposed and targeted. So should we do battle for another five years? Will the Kabul government be any stronger if we stay another five years? I think not. At best we don't know. But these hawks are willing to risk more of us to find out. The hawks will pay tribute on Memorial Day. Some will truly memorialize the fallen. And some will shed false tears. That's what you do to enable you to pursue more belligerent policies. Maybe there are guilt feelings. But they are blinded by some ideology that justifies sending more in harm's way.

War results in death which results in Memorial Day(s). It is necessary and honorable that Memorial Day be observed, and it appears that Memorial Days will forever be necessary. Peace is not in sight. I still don't know how to answer the question. What do you say to a Gold Star parent or spouse?



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

Public Misled on Afghanistan War

JOHN KETWIG

The Washington Post recently (December 10, 2019) exposed that the Pentagon has, for the last 18 years, systematically misled Congress and the American public about the war in Afghanistan at a cost of thousands of lives and trillions of dollars. Afghanistan has been left a smoldering pile of rubble, with more than 111,000 dead and the Taliban controlling 70% of the country, far more than when the Americans invaded back in 2001. Meanwhile, suicides among active-duty military personnel are at epidemic rates, surpassing the numbers of GIs killed in combat over the past few years. Suicides among veterans, although only rarely reported to the federal government or VA authorities in most American communities, are also soaring. The usual number of veteran suicides is 22 per day, or more than 8,000 per year.

The wars in the Middle East and Africa are funded separately from the Defense Budget, and are estimated to have cost American taxpayers approximately \$5.6 trillion to date. The costs related to militarism and war now cost America more than a trillion dollars a year, which Congress deftly camouflages by borrowing most of the money. Our children and grandchildren will pay it back, they

assume, just like college students are expected to pay back their student loans. It seems the Department of Defense (DOD) has cooked the books on every measurement of progress, or the lack of it, regarding the war in Afghanistan. The Pentagon currently employs approximately 600,000 contractor companies, and more contractor employees (3814) than GIs (2400) have died in Afghanistan. Those numbers include the young GIs electrocuted in faulty showers or poisoned by the foul smoke from burn pits constructed by Halliburton, but the company, now operating under a variety of different names, has paid no penalty. In today's America, the ultimate status symbol is not a Rolex watch or a Rolls-Royce in the driveway. It is a defense contract, a license to steal!

On the home front, untold billions of dollars-worth of surplus, or unneeded, high-tech vehicles and equipment have been donated to local police forces across the nation, allowing hometown cops to squelch public protest in communities from Portland, Oregon to Ferguson, Missouri. Meanwhile, our current National Debt is over \$22 Trillion!

In 2019, the American people will pay more than \$67 billion in

interest on that debt. For the very first time in history, Congress demanded an audit of the Department of Defense, to be completed by 2014, then 2017. Not surprisingly, that audit failed because the Pentagon's records were "riddled with so many bookkeeping deficiencies, irregularities, and errors that a reliable audit was simply impossible." One independent study exposed \$21 Trillion (NOT a misprint!) missing, lost in "unaccountable adjustments" by the army alone from 1998 to 2015.

When Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez mentioned it, she was ridiculed. A carefully camouflaged provision of the 2012 defense budget authorization bill erased all domestic laws limiting propaganda. In effect, there are now no limits to what the Pentagon, the State Department, or the Office of Management and Budget might tell the American public. In the year 2015, the army's total budget was \$122 billion, but the Treasury Department made a cash deposit of \$794.8 billion to the army's account, and the army's accounts receivable account showed bills due of \$929.3 billion. No one in government has questioned this. The 2016 OIG (Office of the Inspector General) annual report concluded

that the missing and unexplained trillions of dollars were the result of the DOD's "failure to correct system deficiencies." Next time the family checkbook doesn't balance, try using that excuse with your mortgage company. The simple truth is, like the reports of impending victory in Afghanistan, the Pentagon's books are systematically cooked to drive the DOD's budgets ever higher, while extreme corruption, waste and fraud are concealed.

The military adventure in Afghanistan has lasted nearly 18 years under 17 different commanding generals. There is no prospect of victory, but the lies and expenses, and the death and destruction, will continue into the foreseeable picture. A few years ago, West Point discontinued ethics classes. I can't help wondering if, in their place, they are teaching corruption and profiteering at West Point?



JOHN KETWIG IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, THE AUTHOR OF THE BEST-SELLING VIETNAM MEMOIR ...AND A HARD RAIN FELL, AND THE RECENTLY RELEASED VIETNAM RECONSIDERED: THE WAR, THE TIMES, AND WHY THEY MATTER.



VVAW in Chicago, January, 1974.



Wounds of War

DENNY RILEY (REVIEWER)

Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation's Veterans
by Suzanne Gordon
(Cornell University Press, 2018)

Suzanne Gordon's latest book *Wounds of War* is about the Veterans Healthcare Administration, the healthcare plan under attack by conservative politicians and commentators, the fabulously rich Koch Industries, and Veterans For America, a sham veterans organization financed by Koch. They all malign the VHA (often simply called the VA) on the flimsiest of anecdotal facts. Many of us have been convinced by this attack that the Veterans Health Administration is in worse shape than are the men and women who turn to it for care. Many people, even veterans who qualify for VHA care, put their health in the hands of hope. They hope the HMO or private healthcare plan they're signed up with offers them healthcare professionals who are good. Whether they are good – whether they've had malpractice suits settled against them or had their licenses suspended at some time, can be difficult to discover. For-profit healthcare companies and the medical associations keep their disciplinary procedures as far from the public eye as possible. The assumption is HMOs and private healthcare employ good people. They say so in their advertisements. Certainly better than the Veterans Healthcare Administration, one would think.

Gordon swings our attention to a different view of healthcare in America. The RAND Corporation and the MITRE Corporation "confirmed, in great detail, that the quality of the VHA's frontline care was equal to or superior to that delivered in private sector... wait times for appointments with primary care providers or medical specialists at the VHA were actually shorter than those experienced by patients using private doctors or hospitals."

Those might be sufficient words to convince a person if discussing the matter over dinner or a glass of wine, but the force amassed in the mission to turn the VHA's budget (\$200 billion annually) over to the private sector has tremendous clout. So Gordon did

the work, and with *Wounds of War* the facts are known. They are here in black and white.

Full disclosure compels me to say I am a military veteran who receives healthcare at a Veterans Health Administration facility Suzanne Gordon writes about in *Wounds of War*, and I am satisfied with the care I get, generally pleased. Compared to my friends who are enrolled in private healthcare, I may be the only one pleased with this care.

Gordon hasn't written *Wounds of War*, however, as a champion of the VHA. She is an award-winning journalist whose eighteen published books are about healthcare, patient safety, nursing, and teamwork, and she goes at this thorough book about the VHA with the mastery she has applied to all of her chosen subjects.

Subtitled *How the VA Delivers, Health, Healing, and Hope to the Nation's Veterans*, the book covers all of those issues and more. Written in seventeen topical chapters with an introduction, a conclusion, and an epilogue, *Wounds of War* tells it all. The evolution of many VHA programs is explained, usually in the words of the physicians and clinicians who developed them, with brief biographies of veterans who participated.

Gordon approached the VHA not through interviews either in person or in emails or on the phone. No, she visited a VHA facility and spent days with caregivers, in their offices, in staff meetings, and with patients. She visited the psychiatrist Lanier Summerall at a VHA Medical Center in South Carolina and also at a VHA Medical Center in Vermont. Doctor Summerall has been with the VHA several decades. From a mental health point of view Doctor Summerall describes the integrated healthcare unique in the United States to the VHA.

70% of the United States' medical residents and 40% of all other healthcare professionals receive some or all of their training at a VHA facility.

"We have a breadth of psychological services under one roof that is unequaled even in the most well-resourced private-

sector environment," Gordon quotes Summerall. "If a person is homeless, they can get help with a variety of agencies to get housing. If they are having trouble getting a job, we have supportive employment and compensated work therapy. We have residential programs for PTSD and substance abuse and for chronic, hard-to-treat psychiatric illnesses like bipolar or schizophrenia."

Summerville goes on, "Our patients have lifestyle problems, relationship problems, work problems." She says many of the patients cannot possibly coordinate their own care or take responsibility for self-care. "The paramount thing for these people is that everybody here [the VHA facility] knows each other. We are all on the same team in the same place." Continuing, Dr. Summerville says, "We have the only system of integrated mental health and primary care in the country."

As Gordon reveals, the VHA functions very differently from the way it is depicted in most mainstream media coverage. The Veterans Healthcare System has 150 hospitals, 819 clinics, and 300 mental health centers, which employs 250,000 people (a third of whom are veterans themselves) and sees 230,000 patients a day. Among the many VHA innovations and inventions are the implantable cardiac pacemaker, CAT scans, the nicotine patch, the first successful liver transplant, the use of low dose aspirin regimen to prevent heart attacks, and prosthetic technology to help restore the sense of touch for those who have lost an upper limb or use an artificial hand. All of this was done on the Veteran Healthcare Administration research budget where there is no profit incentive, no patents to file, and all discoveries are made available to all Americans.

Then why are problems the VHA may have not simply fixed? Why is there a movement toward privatization rather than getting it operating at the level our veterans deserve? After all aren't these the people we've been told to thank for their service, people often referred to as heroes? Well, first of all there is that \$200 billion budget Koch Industries and its allies would like shifted to the private sector. And to a

lesser degree the VHA is in a different light than private healthcare. It is a public institution with the mission to fulfill President Lincoln's promise "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans. As a public institution supported by taxpayers, its books are open. We can look behind the curtain and see how it is run. So those with their eye on the big budget can poke and point with ease.

Private sector healthcare has no equivalent damning light. For instance the Cleveland Clinic, a highly regarded general medical and surgery system with eleven hospitals and eighteen health centers, was fined \$650,000 for serious lab violations in 2015, paid \$1.6 million to the Justice Department to settle "accusations that it implanted cardiac devices in patients too soon after a heart attack or surgery," in 2016, while the CEO received huge salary increases. The Cleveland Clinic averaged more than \$730,000 spent on lobbying between 2014 and 2018. No one clamored for the CEO's dismissal or the closing of any of the Cleveland Clinic facilities.

Of course, money is the issue, it always is. But 70% of the United States' medical residents and 40% of all other healthcare professionals receive some or all of their training at a VHA facility. The VHA is the spine of American healthcare. Gordon clearly and extensively makes that point. And the VHA is looking at a stream of disabled veterans for at least the next fifty years (an estimate based on disarmament happening some time soon.) Who among us will be the one to tell the returning soldier we do not care? Anyone who wants the VHA dismantled does not know the facts. Suzanne Gordon delivers the facts in *Wounds of War*.

The article first appeared in Peace In Our Times, Spring 2019.



DENNY RILEY IS AN AIR FORCE VETERAN OF THE VIETNAM WAR AND A WRITER.

I'm A Vet, But Not A Hero

JACK MALLORY

Got into a discussion with a Trumpster on a high school reunion web site. She's someone who thinks she can ignore the results of war as long as she calls every vet a hero—while refusing to condemn Trump's attacks on the loyalty of those who have served, like Lt. Col Vindman and Ambassador Taylor.

I posted this on the site, in a probably hopeless attempt to introduce a little reality into her life.

Heroism and war. No representative data, no good evidence, just anecdote. The vets I know don't think of themselves as heroes. They know there are heroes, may have seen a few, but would never describe themselves that way. For many, I suspect, being referred to as a hero gives them the heebie-jeebies, as it does me. I don't go to many vet ceremonial events, because of the proliferation of hero verbiage on the part of civilians.

Heroism, the way I think of it, is a relatively small part of war for

those who fight one. The everyday realities of war are more mundane: the shits from the weekly malaria pill; a missed mail call because the log bird took ground fire, or a Dear John letter when there is mail; getting stuck with the ham and lima beans in your C rats; crotch rot.

Today, Deb heard a good example of the everyday, potentially lifetime realities of the war experience. Interviewing a prospective employee who would be working very closely with vets, requiring patience and sensitivity, she asked him what are the things that "set him off." That is, what are things that can cause him to "lose it." He's a vet with two combat tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. Deb's got 20 plus years as a VA therapist, knows that many/most of us have triggers: long-lasting reactions to situations that remind us of war. Sudden, loud noises; discomfort in crowds or contained spaces; people close behind us.

The vet's trigger was one I hadn't

heard before, somehow specific to his wars. Without any hesitation, without having to think about it, he said, "People with their hands in their pockets."

I haven't talked to him, don't know where this comes from. Being around people of uncertain identity, in wars without uniforms where the threat isn't easily defined? Whatever the origin, it's his trigger. Next time you're out, look for people with hands in their pockets. How many do you think you'll see? Think about spending your life with that as a serious anxiety prompt, trying not to treat every pocketed person as a potential threat, feeling like you're nuts looking at people's pockets.

This kind of thing can be a serious obstacle to a normal life, like the other long-lasting combat adaptations I mentioned. Hurling yourself to the floor in the Principal's office when a plastic water bottle a student has loaded with dry ice explodes outside the window can give a rather odd

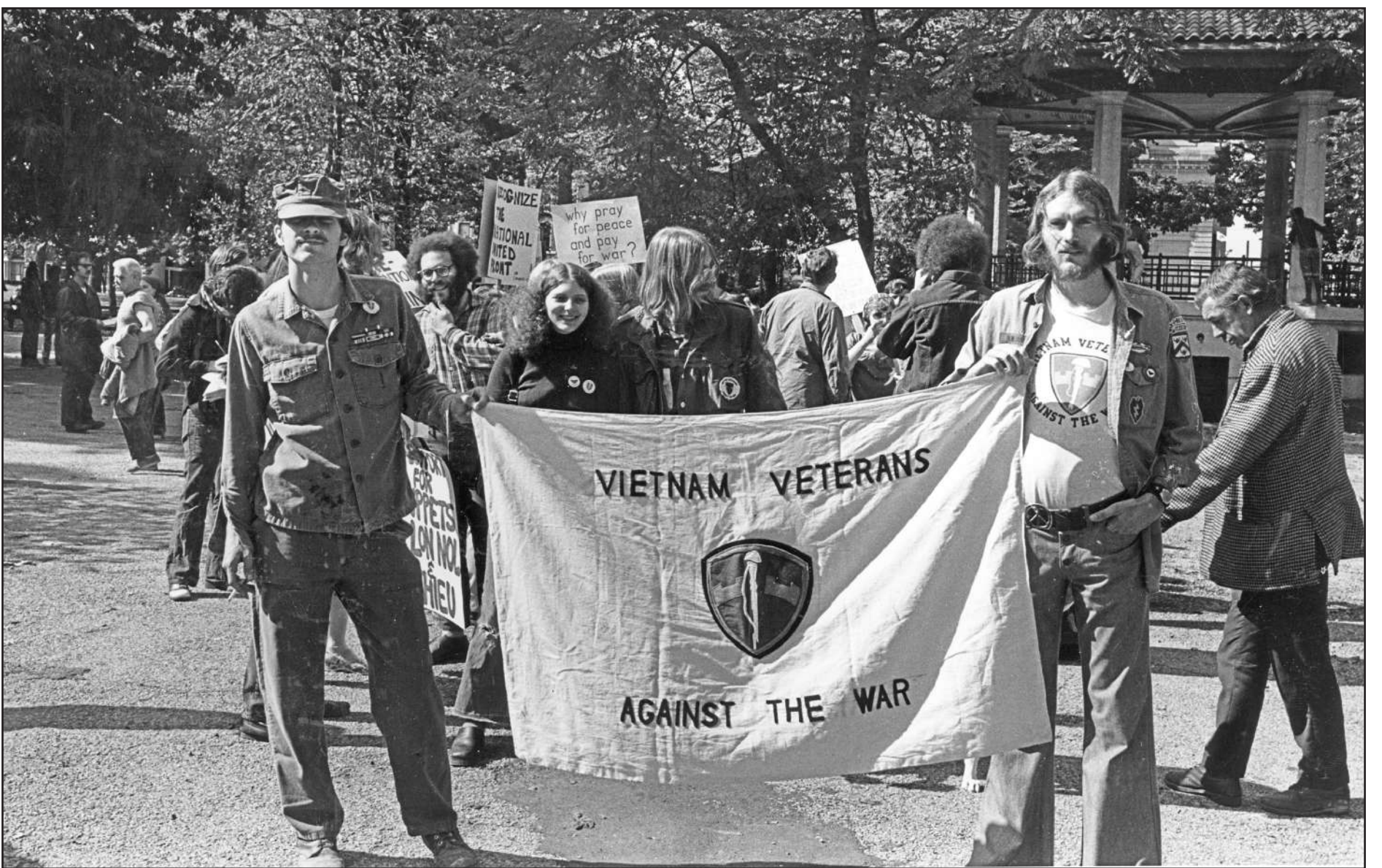
impression during a job interview.

Or, with some work, maybe a lot of work, these reactions can just be the lifetime leftovers of war that we adjust our lives to. Luck helps, also. The first time Deb and I went out, the VA therapist in her said as we went into the movie theater, "You don't want to sit in the middle, do you?" We sat by the aisle, near the exit, and I thought maybe she was a keeper.

Heroism gets more attention because it sells movies and drives recruitment for the next war. But for many of us, decades after the fact, it's not parades, not medals, not "thank your for your service" that remain, but these lingering, quirky differences between us and the rest of the world.



JACK MALLORY IS A LONG-TIME VVAW MEMBER. HE SERVED IN VIETNAM 69-70 AND JOINED VVAW IN 1970.



Coming Home Again

DAN NEW

The cab waits outside the gate to the Hoi An hotel an hour before dawn. A light fog vents from the damp streets. I place my bags in the trunk of a tiny car and fold my long limbs into the backseat. For the first time since arriving in Vietnam, I am separated from any help to negotiate the airport where I don't speak the local language. I'm a six-foot-four American in a country of people who see me as a giant and where I can't hide. The cab speeds north to the Danang airport and my flight to Hanoi due to leave in ninety minutes. The driver leaves me at the departure gate. All the signs are unreadable to me, so I trail behind travelers with luggage who seem to be departing until I come to a check-in counter.

I place my boarding pass and passport on the counter for the agent to process in a wordless transaction. With my bags checked, I continue to the assigned gate to board the fifty-five-minute flight to Vietnam's capital. The plane's seats face each other in some areas like railroad seating. I pick a seat across from a frail, elderly couple wrapped in a blanket. The wife sits across from me. She wears elegant jewelry. Her glasses, a stylish shade of crimson, allow her eyes to be seen but provide an intrigue to her story, in my mind. She tends to her husband and looks out the window until we are above the clouds. Then she turns to me and asks in perfect English, "Will you be visiting Hanoi for long?"

"No, I'm connecting to another

flight to take me home."

"And where is home?"

"I'm from the United States."

"A long way from home. Why Vietnam?"

"I'm revisiting the country. I was in the war."

"So many years later? I do not mean to be so forward. My husband and I are returning to our home country. We left in 1965 to move to Paris and avoid the bombing."

"This is your first time back?"

"Yes, we moved there. We had our family there. My husband practiced medicine, and I raised our children. My daughter is a doctor in Paris, my son a professor at the university. But now we come home to live out our lives in the place that we've always loved, home."

"I needed to return here to finish my business, my war memories, these spirits that have lived with me all these years, to find peace within myself."

"Have you traveled alone?"

"No, with a group, hoping to settle the past with the present, perhaps to right some wrongs, to find freedom."

"And have they?"

"For some, I'd say yes, but not for all. I've been on this journey since I left here. I never thought it would bring me back, but it feels right, to see the peace, the people, the growth, the happiness, and to witness the damage. It's no longer rolling around in my head. I still have a way to go, but this helped so much, brought so

much into focus."

We sit quietly. Then she says, "I think we were meant to ride this last part together. You have brought me some peace even before I have set foot on this soil. It's comforting to know that healing is happening in my land."

I peer out the window, as the plane begins its descent over the Gulf of Tonkin.

"It's a beautiful country, so rich and lush with growth."

"Thank you for coming back and for being here with us today."

Our plane lands and taxis to the terminal. The man wakes up, and they speak French, then switch to Vietnamese. He bows his head as a sign of respect. I bow in return. I follow them up the aisle and down the gangway to the airport's main corridor where we part. I look to the departure listings on the electronic screen and find my flight. Then I head home across eight thousand miles that bridge the 50 years between then and now.

I remember where I've been and, with gratitude, know that I will continue to heal on my road back.



DAN NEW IS A WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER. HE IS A DECORATED COMBAT VIETNAM VETERAN, WHO SERVED IN THE US ARMY FROM APRIL 1967 TO APRIL 1968.



Our VA is Threatened

JOHN KETWIG

In mid-February, I attended the Save Our VA (SOVA) conference in Washington, hosted by Veterans for Peace. Attendees came from all over America, even Alaska, and they were a wonderful group of experienced veterans, activists, and lobbyists. This conference was timed to coincide with the national convention of AFGE, the Amalgamated Federation of Government Employees, many of whom are VA employees. There was also an associated Town Hall by National Nurses United, which includes many, if not most, VA nurses. The conference was very effective in attracting other guests and speakers who have been working to prevent the privatization of the VA.

A prominent speaker and participant in all of these activities was Suzanne Gordon, the author of *Wounds of War*, a hugely important book I recently reviewed for *The Veteran*. *Wounds of War* is the "textbook" of the SOVA movement, and Suzanne Gordon is a former VA medical professional and an award-winning journalist and author. She has researched the subject extensively, and is an extremely knowledgeable and motivated spokesperson for this effort.

Basically, the infamous "Koch brothers" are no more as David recently died, but brother Charles continues to bankroll many "conservative" efforts. Among his priorities is a movement to privatize the VA, turning over its medical health care activities to the for-profit health industry. Are you aware that there is a Koch-funded "veterans" organization, Concerned Veterans of America, that is pressuring legislators to back legislation that threatens to undermine and, ultimately, abolish the VA? They don't have a large membership, but they have the bucks to generate lots of attention-getting paperwork, literature, and lobbying activity. The Koch campaign is intending to diminish the VA's activity before the Trump administration gets voted out of office in November, and there is a huge flood of legislation pending and anticipated. The MISSION Act's "Veterans Community Care Program" (VCCP) has been passed and is currently in place, encouraging up to 60% of all eligible vets across America to go to for-profit healthcare providers instead of the VA. These

"outsourced" visits are billed to the VA's budget, and of course the private sector visits are far more costly than VA healthcare, slowly depleting the VA's financial abilities.

Sadly, many of the for-profit health industry's proposals and legislative suggestions, often Koch-funded, have been camouflaged as efforts to reduce veteran suicides. The first steps of their long-term plans are to fund millions of dollars in grants to a wide range of private sector, or for-profit, health care providers outside of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) network. These providers would be tasked with conducting outreach and providing outpatient mental health treatment, along with other types of medical care, to veterans with a potential for suicide.

The most notable example of this charade is the Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act, a Trump administration effort that masquerades as a suicide prevention bill and is co-sponsored by a bi-partisan crowd that includes conservative Republicans and even some liberal Democrats like Senator Elizabeth Warren. The bill is opposed by Disabled American Veterans, the American Legion, American Psychological Association, and the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute, among others.

The actual purpose of the bill is to farm out various VA activities to the for-profit industry, but with no provisions for oversight or quality of care, and no set standards for the providers to provide "care" or track the progress of any potentially suicidal veteran. Providers will not be required to meet any performance or experience standards, they will be allowed to "care for" needy vets by any process or procedure they choose, and the terms used in the legislation to describe the boundaries of that care are not familiar to the mental health industry. There are no provisions to help vets with support services that would include housing, employment, or financial problems. While the VA has experience in dealing with PTSD and veterans' mental health problems related to their war-time experiences, the for-profit providers usually do not. The wide-ranging activities to be funded by the bill would be debited to the VA's budget, which is already far short of what's needed. There are more

than 55,000 openings for physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and nurses throughout the VA system.

Currently, 14 of the VA's 18 regions have spent or committed their annual budgets, so they cannot add desperately needed staff, improve their facilities, purchase equipment, or increase efforts to reach out to veterans who are not enrolled in their programs. The SOVA movement's aims are to fully fund the VA as needed, which would require a financial investment far beyond the VA's current budget, fix the problems, and fully staff the VA.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie has maintained an adversarial approach to all efforts to question or delay the selling off of VA services to the for-profit healthcare industry. The House Committee on Veterans Affairs (HVAC) is chaired by Democrat Mark Takano of California, and he has been attacked by Republican members of the committee for questioning the Trump administration's proposals. Takano has proposed alternative legislation that would place limits on the for-profit institutions funded. He insists that "The urgency of addressing veteran suicide should not be the pretext for allowing VA money to go to providers who are not held to account for measurable outcomes, who are not subject to oversight." Wilkie, a Navy veteran who describes himself as a war historian, has falsely claimed that the VA did not care about veteran suicides until Trump came into office. He has indicated that he would award grants to groups who provide questionable therapies, as well as "post-traumatic growth therapy" at luxury resorts. His office has pressured legislators to embrace the bill, and is being supported by the for-profit healthcare industry. There is, after all, big, big money at stake.

I am no expert, but I recognize the need to get veterans aware of, and actively voicing their opinions about this topic. Please take a look at www.SaveOurVA.org. Approximately 86% of all veterans who use VA healthcare facilities favor the SOVA position of "Fix – Fund – Fully Staff the VA".

Study after study documents that VA healthcare is equal, and often superior, to care provided by private sector, for-profit doctors and hospitals. VA personnel are experienced and mindful

of the special needs of veterans, especially combat vets, while the for-profit folks only view their customers by the size of their insurance coverages. Clearly, the VA healthcare program is the largest and most prominent example of single payer healthcare in America, and it is a model for all of the universal healthcare / "Medicare for All" program movements.

This is a huge, important, and constantly-changing issue that will ultimately affect all veterans. The for-profit industry realizes that their conservative, pro-Trump supporters in Congress may not be around after the end of the year, and they are pushing a lot of proposals in hopes that some of them will get passed before the election. Unfortunately, VFP and the other groups say they have no ability to monitor legislation and advise us of which bills we should be for or against (!) The only recommendation they offer at this time is to get behind HR 701, a bill that would require full funding and staffing of the VA without farming out any of the VA's activities unless for issues of distance or availability. That bill would pretty much eliminate the influence of Charles Koch and the three influential members of the President's Mar-A-Lago club in Florida.

The next issue of *The Veteran* will be targeted to Veterans Day and will appear shortly before the election, but probably won't be distributed in time to resist the Trump administration's efforts to cripple the VA. What can we do? First, call your Congressman and ask him or her to support HR 701, and see that it is passed. Sign onto www.SaveOurVA.org and stay abreast of the situation, and don't hesitate to let your Congressman know what you are thinking. Veterans for Peace are planning to picket at the entrances of many VA hospitals, with a target date of June 5th. Letters to the editor of your favorite newspaper can certainly help to sway public opinion. Just pay attention, or the VA hospital you visit might be out of business soon, and that would be a disaster!



JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW AND THE AUTHOR OF TWO BOOKS ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR.



A VA Excursion During Lockdown

JOHN ZUTZ

In Wisconsin, the Governor's isolation order began at 8 a.m. In Milwaukee, the Mayor, perhaps trying to be first, ordered people to stay home beginning at midnight. My VA appointment was for 8:30.

The VA made two robocalls over the weekend advising that if my appointment should be canceled they'd call. Getting no cancellation calls, I headed for the hospital, arriving just before 8.

I had expected the streets to be pretty deserted, but I was amazed at how many people consider themselves "essential." 8:00 is starting time for many VA employees, and a steady stream was entering. However, the

patient parking lot was less than half full. I managed to pull up right in front.

Outside the entrance, there was a large tent everyone had to pass through. Workers keep right. Patients go left. First question: Do you have an appointment? Yes, yes I do. Second Question: Do you have a headache, sore throat, lung congestion? No. I was allowed inside the building where my appointment was confirmed.

I was concerned finding this was the extent of the screening. I thought they should have at least taken a quick temp. More on this later.

The inside of the building has been altered. Lobbies containing waiting areas have been closed off.

There were very few people wandering through. I arrived at my clinic waiting area. There was one other person in a space that would normally hold at least 20. The usual four clerks were behind the desk, but they seemed busier than normal.

There seemed to be fewer techs in the clinic, but I wasn't there long enough to tell. My blood was drawn, I filled out a form, I made an appointment for next month (pending the future of the bug) and I was out of there.

Here's my problem. The VA went to some expense to alter the interior and to set up and staff the screening area outside the building. But if they

were serious, I believe they should have been scanning the temperature of every person entering. Amazon sells a wide variety of non-contact infrared thermometers for between \$50 and \$100. The cheapest one sells for \$24 including battery. Point it at a person's forehead and get a temp readout. Over 100 degrees? No entrance, except to be put in a bed.

I was told they didn't have the equipment. So, who are they trying to fool? They could get next-day delivery.



JOHN ZUTZ IS A MILWAUKEE VVAW MEMBER.

VVAW Patches

BARRY ROMO

VVAW member Dennis Boyer was going through an old footlocker and found a bag of old VVAW patches. He couldn't remember their origin but knew they were from the old days. He sent them to the VVAW National Office. After sending long-time VVAW leader Barry Romo one, these were his reflections.

Wow! In the '70s, VVAW expanded gigantically in Vietnam. I mean 10,000 of our members were there or flying in and out of there. Sometime in the '70s, I was speaking someplace. A local member came up afterward. I don't remember who or when or where. But he gave me the patch I just got in the mail. The one our friend found. He said that he had bought it at a kiosk outside of Saigon. I don't know if it was Chinatown or what section. But it wasn't right in Saigon. He saw them and bought a bunch of them.

Part of the war plan was to get thousands of Korean troops to Vietnam. Part of the deal was they

had to allow an equal number of small business people to come as well. So, South Koreans showed up to do everything at these kiosks, from sewing to washing Army vehicles, to being prostitutes and running whorehouses.

In fact, when I was in I Corps, I went to one of those, not for any bad things. I had my poncho liner made into an insert for when we were out at night; it would get quite cold there. I went to a Korean place. I knew what he was talking about. But not where.

He said that he asked the woman there how many they had made. She told him 30,000, which is incredible. The Vietnamese, after Dewey Canyon III in 1971, issued a public statement that anybody who didn't hurt the Vietnamese and wore the upside-down helmet on a rifle; the universal symbol of the Soldiers who were killed in combat, that they wouldn't shoot them. They would have peace with them. So, it's possible.

People likely sewed these on their

uniforms. I think probably just put it on their chest or maybe on their side, by their combat patch. One side, of course, is the unit you are with and the other side is the unit you were in combat with.

We, for the most part, thought that our members in Vietnam probably wore buttons with the VVAW symbol on it, which could easily be removed. But those had VVAW's name, as well as the symbol. The patches, while more permanent, were more subtle.

At the Winter Soldier Investigation, one of the guys testified that his unit made a deal, through the prostitutes; that they wouldn't shoot Vietnamese. I guess the officer went along with it or the guy in charge did. He said they went a number of months without taking any casualties; not shooting anybody. Then they got a new commander. He had them shoot up Vietnamese; that very night or the next day the Viet Cong attacked them and shot a bunch of their men.

That's great Dennis thought about



us. Hopefully, other people will as well when cleaning out old footlockers or the basement or garage.



BARRY ROMO HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF VVAW SINCE 1971.



Long Beach VVAW, 1974.

The Waiting Devastation of Landmines

PAUL NICHOLS

I read with dismay, but not surprise, about President Trump's advocacy for renewed production and use of landmines, as described by an *LA Times* article which appeared in the *Concord Monitor* last month. Like every other position taken during Trump's presidency, this policy reversal is misguided and unconscionable.

In December 1997, a multinational treaty signing conference held in Ottawa, Canada brought about the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). Government leaders of many countries signed and ratified the treaty on the spot. The agreement prohibited the use, development and production of anti-personnel mines and called for the destruction of stockpiled mines.

Princess Diana energetically promoted the ban. Jody Williams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in conjunction with the ICBL organization for setting the ban in motion. By March 2018, there were 164 signatories to the Ottawa Treaty and more than 100 had ratified it. Among countries not signing on are China, Russia and the United States, though the Obama Administration took significant steps toward joining the ban.

Fortunately, landmines, booby traps, cluster bombs, artillery rounds and other unexploded ordnance (UXO) are not life-altering threats inside the US, so such menaces dwell in the back reaches of our consciousness.

This is not the case in many countries which often have predominately agrarian economies and where large population segments live

scattered throughout the countryside. Also scattered throughout the countryside are latent indiscriminate explosives from current or past wars.

These merciless devices are usually hidden beneath the soil or in thick vegetation. They have no conscience, uncaring whether to explode in the hand of a playful child, under the foot of a caring parent or grandparent, or in the hands of peasants collecting leftover scrap metal as a source of income. In fact, most casualties are suffered by innocent civilians. Impoverished families are left to survive with legless, armless or blind financial mainstays. Life-sustaining livestock sometimes

haplessly trigger UXO blasts and die riddled with shrapnel.

A considerable percentage of explosives disseminated by all sides during wartime are duds, while others detonate at the slightest nudge. They lay hidden as sleeping monsters ready to awaken with a vengeance to kill or maim. Intact mines, bombs and artillery shells are occasionally discovered left over from both theaters of World War II, and rarely even World War I. They've been found in several European, Asian and African countries. UXO from more recent wars litter the ground in Central and South America, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Laos

and Vietnam.

It's realistically too much to expect that major military powers will agree to cease production, store and use heavy weaponry. Signing on to the antipersonnel mines ban, rather than upending it, is a reasonable step toward a more humane world.

Shrapnel and limb loss hurt far more than Trump's bone spurs and last for a lifetime.



PAUL NICHOLS IS A LONG-TIME MEMBER OF VVAW, SERIOUSLY WOUNDED BY A LANDMINE DURING AMERICA'S WAR IN VIETNAM WHILE SERVING IN THE MARINES IN I CORPS.



1995 photo by Paul Nichols — Remnants at former Marine firebase near Con Thien



THE VETERAN

SECTION B

Volume 50, Number 1

Spring 2020

The History of VVAW National Newspapers

BARRY ROMO

In your hands is Volume 50 of VVAW's national newspaper, *The Veteran*. It started off as *First Casualty*, then *Winter Soldier*, and then became *The Veteran*. We decided to look back at the early days of VVAW's newspapers and get memories from some of the key organizers who worked on the paper over the years. See page 11 for recollections by Pete Zastrow and next issue for memories from Ed Damato and Bill Shunas.

I started working on the paper in 1972, when I got elected to the VVAW National Office. It was still called *First Casualty*. Prior to that, my local chapter and regional people published GI newspapers. In San Bernardino we organized GIs from 29 Palms Marine Base, March Air Force Base (B-52 Base) and so had a little experience already in publishing a newspaper.

The GI papers weren't chicken shit papers. The bases had military papers by Airmen and GI's and Marines, things like the *March Beacon*. The anti-war GI paper was called the *March Bacon*. We waited until the printed the *Beacon*. We would then get that and rush back and put our anti-war GI newspaper inside of the *Beacon*. Then we would drop it off every place where you could pick it up. 29 Palms, was the same way. There were tons of other places doing GI papers, not just there.

The printers started showing us more ways to improve our papers. They would tell us things we could do. Cut out blue space, use blue pencil. Then use a semi slide rule that they would have. Turn it around, so you'll have both black background and white. And stuff like that. I think they were sympathetic. This is when I started to do layout.

I did that for a year or two. Then I was elected to the VVAW National Office. They knew I had newspaper experience.

A couple issues of the *First Casualty* had already come out before I got onboard. One of the issues had a note back from a GI saying "I want to join." We mailed a thing back to him saying, here... And the company clerk sent a note back, saying he had died. He was killed in combat.

We didn't have a national newspaper from 1967 to 1971. I'm sure, money and I'm sure numbers of people were some of the reasons why. You have to reach a certain level of membership and money, before you can launch a national newspaper. I mean these cost money. I think, at the time, I was getting \$115 for going to school on the GI Bill. I think they raised it to like \$150 a month. So, most of us worked jobs, like washing trucks and cars.

After we did Dewey Canyon III and the Winter Soldier Investigation,

we found a national audience. Everybody had their own papers; Chicano Rights people, Black Panthers, etc. That was what people wanted. They wanted something that was national, that local people could connect to. We would print articles in the paper that were topical. California had our own paper, *Different Sons*. I think New York did as well. But, for the most part, people didn't have local papers. That became a giant thing. National meetings, people would say, over and over "We want a national paper and we are electing you to the National Office specifically to get out a national paper."

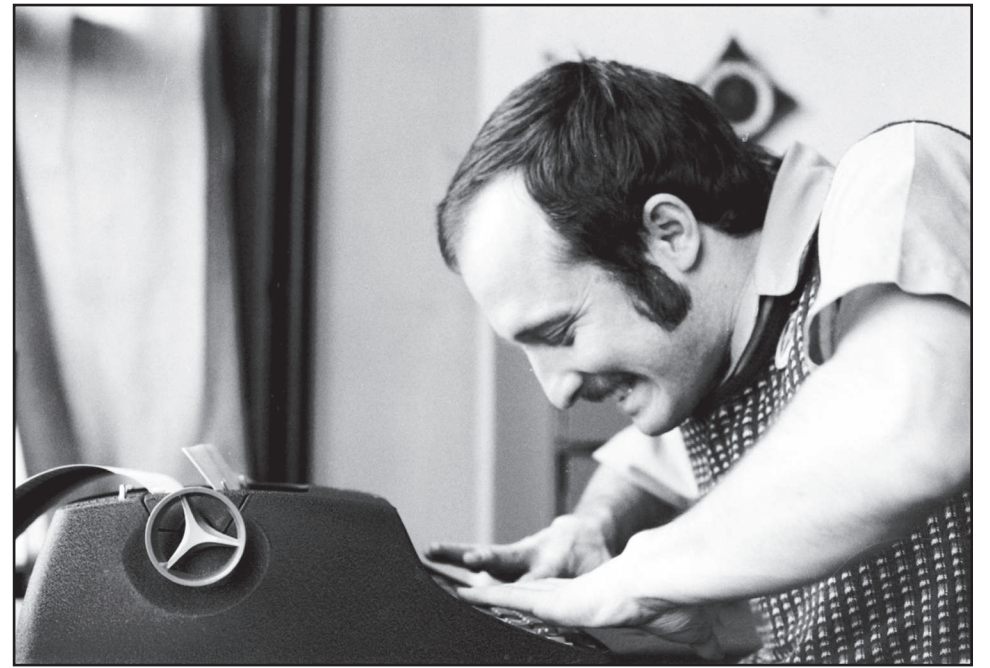
The National Office was still in Manhattan. I lived there for a while, on and off. I was living there half the time behind my desk, in the office. You know, we were getting \$25 bucks a week to live on. And then, I was sent down to Miami to organize for the Conventions. So, that took up more time than I spent in Manhattan. But, it was cool. I liked it. We liked it. That became a big thing, to get out a newspaper. And then we moved the National Office. People said also you got to move the NO. It's got to come to the Midwest. So, we checked out St. Louis and we checked out Detroit, and we checked out Chicago. Chicago was the Second City, it had gigantic steel mills and auto plants, and everything. Besides, it had Panthers. And it had Rising up Angry; people who were organizing white youth to be anti-racist and stuff. The move to Chicago happened in 1973.

The paper played a gigantic role in organizing. You could look and there would be 50 addresses of all the Regional Coordinators. It would give both the breadth of the thing. We had overseas GI projects and stuff. When we moved to Chicago, I had never done color.

In California, everything was black and white, or reverse stuff, negatives and stuff. We knew how to do that. We knew how to size up photographs and stuff. The presses even let us use their gigantic wax machines. We could use glue sticks, but we put most of them together at the printers.

We were distributing the paper by mailing to Regional Coordinators, not individuals. I want to say, 20,000 to 25,000 issues at the time. We would bundle them up and ship them at the Post Office, gigantic bundles.

I think we only asked for donations. I mean like in California, we used to have selling contests, who could sell the most papers. So, we would go to the steel mill where we would have members that were also union members as well, so we would sell them. Actually, I won bunches of those, especially at the Unemployment Office. It was great



Barry Romo on the National Office typewriter, Chicago, 1974.

because here would be GIs, who were out of the service now. They would give you a quarter. It may sound like not a lot. But it fuckin is!

Then the name changed from *First Casualty* to *Winter Soldier*. I think to emphasize that we were forward thinking, the same way we added Winter Soldier to the name Vietnam Vets Against the War at the same time. The change happened in Chicago; the change happened in 1973.

In Chicago well, I came here and became friends with people. Became friends with Rising Up Angry people. Became friends with Panthers. Became friends with hippy dippy people printing... I want to say something like the Great Colored Buffoon or something like that. They would print in parts, so one part was with the colored paper, and they used twice as many colors. Then the second part, they would have to put it all together, was totally black and white. But they wanted the hippy colors. We wanted the colors because we were using the newspaper with posters and shit. So, we copied that from the Panthers and the Panther paper, and Rising Up Angry had cartoons, revolutionary cartoons. They showed us how to do colors.

We got inspiration from the movement in Chicago, and they also helped out. They introduced us to the print shops they were using, which were already cheap. In the suburbs. Palos Hills was one, a printing place we used for over ten years.

The National Office was living collectively at this time on Newport, just a couple of blocks from Wrigley Field. And then it was mostly Puerto Rican and other poor people.

At this time, we upped the production to monthly. It was 25,000 copies. Most of the National Office collectively worked on the paper. There was a decision to not sign articles, no authorship - we said "it's a national paper." That was a cover for people who were sensitive and shit, and that we spoke with one voice. If we had two positions, then we would print two different positions from the

group and us.

Production wise, at this point I am doing a lot of the layout, No writing. Except the one article about my trip back to Vietnam, they made me write it. The very first trip. I wrote, the first time I understood what Imperialism was. I didn't see any Chinese people, except at the embassy. There weren't prostitutes and people running around and their kids were fighting back and they were fighting back.

The collective determined the content. We would talk it over and sometimes people wouldn't care, and sometimes they would. And I was sort of layout editor, so I could do whatever I wanted.

Then the name changed to *The Veteran*. We had some problems with people who didn't want us to be a veteran's organization. In fact, they said it was shoring up Imperialism, if we got these benefits for vets. And so, we decided we wanted to more directly hook back up to veterans, especially, after the war was basically over, to show sort of a break. We still recognized all the women, so Annie Bailey was Regional Coordinator and stuff like that. It was to re-emphasize our vet connection, we had War on the VA and stuff.

The name *Winter Soldier* coexisted with the time Winter Soldier was the sub-group or sub-name of VVAW. So, when that changed, it became *The Veteran*. Also, it went from monthly to semi-monthly, then quarterly, and eventually twice a year.

The color went away as well, with *The Veteran*. We stopped it. People like Jim Duffy just made hilarious jokes, like "I really want to thank you for dropping the use of colors. They used to always come off on my fish, when I was buying at the market." So, with wonderful support like that...

In the *Winter Soldier* era, Carol from California made the color posters. So, we would have a meeting and discuss, for instance Women's Day, and we would say, well, we want a poster about Women's Day or

continued on page 10

Memories of Operation RAW

JOSEPH BANGERT

Operation RAW (Operation Rapid American Withdrawal) was the first mention of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in my native Philadelphia Inquirer in August 1970! Winston Warfield, a US Army Vietnam Vet, ironically, stationed in Quang Tri at the same time as me, a helicopter Marine met up, believe it or not, at a "Veterans for Peace in Vietnam" meeting. Old guys in Philly, but they were all like WWI and WWII veterans who lacked energy and Winston and I headed out to a bar—we made fast friends and exchanged numbers and a few beers.

I remember cracking him up with an old exclamation that both Marines and Army used to scream to their homies when in other provinces in central Vietnam "Quang Tri is ALLRIGHT" and off I trudged for about six months after my 'honorable discharge' from the Suck. (nickname by Jarheads for Uncle Sam's Misguided Children!)

I hitchhiked to Morristown, New Jersey and was immediately warmly welcomed by an odd lot of

my fellow Vietnam Veterans. Joe Urgo, Christopher Soares, whacked out Bob McClaine (my first PTSD nutcase), Scott Moore on the horn, his beautiful girlfriend Kris, and then I met Al Hubbard, clearly either our Sergeant Major or confidante. Ah these memories, ah the fact that this was a Joint Force Action. It was like a real homecoming, a field reunion "in the field" of New Jersey of sorts, where I met who I just had experienced

Totally Operation RAW was our first "limited incursion" into the heart of the Northeast corridor. Retracing earlier steps of a ragtag army. We assembled and planned our "Harch Forward." There were loads of wimmen—nurses and a few vets in the closet still....we were an army of about 100 starting but boy did we have fun along the Hue.

There were the Brooklyn Heights boys Danny Schecter and Ed Damato. It's coming back to me. Oh yes, there's a mystery about the film/docu *Only The Beginning*.

I got to interview my compadre Bob McClaine, who had sore feet

and we were being treated by the surgical volunteers, who, I believe had a fucking ambulance. All squad leaders had walkie talkies and we sauntered forward in delightful still summery weather.

In *OTB (Only The Beginning)* there's a Woodstock scene of skinny dipping when we were young, hairy uninhibited and a little stoned too.

Operation RAW was the first time that I was "out" as a Marine combat (airdale for shore) Vietnam Veteran. Surrounded by one-footed or no-footed fellow 'Nam vets moving out, each day, into the unknown with a twinkle in our eyes and Ayes...Forward March.

Remember, I hail from the East Germantown section of North Philadelphia and so as a lad I was steeped in exactly where Continental Army heroes fell during the defeat at the Battle of Germantown. Elfred's Alley, the First Catholic Church, Saint Joseph's, down the street from both Carpenter Hall (Masonic trade union) and Independence Hall where the plum went down on the papier de Victoire!

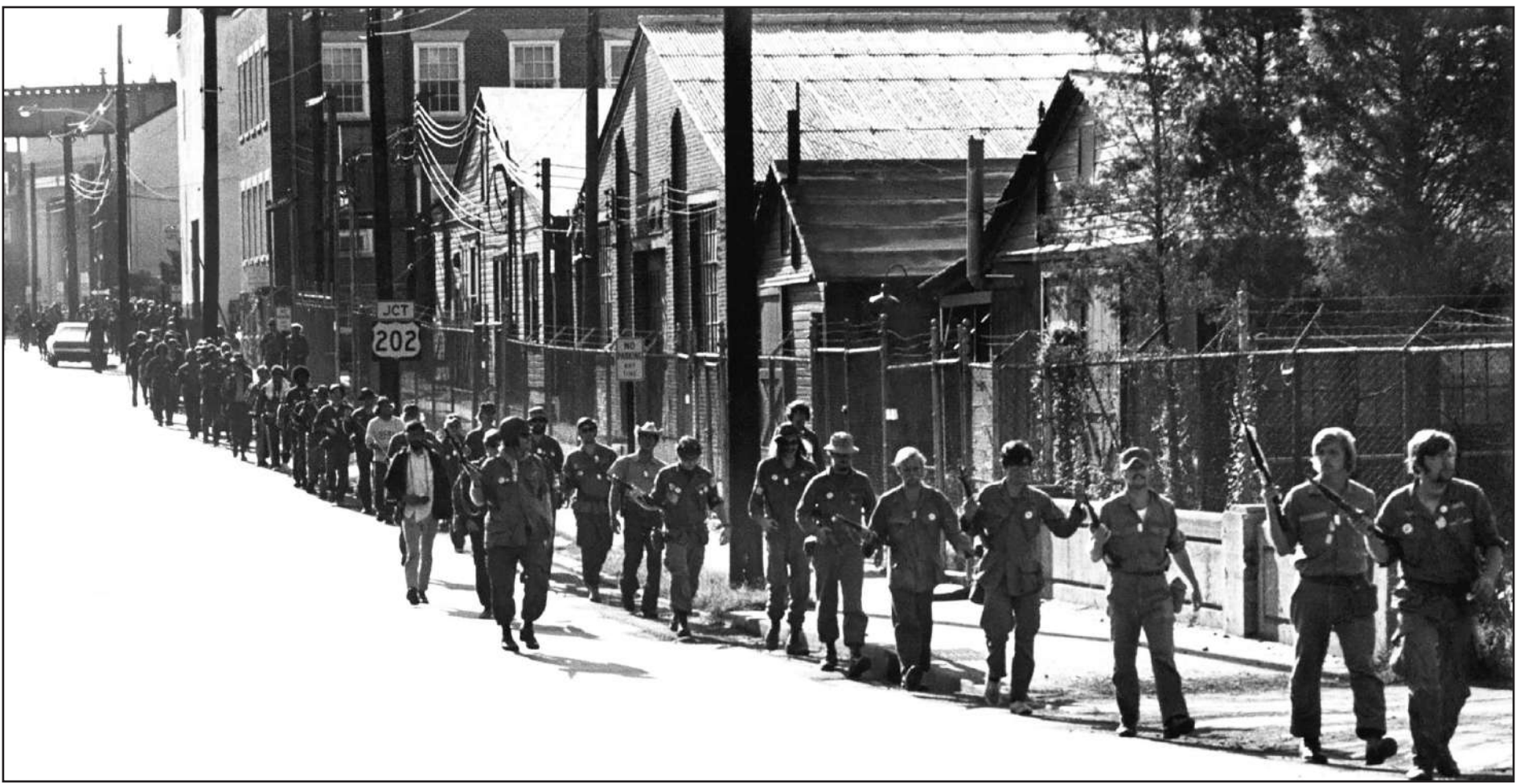
Not to mention the bogus "Betsy Ross" House.

Day two, we encountered our first flag wavin "fuck you, ya hippie faggots" VFW/AL confrontations. Oh boy. And we were performing "guerrilla theatre" along the Hue with volunteer Quaker girls/wimmen from Philly and very young high school kids, all Quakers, who came along with their brave leader Bridge McKay from NARMIC.

Anywho, "I was there" and we finally trekked all the way to Valley Forge, and I am proudest of the fact that I was only a small part of a squad sent over to the Valley Forge Army Hospital to invite recently amputated brothers to join us and they did in numbers, and that well and the icing on the cake. It was great to see and greet and touch and meet Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, and wait for it, glory hunting John Forbes Kerry! Chua chet!



JOSEPH BANGERT IS A LONG-TIME MEMBER OF VVAW.



VVAW's Operation RAW, September, 1970.

The History of VVAW National Newspapers

continued from page 9

GI Counseling or A Single Discharge or other issues. We also printed out bunches of them as posters. So, for instance "The Vietnamese have been victorious on the battlefield" and "Solidarity with the Cambodian people." We did, I think, bunches of those. But, I mean, we also laid the paper out so the centerfold and the posters could be done by themselves. So, people in offices and shit would just put them up in the windows, whether they were doing GI counseling or GI organizing or stuff like that, or PTSD.

Distribution wise, at the peak of the 25,000, it went to the chapters. And some to individuals. But, as we

got bigger, we did mailings to the people who gave money to us. So, if somebody joined when they were in Vietnam or somewhere else, we would mail those to them.

We had a bunch of layout stuff at the National Office on Newport. I mean we had giant light tables and shit. The printer would deal with the photos. We would have to give them the percentages. And so, if it was 90%, you had to have on the back of it "page 15 - 90%" and we would have to put a blue spot in it. Pete Zastrow maintained the mailing list.

The National Office moved in 1975 to the South Side of Chicago.

The printing stuff moved there. And the darkroom and stuff. We had our very own darkroom, at both places, upstairs when we were on Newport. And so, in one of the kitchens Brian Adams made a darkroom.

The photographers around *Winter Soldier* were Brian Adams and Damato. Ed was a great one. Brian was so good, he was able to open his own photo studio, after leaving the National Office.

When we were producing the paper on the South Side. It was being printed in Palos Hills, a Chicago suburb.

Pete Zastrow was part of the National Office and at a certain point, Pete started writing most of the articles. And I was doing the layout. Charlie, Bill Shunas, Bill Davis, Bill Branson were all working on the paper. I was living there with Pete, Bill Davis, and others. Everybody was working on the paper, at this point, and going to community college. This is where Bill and Bill became mechanics. They went to Kennedy King College

In the 1980s, the 75th Street house went away. Then I did it on my table in our house on Marshfield. I left the collective house, when Alynne and I got married. We had a rental. I brought the light table with me. But the dark rooms got dismantled. We had one bedroom for us and one for VVAW.

Pete was typing the articles, and maybe other people. I was doing Press Type for headlines. Cut and paste.

At a certain point, we started

using the computer to print those out. Alynne was doing that. But getting the articles, eventually, it came down to just me and Pete. And Bill Davis.

Writing wise, the shift came in the later 80s, to get other voices in there. The switch went from, "this is just a National Office organ" to be a broader VVAW and vets paper.

In the 80s, we did stuff around Central America and centerfolds and pullouts. But, without colors and shit. Dewey Canyon IV, there was a pullout. And going to the Philippines, coming back and going to Vietnam and coming back. And then the Gulf War.

And then in 1996, my PTSD prevented me from working on the paper. Jeff Machota came along and has kept it going since. He saved us.

The paper is still important today because it is still the visual representation of who we are. It has carried through. Pretty fucking amazing. The paper represents a generation that fucking fought the good fight. Everything from Civil Rights to anti-war to anti-imperialist, not just anti-war. I mean we took a stand. We stood with people that were fighting. That's continuing. I'm amazed at the quality of writing that is still coming from Vietnam Vets. Books, yes, but articles, reviews. There is still something to be said, that needs to be said.



BARRY ROMO LIVES IN CHICAGO AND HAS BEEN A LEADER IN VVAW SINCE 1971.



Barry Romo in VVAW's National Office, Chicago, 1974.

Life in the VVAW National Office

PETE ZASTROW

I got back from Vietnam at the end of 1969. I connected with VVAW in 1970.

My home was Ft. Thomas, Kentucky and I belonged to the Cincinnati VVAW chapter and eventually became the Coordinator for what we called MOINKWVAPA, which was Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Pennsylvania. I don't remember all of them.

I started working on the paper when I came to Chicago after being elected to the National Office in 1973. I moved into the VVAW Collective house at 827 Newport.

We all did newspaper. We had meetings and decided who was going to write what. Sam Schorr was our layout expert at the time.

There wasn't a lot of "everything else" because we wrote the articles and then two of us, mostly, typed them and gave them to Sam, and he put them together. He did all of the, what do you call it, whatever work it's called when you make up the page.

I think I replaced Barry Romo. He left to go work on the Gary Lawton case. I replaced him and he came back the next year or year after.

I put out our local, chapter wide, newsletter in Cincinnati, which was some of the same thing; Rah, Rah VVAW, and here's what we did, and here why we're heroes for doing it.

It was Mimeographed, but towards the end of time I spent in Cincinnati a young man who came and lived in our basement had been brought up as a printer, so he found out that his school in North Carolina was selling its printing press. Anyhow, we bought it. We went down and got it. It was this funny printing press that printed 24 by something or other. It was originally intended for blueprints. So, we started doing our own newspaper. In the basement!

By the time I got to the National Office, I already knew how the process went, more or less. It wasn't a mystery. I was surrounded by people who were already doing it. So that made it even easier.

We divided tasks in the National Office. Marla Watson and I did all the prison writing, which was a huge amount of letters. We put out a newsletter to prisoners every month. Ed Damato and I think, Brian Adams, at the time would have been doing the corresponding with chapters. There was always something in chapter news that we figured was publishable in the newspaper. We would have, usually, some kind of prison column, which either Marla or I would write.

Yes. I think we had 300 prisoners, at one point, all around the country. Most of them, not all of them, were veterans. We got at least tangentially involved in a number of the prison fights that were going on. There was a group in Oklahoma, I can't remember. We were writing to people in prisons, pretty much all across the country.

We had a Gestetner which we did the prison newsletter on. You just put a ream of paper in the Gestetner and it prints it out. We sent out 300-400 of them.

I have no idea if they still exist. Marla was kind of our in-house secretary. I know she had a log of all the mail that came in, each individual letter and to whom it went to be responded to.

We had an addressing machine. There were little metal plates. You typed out the address on the plates, and you put that in a machine and then you ran the envelopes, for 8 x 10 envelopes through the machine and it would print the addresses, in zip code order. Because we would then take them to the Post Office and did bulk mailings with them.

Mostly the paper went to the chapters. I distinctly remember our late-night trips down to the Greyhound

station with boxes, and boxes, and boxes to send out to chapters.

We would ship them via Greyhound and they would just pick them up at the different location. At one point, we had UPS come and collect them from our garage in the back of 827 Newport. I don't remember why we stopped doing that. But we went from there to the Greyhound. Maybe it was quicker on Greyhound.

I'm not sure where the boxes came from. I remember working out in the garage for hours at a time putting a hundred in this one and two hundred in that one and so forth. Anything less than, I think it was 50, we would send through the mail.

There was a Greyhound bulk shipping corner in their downtown office, at that time. We would take the boxes in. They would weigh them and I assume Sam would give them a check for whatever it came out to.

Greyhound was considered a perfectly reliable way to get things in bulk around the country.

They would just leave them at the individual stations and the chapter representative, or whoever, would go pick them up and them distribute them. I can't remember ever picking them up in Cincinnati, but I must have.

It was printed in Palos Heights. Palos Printers. It had already been going there for some time before I came to Chicago. It was a long trip down there. We all loved the opportunity to go down and turn the paper. Because, then, Sam Schorr would let us have dinner out. And actually, paid for dinner. Of course, we never got to do that normally, because we didn't have enough money to go out and pay for dinner. But that was our one treat. Take the paper to Palos Heights and you could have dinner out.

Brian Adams's girlfriend, Carol, was a waitress in a local restaurant, and used to come home back to the office, at night after working, and count out her tips, which weren't very much. She was our artist and did all the posters. I still have framed versions of some of them.

Not signing articles was more of a collective thing. We weren't in hiding. We were not an underground collective someplace. We were quite public. I think it was just; "It is a collective effort. Here are the articles. And they are not by individuals." Even though they were by individuals.

Around the late 1980s, we started signing some articles.

In 1974-75, I remember doing a series of articles about the Bonus March, even actually doing research. Someone had given us a copy of the Communist Party version of the Bonus March. It gave us a lot more information than we could get out of normal history books. I don't recall that I ever signed any of those. I think there were a number of them. I like to think there were four of them.

I don't remember anything about the name change from *Winter Soldier* to the *Veteran*. There must have been major discussions. There was, of course, a remarkable amount of discussion about getting rid of WSO (Winter Soldier Organization). Were we really just a veteran's organization or did we really want to take on the rest of the world? Obviously, the veterans organization won that discussion. That's probably the same time we never even thought about keeping the *Winter Soldier* and automatically changed it to the *Veteran*.

While the war was still going on, we would put out a fund-raising letter, actually with the help of a fund-raising company in New York. After that went out, within the next couple of weeks, the mailman would bring us bags of mail. All of which was money! You know, mostly five and ten dollars. Sometimes there were the people who

would give us a lot.

We wrote a letter and then the company sent it out. I think they had all the various Peace Groups names. They would mail out, like a hundred thousand. I remember they were very happy with us because we had a five percent return. That was remarkable for one of their mailings. Remarkably high.

Someplace, in one of our files, there is a letter that was written by people in Poughkeepsie New York, who gave us \$10,000, which was a lot of money back then. They had written to ten of their friends, saying "We've given this money to this worthy organization. We think you should do the same." It kept us going for a while.

In the time that I was there, at Newport, I can remember three of them. I think. But, after the war was over, raising money became much more of a problem.

The last issue of *Winter Soldier* was June-July 1975. And then there is no issue of the paper until October of 1975. At that point, it is *The Veteran*. I think we moved in between there to 7719 South Fielding in Chicago.

It was an old house, which at one point had enclosed five or six apartments. But it was vacant. It had, something like, twelve rooms. The lot next door was just a vacant lot, used by the locals to chop up the cars they stole. It was not what you would call a beautiful, suburban housing. We were there for years. And, it was cheap.

The money was certainly less. I don't remember ever discussing the newspaper color going away. I can vaguely recall some discussions at various times with the *Winter Soldier* about what color should we be this month. But I don't think that was ever a serious discussion.

Brian moved out. He didn't make the move with us to the South Side of Chicago. I think Bill Davis may have replaced him.

We all did the same sort of thing. Ed Damato was famous for having an article that was supposed to be done today and he would be in the kitchen polishing the toaster. This is something that my family still uses, when you're putting off doing what you don't want to do. You're polishing the toaster. He always got it done. But he would put it off as long as possible.

VVAW putting out a newspaper was a way to communicate with our chapters. It was also a way to get forth a point of view. As you might guess, on the South Side of Chicago, our neighbors were all African American. At one point, we talked a bunch of kids into going around and selling the paper

in the neighborhood. There is a picture of them, on the front page of an issue of *The Veteran*, someplace along the way there, sitting on our front porch. I think there were six or eight of them. They went out into the neighborhood and sold the paper. I think it was a quarter, in those days. We gave them five cents each for selling it. Five cents per paper. Nobody got rich.

We would go places, like the local college, which at that point was Kennedy King. It probably has a new name now. At least a couple of us went there as students on the GI Bill. We would sell the paper there, or hand it out. I would do the same thing at the Post Office. I'm sure Barry Romo did too.

We had big, big discussions, I remember, about "should we change from Vietnam Veterans Against THE War or just Vietnam Veterans Against War." The "the War" obviously won out. You have to keep in mind that there were four, six, eight people, living together, doing everything together. A lot of it, was just talking. So, we could afford these lengthy discussions about something of relatively minor importance, that we would then discuss for hours. And then, we would take it to a National Meeting where it could be discussed for some more hours.

Marla and I were the two typists in the crew. I think Ed Damato was a typist too, although I'm not sure he was quite as good as the others. Mostly it was a case of "could you type fast enough." We all took notes at these National Meetings. Of course, we then had to discuss what was said. We had to make sure that everybody agreed that this is what the point of that particular discussion was, if it had any point.

Then the collective living started to end. Barry moved on, Ed was back to New York, Bill Davis moved. I think I was the last one, the last person standing at the Fielding address. I think it would have been, maybe, 1980, I moved to an apartment on Farragut, on the North Side of Chicago, in the area where I delivered mail. And besides that, my girlfriend at the time, was on the second floor, and I was on the third floor. We moved most of the stuff, the files and so forth from Fielding to the third floor on Farragut. We had an extra body, whose name was Lee Channing. He lived on the third floor, in my apartment, while I lived with my now wife, on the second floor. And Lee kind of took care of what there was in terms of the office. Chapter reports,

continued on page 12



Pete Zastrow at VVAW's Winter Soldier Investigation on Agent Orange, Chicago, 1979.

Snapshot: Saigon 1994

MARC LEVY

Early one morning at the Singh Café, while enjoying a breakfast of sweet coffee, lightly fluffed scrambled eggs and buttered toast, as we watched the endless jostle of pushcart vendors, crippled veterans, hard pedaling cyclo drivers, fleet footed youths, a young backpacker revealed to me the secret of finding a cheap room in Saigon.

"Thank you much," I said, and taking my leave, I paid his bill, and walked in the direction in which he pointed.

The backpacker was right. Walking sideways down the dim narrow alley formed by two dilapidated buildings nearly wedged together, at times barely inching along the dank crevice, step by step, I managed to twist and worm myself forward. Except for the passage being vertical, the sensation was not unlike crawling in darkness, at a minuscule pace, belly flat to the earth, first the right elbow, then the left knee, and so forth, armed

only with a pistol and flashlight. I knew a man who had done just that. Crawling into pitch black tunnels, salty with sweat, hyperalert to the slightest sound, to the sickly sweet smell of unwashed flesh, in fierce encounters, he had trembled and stabbed and witnessed the dimming of light in the eyes of men who could not breathe.

I was just an ordinary soldier, on patrols freighted with weapons, ammo, rations, water, and yes, bandages, medicines, and morphine, to ease their pain. And when, slinking through too quiet jungle, in the erupting gunfire, bursting grenades, they called out MEDIC! I would run, pell-mell, or crab-like crawl forward to those who called my name. And I would heal them, or lie to them, turning their dreadful wounds to bruises of no consequence. I would do that. Now, inching along the fetid alley, to quell my hammering heart, I reminded

myself, that was quite some time ago.

Breathing hard, finally, I came to a lighted apartment and peeked in the half open door. An older woman, mama-san's we called them, perhaps fifty, or sixty, I never could tell their age, beckoned me in. Raising her hands palm upwards, spreading her arms, she seemed to be saying, "How can I help you? What do you want?" Through pantomime—my praying hands pressed to my cheek, we settled on three dollars per night.

"Up this stairway," she pointed with her skeletal fingers. Each step was surprisingly clean, as if it had just been swept and washed. We passed through a dark corridor, then into a spartan room, a cinder block cubicle with just enough space for the steel frame cot and warped wood chair. Assessing my approval, she beckoned me to a second passage, which led to the wide flat cement roof, where a large rusty steel barrel, filled with rainwater,

ingeniously fitted to a plastic shower head, was artfully attached to a cinder block stall. I smiled. I would have it no other way, and turned from her in order to raise my shirt, to unzip the money belt tucked at my waist, and filch the money with which to pay her.

In the moments before handing her bills printed in the colors of her country, as I looked out onto the waking city, taking in its shifting sights, its drifting aromatic scents, I thought I heard the ancestral spirits who live and breathe in war torn, lotus rising, undefeatable Saigon.

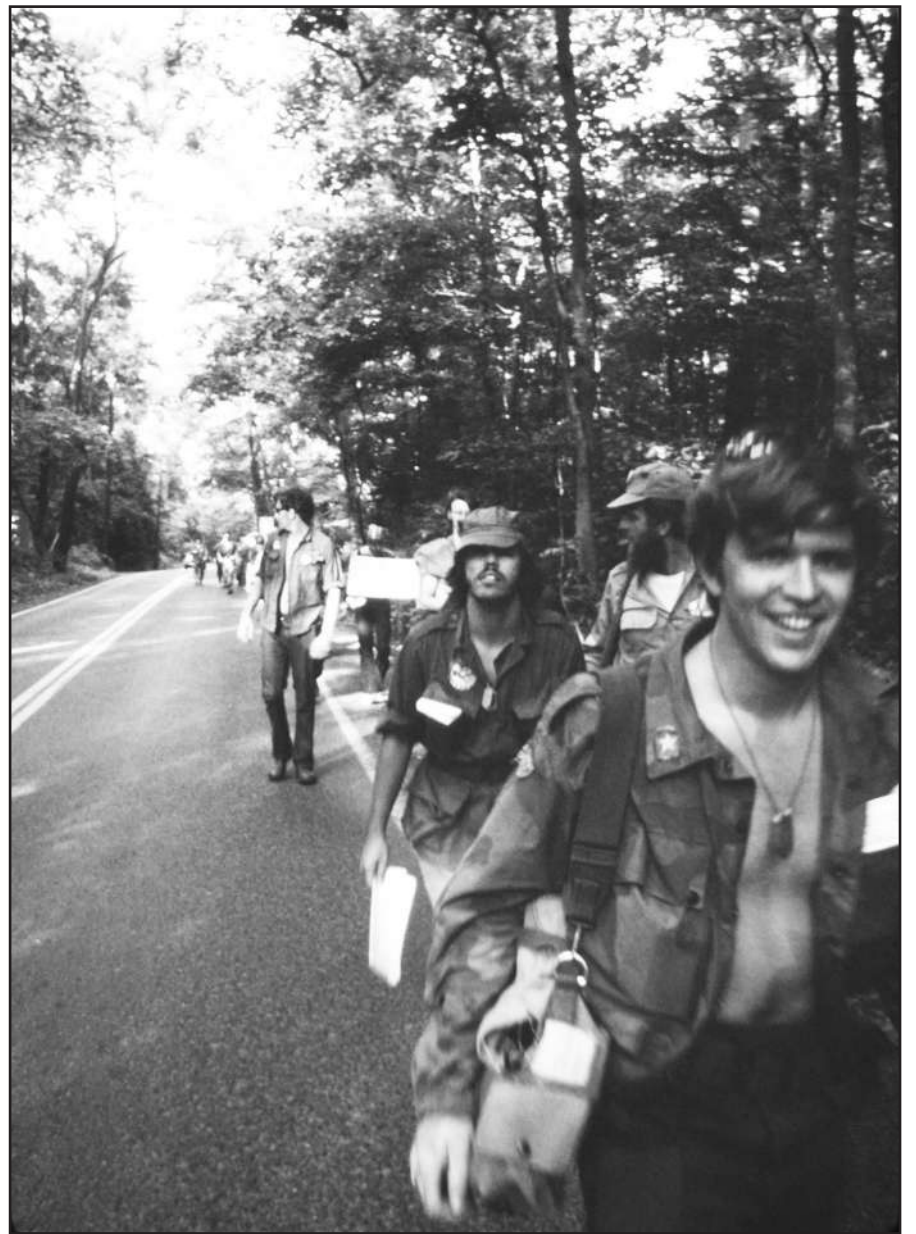


MARC LEVY SERVED AS A MEDIC WITH DELTA 1-7 FIRST CAVALRY IN VIETNAM/CAMBODIA 1970. HIS WEBSITE IS MEDIC IN THE GREEN TIME.COM. FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE PATTERSON LITERARY REVIEW, SPRING, 2020.

The Medic At Dawn

Monsoon—and we live like dogs,
Hunters and hunted down.
At dawn, see how like sitting monks
Soaked ponchos, tight-pulled robes
Trap heat from squares of pale blue flame.
See how steam clouds rise
From the backs of shivering men.
Look at them—
All night lying wet
Crawling with Tinea cruris,
Alive with it.
Hear their whispered cries
Calling, calling.
Soon trembling choppers
Will soar us back to a barbed wire nest
Of sandbag bunkers, thundering canons
Free to gamble, clean our weapons
Drink warm beer, warm soda
But here, under a sky of sheltering trees
One by one, I tilt my green canteen
Press white soap to pristine flesh
Unfurl my hand to skirl and kill
Until each man arises fresh
Until one precious week from now—
Patrol, jungle, ambush, monsoon—
Bless me father, for I will sin
We arrive to kill, and kill again.

—Marc Levy



VVAW's Operation RAW, September, 1970.

Life in the VVAW National Office

continued from page 11

chapter information, was about all that was left, in terms of activities. We would do our normal Veterans Day and Memorial Day things, occasional forays to the VA. But there wasn't a whole lot left at that point.

It was the end of the National Office Collective. All that was really left was kind of a mailing address.

I can't recall what we were doing about the paper in those days. By 1983, I know I had become a father and was working, not only at the Post Office, but another job on top of that. I was not doing much about VVAW. I was aware of what was going on. It's not like it was unfriendly. It's just, there are just so many hours in a day.

If someone had said we need an article on something or the other, I would no doubt have done it. Writing articles was never that difficult for me. But I don't remember.

When I look back, any of us who had families and who were trying to keep families together, and work, and make enough money to survive, that was a full-time job. While we would do what we could, in terms of VVAW work; I remember putting on a fairly major role at the 20th Anniversary affair, in a church on the North Side. A lot of it, we couldn't do. You could either take care of your family, or you could take care of VVAW. People who really kept things going, like Bill

Branson and his wife, didn't have family, could spend a lot more energy on this. What can I say? Times change.

I used to do a lot of the picture taking, the photographs. We had a darkroom in a little room in the basement of the house on Fielding. I would develop all our film. One of the boys in the neighborhood got all intrigued by it. He used to come over and help wrap the film around the,

whatever it was called, so it could get developed evenly. He was much better at it than I was. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that is the kind of talent which became sort of outmoded fairly quickly. So, I would do the pictures, take them down to our lab and develop them. People would make contact sheets. People would decide "oh, this is a good one. Let's use it" and so forth.

It is still important for VVAW

to have a paper today. The paper is something entirely different now. I think it serves a need. I read it religiously. I even pass it along.



PETE ZASTROW IS A LONG TIME VVAW MEMBER AND FORMER VVAW NATIONAL COORDINATOR.



Operation Dewey Canyon IV, Washington, DC, May 1982. Pete Zastrow and Bill Davis on the left.

The Veteran Art Movement Joins Iraqi Artists in Calling on MoMA to Divest from Toxic Philanthropy

KEVIN BASL

In February, 45 veterans from the emerging Veteran Art Movement (eVAM) sent an open letter to Museum of Modern Art PS1 (MoMA PS1) calling on its board of trustees chairman, Leon Black, and board member Larry Fink, to divest from "toxic philanthropy." Black holds ties to defense contractor Constellis Holdings, formerly Blackwater, the US mercenary group responsible for the massacre of 17 Iraqi civilians in Nisour Square in 2007. Fink's corporation, BlackRock, is heavily invested in the two largest US private prison companies, GEO Group and Core Civic.

The veterans' open letter was written as a gesture of solidarity with 37 artists featured in an exhibition at MoMA PS1, *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991 to 2011*, who sent their own open letter to MoMA, in January. The 37 artists, many of whom are Iraqi, offered an important critique in the letter:

[...]this war has been invisible and far from the attention and concerns of most Americans. We appreciate the visibility this exhibition gives to the Iraq wars and to the work of Iraqi artists; however, we also wish to make visible MoMA's connection to funds generated from companies and corporations that directly profit from these wars.

Additionally, several of the featured Iraqi artists could not view the exhibition in person because President Trump's travel ban barred them entry into the US.

The protests surrounding *Theater of Operations* are part of the #MoMADivest movement, started by Art Space Sanctuary and New Sanctuary Coalition, which is calling on the museum to divest from companies that profit from war, weapons, prisons, climate change, debt ownership and oppression. Actions began in October 2019, when #MoMADivest brought attention to MoMA's and Fink's ties to toxic assets in an open letter signed by over 200 artists and activists. A week later, protestors interrupted MoMA's reopening party, calling on Fink to divest. Then, on October 30th, just days before the opening of *Theater of Operations*, artist Phil Collins withdrew his piece "baghdad screen tests" from the exhibition in solidarity with #MoMADivest. Later, artist Michael Rakowitz pressed pause on his video exhibit RETURN and posted a protest statement on the

wall (the museum, which had denied Rakowitz's previous requests to pause his work, promptly re-started his video and removed his statement). Rakowitz's statement extended the campaign to include the call for Leon Black to divest from Constellis, a key demand of the 37 artists' and 45 veterans' open letters, which soon followed.

On the final day of the exhibition, several eVAM artists supported Iraqi artist Ali Yass at an "alternative closing," an action co-organized with #MoMADivest. MoMA, anticipating the protest, pulled Yass' artwork from the exhibition earlier that day. Yass, who could not attend in person, addressed demonstrators via video call. "I will not talk about war," he said, "because it is from the past. I will talk about resistance because it is 'now'." Following his address, protestors he had pre-chosen ripped up a facsimile of his artwork to, in his own words, "reclaim the narrative surrounding his work and the context that allowed it to come into being." During the action, eVAM artists passed out fliers printed on Combat Paper made by Nathan Lewis, which featured a cartoon by Eric J. Garcia.

While *Theater of Operations* has closed, the #MoMADivest movement is ongoing.

The Veteran Art Movement's letter is included in full below.

February 3, 2020

Dear Directors and Trustees of MoMA PS1 and MoMA,

We, veterans of the US military, write this letter in support of the 37 artists featured in *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991 - 2011*, calling for chairman of MoMA's board of trustees, Leon Black, to divest from defense contractor Constellis Holdings, formerly Blackwater. These artists have put their careers and reputations on the line in calling for Black to divest, while simultaneously demanding a realignment of values at MoMA (and, by extension, all cultural institutions). Following their example, we, the undersigned, call on all veterans—especially those who deployed to Iraq between 1991 and 2011—to support their campaign. MoMA claims a longtime commitment to veterans and service members. Accordingly, we are confident the board members will seriously consider our collective call for divestment.

As veterans of the Gulf War and



the "Global War on Terror," as well as working artists ourselves, this issue is very important to us. We acknowledge our own role in creating the conditions for ongoing death and turmoil in Iraq, and we continue to grapple with this reality through our art, activism, and lives. We take responsibility for our past actions and as such choose to stand in solidarity with Iraqi artists and all activists calling on MoMA PS1 to "take a truly radical position by divesting from any trustees and sources of funding that profit from the suffering of others." Instead of accepting our current state of endless war and militarism, we follow in the footsteps of other military veterans who have resisted and denounced war through their art, such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Leon Golub, Black Panther Malik Edwards, and the artists of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Defense contractors, like Constellis, have profited greatly from the coercive exploitation of Iraqis, while operating under the aegis of the US military, using service members as disposable labor and marketing props. The undersigned have witnessed firsthand the destruction and wastefulness of US wars of aggression, the failed "Global War on Terror," and the parasitic, profit-driven motivations of defense contractors (especially the notoriously violent Blackwater), which have nothing to do with freedom and democracy.

We also support the MoMA/BlackRock Divest campaign. MoMA board member Larry Fink is CEO of BlackRock, which invests in private prison companies. Such companies represent a domestic war against people of color and the poor. War

and prison profiteering are intimately connected. The rampant privatization of the military and the prison system epitomize US militarism, prioritizing the profits of the few who make billions from war, tactical equipment, and mass incarceration, over the health, education, and well-being of the many.

If MoMA truly celebrates "creativity, openness, tolerance and generosity," as stated in its mission, MoMA will recognize the hypocrisy in displaying the work of dispossessed peoples—Iraqis in this case—while continuing to profit, if indirectly, from the bloodshed and misery of those very people. Such "toxic philanthropy," as Michael Rakowitz has called it, must end if we are to make the deep changes necessary to address issues like endless war, climate change, poverty, and racism. The successful 2019 campaign calling for the resignation of the Whitney Museum's former vice chairman Warren Kanders, CEO of Safariland, a company that manufactures tear gas and other weapons (and uses veterans and service members as marketing props), demonstrates that major cultural institutions will respond justly if enough people speak up. Accordingly, we are confident that MoMA will divest, and realign its values by extricating itself from all toxic philanthropy.

Visit the blog at veteran-art-movement.net for a list of signatories.



KEVIN BASL IS A WRITER AND MUSICIAN LIVING NEAR ITHACA, NY. HE IS A MEMBER OF ABOUT FACE (IVAW) AND VETERANS FOR PEACE.



The Wall

Two psychotics, donald & rudy
are like children on christmas morning,
opening their presents, one by one
until they get to the last one.

They go back to the first one,
building a black wall with immigrants names
carved on it, from fleeing southern killer countries.

On the next present, bone-spur donald
pulls the troops out of syria and creates
another black wall with kurds names on it.

Then the next present, mentally ill donald
sends dizzy rudy to the ukraine to withhold
weapons and create another black wall
with ukrainian soldiers, carved on it.

Then bald headed donald puts tariffs on china
who won't buy usa farmer's soy beans
and wheat and there is another black wall,
with starved to death chinese names
carved on it.

Then insanely, rudy travels around
the world, trying to shore up countries
to back the usa, then there is another black wall,
with countries names, who hate america,
carved on it.

Then the insane asylum
that is known as the white house,
comes another present with shaky republicans
in congress, to come to trump tower
where donald steps on their throats
with pressure and in fear, they say yes man
or there will be another black wall.

—Dennis Serdel

Federal Veterans' Benefits Located At The Washington DC Mall – Winter 1971

I got the paltry college money, \$129 total for the G.I. Bill at the University of Maryland
I got the free 4 hour waits at the Irving Street VA hospital for a look-see
Along the Mall, The homeless Vets got the 'bennie'
to sleep on the snow-free heating grates by the Federal buildings

Our government saved many Nam vets' lives with this benefit
These Vets were the shadows embracing the metal grids...best spots hidden by shrubs
These vets could be white, black, Latino
BUT for a moment equal

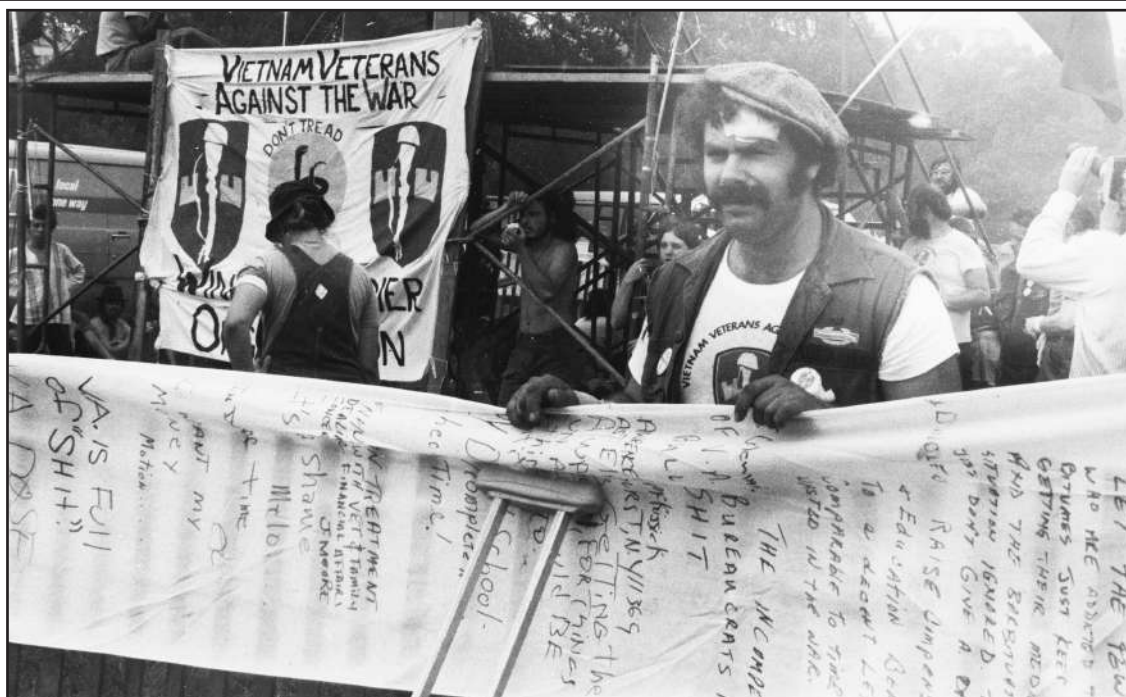
They had ragged jungle fatigues for pajamas
Their winter quilts were soiled field jackets...poncho liners
AND...those heating grates worked all winter

Our government wouldn't fund vets dying from Agent Orange or 'Vietnam Syndrome'
Our government wouldn't provide housing, jobs, not even the VA hired us
The VFW and American Legion banned us...we were losers...Not in a real war

But nobody stopped these Vets from the Federal heating grates they called their evening
home

I was living
They were dying...and they would not be buried at Arlington

—Jim Murphy, Maryland
(Vietnam 1966 and 1968)
DC VVAW Forever



Danny Friedman at Operation Dewey Canyon IV, Washington, DC, May 1982.

Almost Dust

JIM WOHLGEMUTH

We are almost there. Time has all but passed by us. Our days are numbered. History has almost swallowed us up. Soon we will be relegated to the images on worn out film or distorted audio. Soon we will be no more than a distant note in a history book on a page no one ever gets to. I now appreciate those young men who fought in WWI who were also fading into history while we were being sent off to war in Vietnam.

Time passes. We are forgotten, even you, even you with your name on the wall to be read and to stand the test of time, but for what? No one will come to get an image of your name unless they are doing research for a graduate thesis that no one will read. The gifts and letters left will diminish and end as children and grandchildren grow older themselves.

We are all heading for that large brush heap of history to join the millions and millions of young men

and women who participated in and were the victims of wars launched by few who ever saw the battlefield. We will join our predecessors from WWII, WWI, the Spanish American War and on and on as honorable victims.

After each of those wars at least some of us have thought, well that will do it. We won't do that again; young men and women will never be as foolish as we were to go off to war. We will make sure our daughters and sons don't have to go. We will make sure that our politicians get in the way of the war profiteers. But then history gets lost and of course, we do it again. We send more off to war.

I hate to be so gloomy, but to those guys on the wall, your short lives were in vain and while mine has been the joy of family and friends, I have talked peace to neighbors who would not listen. I have carried signs with creative words that no one saw.

I have given speeches to the choir. In other words, I have had a life that was both fortunate and frustrated.

As our voices and memories quickly fade into the dark granite of the wall that so many occupy, why has no one listened? I am sure the powers, the oligarchs, the war profiteers are reserving ground for a memorial on the mall for Afghanistan, Iraq, currently and then Iran, Korea, Venezuela, and who knows what else in the future. That is if we survive. To use the words of Dr. King that many of you heard from 1967, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom." To those on the wall your spirit is etched in the honor of a perceived sacrifice. To the ones who survived Vietnam, we let you down. We let the nation continue on that path toward spiritual doom and I am truly not sure

we have not reached it.

With that, all I can say is I am sorry. We, those of us you left behind, will soon be joining you in the oblivion of history while the world of humans that remain will just keep going ignoring history. They will come and wonder at the wall and look at all those names not realizing the faces, the dreams, the lives you lost nor the generations never born. And so the madness goes on.



JIM WOHLGEMUTH WAS ON THE USS WESTCHESTER COUNTY LST 1167 1969 TO 1971 AND THEN USS POINT DEFIANCE LSD 31 1971 TO 1972. HE IS A RETIRED FEDERAL EMPLOYEE, RETIRED SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHER, AND NOW GRANDPA TO TWO GREAT LITTLE ONES. MAY THEY NEVER BE CALLED TO SERVE.

Parva Mundi

MARC LEVY

My article *A Discomforting Letter From a Comfortable Town*, published in Issue 49, Number 2 of *The Veteran*, describes my reading *The Gypsies* by Jan Yoors while on patrols in Vietnam, and fifty years later, before joining a march with VFP in Rockport, Massachusetts, meeting his next of kin.

In the spring 2020 issue of *Three Penny Review*, a lit journal in newspaper format published four

times a year, Irene Oppenheimer has a short piece in which she recalls her family's tiny three room apartment in New York's Little Italy, the parks near Greenwich Village, and how, as a student, an older woman asked her to model for her artist husband. Irene relates the modeling experience, and how Jan Yoors got a little too close for comfort. In March 2020 I emailed Irene and sent her my article about

Jan Yoors. From Los Angeles, she wrote back. In passing, Irene noted her former husband was a member of Veterans for Peace, and she named him. Of all things, I had met this man twenty years ago when visiting VFP friend Dayl Wise (Echo 2/5 First Cavalry '69) and his wife, the poet Allison Koffler, in Woodstock, NY. First Jan Yoors in 1970. Then his wife Marianne, and their son, Vanya,

in 2019. Then Irene and the late Jay Wenk in 2020. Parva Mundi.



MARC LEVY SERVED AS A MEDIC WITH DELTA 1-7 FIRST CAVALRY IN VIETNAM/CAMBODIA 1970. HIS WEBSITE IS MEDIC IN THE GREEN TIME.COM.

The Flight Home

TERI SAYA

Living with a wounded soldier is not an easy thing, and sometimes the wounds are not visible. My husband is a Vietnam Veteran. I've known him for 24 years and it surprised me that he had never told me about this experience. He still suffers from PTSD, even after all these years.

We had been living in Mexico for six years, and my husband had finally decided to sell the house and move us back to the states where our families live.

I had traveled with him on many occasions. Moving from California to Guadalajara, Mexico in an SUV packed full of our possessions was an experience in itself, but the few times we had flown from Guadalajara to California and back, he would become agitated in the airport which resulted in exasperating verbal abuse. I could not calm him down, even with a cocktail or two from the airport bar while waiting for our flight. A miserable experience.

This time, I bought my own ticket, knowing it would take a ridiculous amount of time to sell the house through the Mexican red tape. I figured that if I flew to the place in the states we had agreed to ahead of time, and began getting things prepared for us to settle there, it would make the process much easier for my husband to complete the sale without me, the dog, and all the luggage I would be taking. Afterward, all he had to do was meet up with me in the states. I was actually looking forward to a solo flight.

I thought he would be happy to know I was trying to help in our move. Instead, my husband became very quiet and depressed. I know better than to engage him while he was in this type of mood, so I kept to myself and continued to prepare the house for sale and for my flight which was still a long way off. After about four days of not speaking and the cloud getting darker and darker over my husband's head, I decided to kick start a conversation.

"Honey, aren't you excited to be getting back to the states?" I prodded.

He snapped back, "Why can't we fly together?! You are abandoning me!!!"

Abandon? WTF? Stunned, and a little confused, I tried to explain what I had said before, "I'm trying to make it easier for you...."

"You bought a ticket without even asking me about it!"

In my mind I was thinking, "first of all, I don't need your permission for anything, and second, I had been begging for three years to move back to the states with you." But instead, I said, "I am not abandoning you. I am trying to make things easier for you. Why do we need to fly together anyway? And to be honest, every time we've flown together, you become agitated and I end up getting the brunt of your anger. I don't want to go through that again."

His fists clenched, and I steadied myself for a verbal barrage. Instead, he took a breath and began to speak quietly. "When I was flying back

from Vietnam, I was on a plane full of veterans who were also going home after serving their military terms. Everyone was laughing and joking and talking about their families they hadn't seen in so long. We all knew we were the lucky ones, the ones who had survived."

I watched him as his whole demeanor changed. He stared at the ottoman between our chairs and his eyes began to water. I leaned forward, and the hairs on the back of my neck began to prickle with anticipation. I knew he didn't like talking about his time in Vietnam, so I quietly waited for him to continue.

"We were scheduled to land at the Cam Ranh airport to board a plane leaving for the US. As we approached the airport, our plane suddenly leveled off and began to circle. The pilot buzzed the intercom and told us that the airport was under attack, and we were going to stay in the air as long as possible. We would have another 30 minutes until we ran out of fuel and had to land. The silence was sudden and intense. No one spoke during that whole 30 minutes. We thought we were going to die in battle after all."

My husband stopped speaking, remembering. After a long pause, he cleared his throat and continued. "When the plane finally touched the runway and taxied to a halt, the pilot entered the cabin and told us the attack had been thwarted and we were now safe to depart. No one moved at first, then slowly and quietly, we gathered

our carry-on bags and walked off the plane and into the airport. I was in a strange, surreal frame of mind as I stood in line to have my ticket checked for the next leg of the flight. Keeping an eye out for snipers, I put my bag down for just a minute, and when I went to pick it up again, it was gone... stolen right out from under my nose at an airport that had just been under siege moments before. The thief could have easily killed me!"

He looked up at me. "Airports make me nervous. I'm sorry for being so agitated when we fly."

I wanted to go to him, hold him, whisper in his ear that everything would be ok. But he quickly stood up, knowing that I might be thinking just that, and walked into the bedroom without another word.

I knew it was painful for him to bring up the past, but it was his way of saying, he needed me. I calculated the approximate time the sale of the house would finalize, went online and bought his ticket, then changed the date of my flight to match his. We would be flying together. And I had gained a deeper understanding of my sweet, broken, war-torn soldier.



TERI SAYA IS THE WIFE OF A VIETNAM VETERAN. BOTH ARE CALIFORNIA NATIVES WHO RECENTLY DECIDED TO MOVE BACK TO THE STATES FROM MEXICO TO BE CLOSER TO FAMILY AND THE VA.

Portrait of the Artist as Political Prisoner

BILLY X. CURMANO

I constructed the "Tiger Cage on Wheels" as a performance sculpture that could draw attention to political prisoners in Vietnam. VVAW—and a select few other groups—dragged it through anti-war demonstrations in the '70s, but it has always had a second life in exhibitions and performances traveling across the country.

The cage is welded steel, large and heavy. I rode in it. I pulled others in it and documented most everything. I had to carry it by truck or send it to motor freight. It became too expensive for me to show. And yet, it still seemed important. I reworked the general concept with a lighter, wearable lock-up that allows me the luxury of mobility.

When I put this new sculpture on, each frozen moment becomes a "Portrait of the Artist as Political Prisoner." It's a pop-up reminder of our precious freedoms contrasted with the plight of the world's detainees, refugees, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience—the unseen—the unheard. Those who have spoken out for justice live alternative lifestyles or simply become victims

of happenstance and are imprisoned. Add to that the children, elderly and infirm locked away in containment facilities. They have no voice, and so I DO NOT SPEAK.

My audiences may feel ambushed, surprised and startled. But still, I DO NOT SPEAK. An interpreter accompanies me to calm hostility and illuminate issues of incarceration.

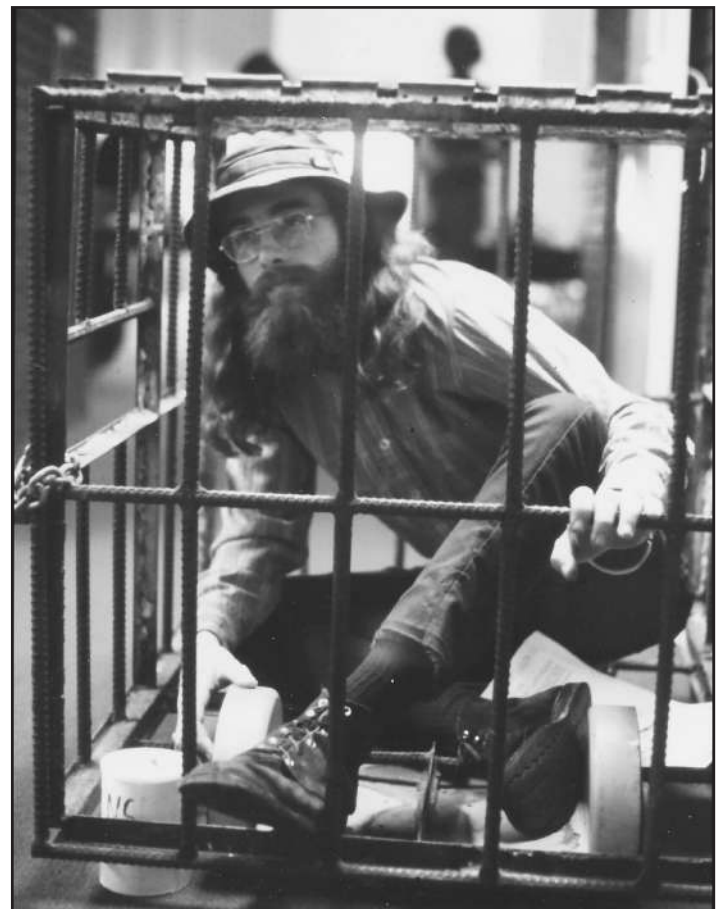
"Portrait of the Artist as Political Prisoner" makes random appearances in random locations. So far, there have been appearances around Minnesota, New York City, and Chicago.



BILLY X CURMANO IS A LONG TIME VVAW MEMBER AND CREATOR OF OXY THE WISE BOMB. HE IS KNOWN FOR EXTENDED PERFORMANCES LIKE A 3-DAY LIVE BURIAL, 2,367.4-MILE MISSISSIPPI SWIM AND 40-DAY DESERT FAST ALL WITH SERIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE UNDERPINNINGS TEMPERED BY IRONY AND SATIRE. AN AMUSED JOURNALIST DUBBED HIM, "THE COURT JESTER OF SOUTHEASTERN MINNESOTA". HE CONTINUES TO MAKE IT SO.



VVAW members John Lindquist and Buzz Noyes pull Billy X. in a Milwaukee Anti-War Demonstration in the 1970's. (Photo by Steve Shapson.)



John Lindquist collecting contributions for Indo China Day from inside the "Tiger Cage on Wheels" in the 1970's (Photo by Paul Ruez).



Portrait of the Artist as Political Prisoner, Chicago Hilton Hotel Elevator, Billy X. Curmano, February 2020. (Photo by Margarita Baumann.)

The Little Girl at My Door

JACK MALLORY

She doesn't knock. She comes through the door uninvited. I've read hundreds of books about Vietnam history, analysis, memoir. They don't explain the little girl.

I was going from Landing Zone Andy into the Vietnamese army base in An Loc. Right outside the wire. I noticed several children. Something wasn't right, and I told my jeep driver to head over there. Half a dozen kids were gathered around a young girl, maybe 10 years old, lying under a tree. She wasn't visibly injured, but pale, motionless, and dead.

Through my interpreter, her friends told me she'd been up in the tree gathering dead branches for firewood. She had triggered a booby trap set up by the local Viet Cong. A grenade, without pin, had been placed in a tin can with a wire strung across the road. They had hoped that the antenna on an American vehicle would hit the wire, yank the grenade from the can, detonate it over the vehicle. A few minutes earlier, the little girl had detonated the grenade herself. She was apparently untouched, except for a small hole not much bigger than my thumb nail, right in the center of her chest. She had bled out internally. Not my fault. Not, directly, our fault.

During my year in Vietnam and the years after, as the futility of the war became increasingly apparent, she was a reminder, a refutation of any attempt to justify the war with geopolitical bullshit or the trivia of whose fault it was. She was a dead little girl, in the wrong place at the wrong time, killed in a war that didn't have to happen. And because I played a tiny part in the making of that war, she came to my door. I had friends who died in the war, I may have killed North Vietnamese soldiers in the war, but she's the one at the door.

I don't understand little girls. Both of my kids are boys. It took a long time for them to learn to knock before coming into the room. She'll never learn, she's dead. She's been dead for as long as I've known her, but she still comes in without being asked, like the rest of the war. The little girl is the reason I go outdoors.

She follows me there, too, sometimes. But there's a lot more out there, a lot more to take my mind off her, and the rest of the war. There are things to listen to, things to see, a lot to focus on. She fades into the background, sometimes almost disappears completely.

The camera helps, now, too. I didn't take many pictures in Vietnam, and very few of those survived the war and the decades and divorces since. Some memories have survived. I remember green and brown, jungle and dust—mud during the rainy season. I don't remember beauty. The few photographs and my memories are of destruction. I was with the 11th Armored Cavalry: assault vehicles and tanks. Everywhere we went, we destroyed: farmer's fields, rubber plantations, jungle.

Green and brown. The colors of bodies as they decay into the earth. My memories are green and brown. Very little stands out: no bright colors. In the jungle or in the rubber, it was dark, almost gloomy.



And no animals, nothing alive except a few villagers and the enemy. We were an armored unit, our lightest fighting vehicle weighed 12 tons, our heaviest over 50. Where we went, the ground shook. Everyone, everything,

knew we were coming. The Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese had plenty of time to get out of the way, or get ready. Jungle critters just disappeared.

Today, I know jungle and forest as home to countless creatures. Working in Central America, I've seen toucans and macaws, howlers and spider monkeys, snakes and iguanas. In the woods and on the waters of New England I see deer and moose, snakes and snappers, loons and herons.

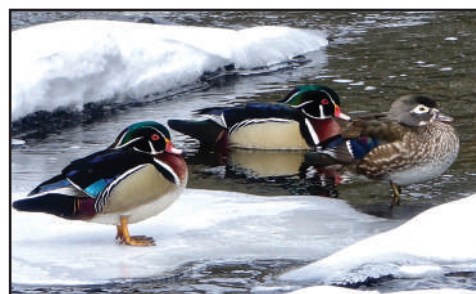
When I'm outdoors, bright colors are everywhere. There are the variety of greens in the needles and leaves of the mixed forest in the summer, and in autumn much of that green becomes yellow and orange and red. In the winter, the shine of the ice and snow can be blinding. In the summer the flowers stand out brightly along the banks of river and lake. Year round there are the blacks and grays and silvers of basalt and granite. Any of that can be reflected in the waters of the lakes and rivers, with all the colors of the sky.



The animals of the woods and waters are further distractions from the little girl. On the trails and on the waves, I have seen animals as small as spiders and as big as moose. I have spotted a young mink, curiously spotting me; I have been saddened by a raccoon coming down a tree with a face full of quills from an encounter with a porcupine. My camera has caught a young eagle against fall foliage, osprey launching themselves from the tops of snags, harlequin ducks against the brilliance of ice.

The camera focuses my attention on a narrow part of the outdoors, so narrow there's hardly room for the little girl. Part of that concentration is technical—camera settings for the light and movement. Part of it is aesthetic—composition, framing, waiting for a cloud to pass or for the sun to sink behind a hill. And sometimes I just wait, watching for the osprey to return to its nest, or for a loon to reappear after diving for a fish. There's no attention left for her.

Much of my hiking and paddling is done alone, but I often share my outside time with someone who understands my need for the woods and water. For her own reasons, she also finds peace and joy in the natural world. She doesn't see the little girl, but she understands why I do.



Part of being outdoors is physical: biking, walking or running, rowing or paddling. I used to think it was just the exercise I was after. It was the 70s, the running decade. I thought I was doing it for physical health, to keep slim and fit. I was one of millions of people in their new running shoes, pounding the roads and trails, going to the gym. I thought it was for my body—I had no idea that exercise, and outdoors, were an attempt to leave Vietnam and the little girl behind.

When I came back from Vietnam, I began to work with Vietnam Veterans Against the War; living in the city, organizing opposition to the war. Urban life, consumed by demonstrations, negotiations, politics. "The war" was a monolithic



evil: personal details were lost in its immensity. And the Rolling Rock, Boones Farm, and pot helped keep the little girl and the other little details out of the picture.

After two furious years I burned out on anti-war work, even as the war itself burned out. But then there was school: a BA, and graduate school, and fieldwork, and a dissertation, and jobs. A couple of marriages, career changes, kids. In and around the rest of life, I read about the war—those hundreds of books, trying to make sense out of it. I graduated from cheap beer and wine to cheap scotch.

Decades after the war ended, it all fell apart. I retired, and read more about the war, and had another scotch, and still could make no sense of it. My marriage crumbled, and I had more scotch until my sodden brain realized I was in trouble. I quit drinking, and a veteran friend suggested PTS and help from the VA.

It took awhile. But, sober, retired, divorced, in Vet Center therapy, I began to understand what the little girl was doing in my room.

And I could also begin to understand the importance of the outdoors: I had the time to both be outdoors, and think about why. To understand that the outdoors, and my camera, were a refuge from the little girl.

In 2001, I had returned to Vietnam with my family, one of my boys about the same age as the little girl when she was killed. When I saw young Vietnamese children I often thought about her, about how her life might have gone if she hadn't been gathering firewood that morning.



Other scenes of Vietnam at peace were reminders of lives that had survived the war, and lives that have been built since. Vietnam seems full of color today—my photos are full of greens brighter than the greens I remember. There is the scarlet and gold of the Buddhist temple, the pink of market-bound pigs, children in their clean, bright school clothes. People living their daily lives helped me understand that Vietnam is a living place with living people, not a war and a little girl lying dead in the woods.

After nearly a decade since I started thinking more clearly, understanding what she and the outdoors mean in my life, I realize there's been a change. Like my understanding of Vietnam as a living place, I can see nature the same way—as a world of its own. I now hike and paddle to enjoy the woods and water, more important than their value as an escape.

I guess I'm ambivalent about her. Would I want her to go away, never come through my door again? No, she's part of my life. She's not always welcome, she's not always comfortable to be around. She reminds me of part of my life that I might wish had never happened, but that shaped it in a way that made me who I am. She sent me into the woods and onto the water, and for that I will be forever grateful.



JACK MALLORY IS A LONG-TIME VVAW MEMBER. HE SERVED IN VIETNAM 69-70 AND JOINED VVAW IN 1970.



Flowers Are STILL Better Than Bullets

LAUREL KRAUSE

On May 3, 1970, a day before her slaughter, Allison Krause said to Ohio National Guardsmen, "Flowers are better than bullets."

Approaching the 50th anniversary of the Kent State massacre on May 4, 2020, I've been thinking about my sister Allison, who was killed as she protested the expansion of the Vietnam War, the forced draft lottery, and President Nixon's Cambodian invasion. Allison Krause was a 19-year-old Kent State University freshman and honors student who was shot dead, along with Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer, and William Schroeder, by Ohio National Guard gunfire on May 4, 1970, at an anti-war rally at Kent State University in Ohio.

In the afternoon on May 4, 1970, as a 15-year-old, I was walking home from my junior high school bus stop. A neighbor met me, advising me that Allison had been hurt and suggested I phone my parents who both worked. Within hours we were driving to ID Allison's lifeless body on a hospital gurney, not far from Kent State, where we heard armed soldiers mutter to us, "they should have shot more."

Ever since May 4, 1970, Kent State massacre survivors have been treated miserably by the US government with harassment, surveillance, and threats because we demanded accountability and truth at Kent State, and because we dared to sue the State of Ohio for wrongful actions. Instead of informing us of what happened to our family members, supporting us in our time of grief and honoring our loved ones correctly, Kent State survivors have had to defend ourselves from chilling pranks and surveillance by the FBI and COINTELPRO... now going on five decades.

Just nine months after Woodstock in May 1970, a generation of young, anti-war Americans, peaceful protesters, and college students became the latest target of the US military. At Kent State, and 10 days later at Jackson State, the Nixon administration criminalized campus protests against the Vietnam War, literally taking aim at students protesting the war, shooting dead six students and protesters in May 1970. The shocking news of a government using military force against protesting college kids and killing four, went around the world along with Neil Young's anthem "Ohio." From Vietnam veterans' stories from back then and to this day, the song "Ohio" was rarely, if ever, heard on the airwaves in Vietnam.

In response to Allison's killing, I raised my fist for Allison and for the

truth at Kent State. Back then, even though Kent State was probably the most documented, modern American historic tragedy, those in power have managed to get away with it, never credibly examining what occurred, and a Kent State federal grand jury was denied.

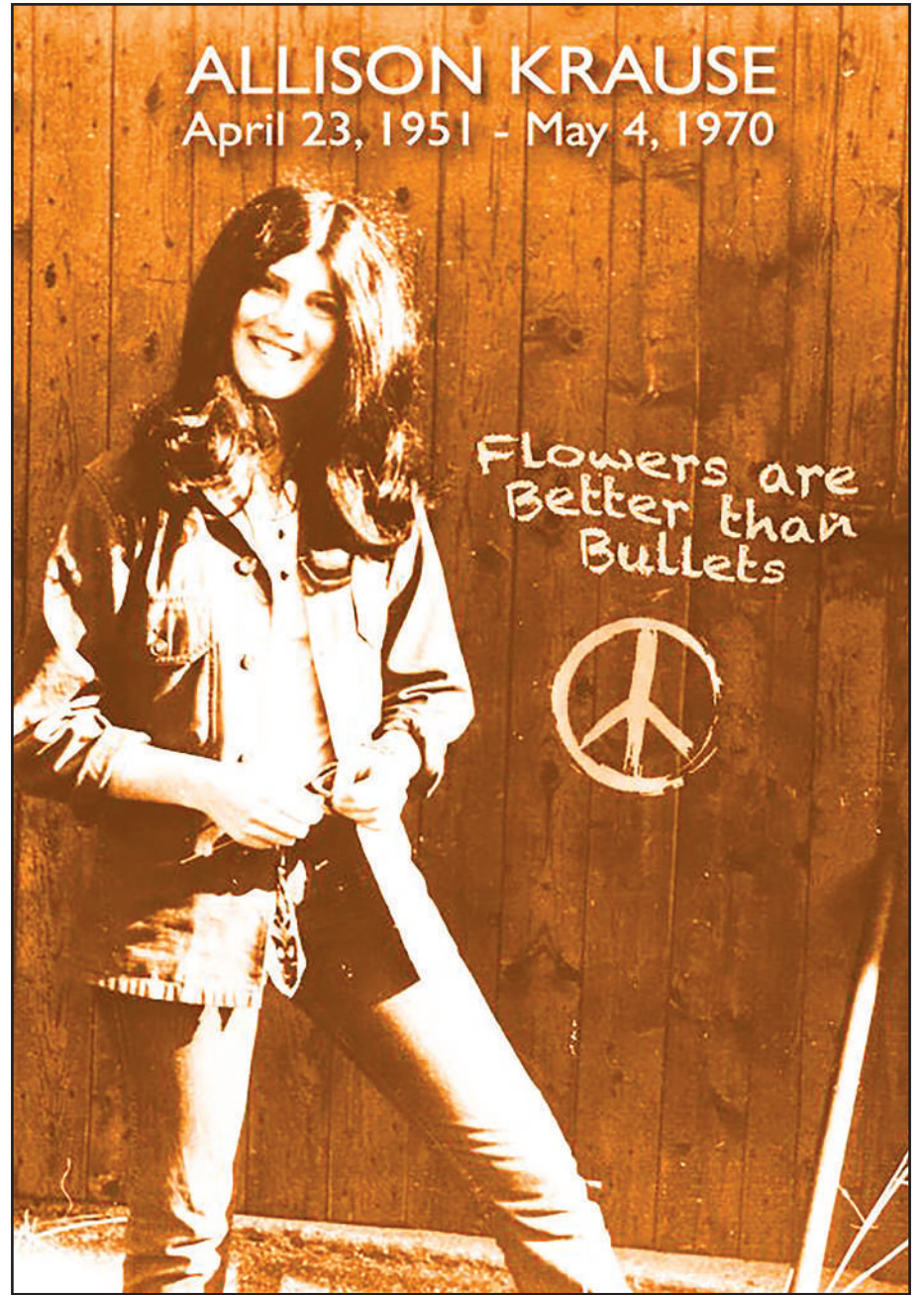
Fifty years have passed, yet little has been done to heal this wound or learn from these massacres. Instead of investigating and acknowledging how the US government's militia killed unarmed student protesters on May 4, 1970, over the last 50 years, Kent State has ignored, minimized, and propagandized the true facts and impacts of what occurred.

Since there has been no action to credibly investigate the Kent State massacre, we took matters into our own hands. Wishing to learn the truth from observers and participants at Kent State, Emily Kunstler and I launched the Kent State Truth Tribunal at the 40th anniversary. At three Truth Tribunals held in Kent, San Francisco, and New York City in 2010, we filmed the stories and testimonials of original witnesses and participants of the Kent State massacre. Visit our website: www.TruthTribunal.org

In May 2010 at the 40th anniversary, more credible truth about the Kent State massacre emerged in Stuart Allen's forensic examinations of tape, recorded on a Kent State dormitory window ledge at the time of the massacre. Allen discovered the Kent State Commands-to-Fire in the massacre that authorities had denied for 40 years, also uncovering elements of US government complicity at play in the massacre.

Instead of Kent State or the US Department of Justice examining the command responsibility uncovered in forensic expert Stuart Allen's Kent State findings, the University worked to discredit and bury Allen's forensics as the US Department of Justice refused a new examination into the Kent State Commands-to-Fire. Obviously, at Kent State, the US government still has a lot to hide.

In 2014, we took the Kent State human rights abuses before the United Nations Human Rights Committee. During the UN treaty hearing, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) admitted, "In 1970, four students were killed, were murdered," yet the DOJ offered no accountability for their comment or findings. From the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, we learned Allison had been target assassinated by the Ohio National Guard at Kent State University on May 4, 1970.



Last year, at the 49th Kent State anniversary in May 2019, the University selected Stephanie Danes Smith, a retired 25-year CIA Sr. Intelligence Executive, to lead the Kent State 50th committees, making national headlines at Common Dreams. Responding across America, supporters of the truth about Kent State reacted with revulsion at the CIA being put in charge of the Kent State "story" for the 50th, noting CIA Vietnam War crimes, their rewriting of Vietnam War history, and torture perpetrated by the CIA. An immediate-response, email protest to the KSU president forced Danes Smith to step down as Chair of the 50th, yet Danes Smith continues to work covertly on 50th matters as she indoctrinates Kent State freshmen in her required class on the massacre.

Other members of Kent State University's 50th team include the Kent State Executive Director of University Media Relations, a 20-year careerist in the Ohio National Guard. And the director of the Kent State massacre museum, the May 4 Visitors Center, came from the Nixon Presidential Library before Kent State recruited her.

According to Kent State, May 4, 1970, was an "unfortunate incident" and it wasn't really their fault. The US government, Kent State University,

and even the Ohio National Guard were not really responsible for the killing of four and wounding of nine unarmed students at a protest on May 4, 1970. It's as if American leadership regards Kent State as a no-fault massacre, with no government exposure, setting a precedent to be able to kill students and protesters again

Ever since May 4, 1970, Kent State University has aimed to control what is known, and now to be taught and learned, about the May 4th Kent State massacre. For the 50th anniversary on May 4, 2020, as the perpetrators of the massacre operate the commemoration, we have to wonder if the American public, along with survivors of the massacre, will ever know the true story of the May 4, 1970, Kent State massacre... or heal our wounds from what the government did to all of us, without apology or remorse.



LAUREL KRAUSE, KENT STATE TRUTH TRIBUNAL CO-FOUNDER, FOCUSES ON TRUTH AND PROTECTING PROTESTERS TODAY. FOLLOW LAUREL, FOR HER SISTER ALLISON KRAUSE, AT WWW.TRUTHTRIBUNAL.ORG.

DR. DOO 5-4-70 by Fred Sternkopf

MURDERED:
ALLISON KRAUSE

SHOT BY NATIONAL GUARD
ON KENT STATE CAMPUS!
STILL NO INQUIRY!!!

1951-1970 CONTACT: WWW.TRUTHTRIBUNAL.ORG

Live Rounds

DONALD MCNAMARA

When the killings at Kent State University occurred, I was a college student, using my GI Bill money to pay for a bachelor's degree in political science.

In my first year of college, I rented a room with a family that had two daughters who were attending universities out of state—I guess my rent was helping defray the costs of their tuition. I still remember hearing the husband and wife arguing about what happened at Kent State; she was appalled that he was not more sympathetic to the students. I wondered if I should interpose myself in that argument. I didn't, which was probably the wise choice, but their disagreement reminded me of my time after Vietnam, when I was finishing out my term of service.

For my final six months in the Army, I was stationed at Fort George G. Meade in Maryland, in the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and I was there during the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. (April 4, 1968) and Robert Kennedy (June 5), and the rioting that ensued both times, in various places throughout the country, including Washington, DC.

Because we could be in DC very

quickly with a ride down Interstate 95, we were put on alert, meaning that our "weeks" consisted of nine days: three days for which we had to stay in uniform and in the barracks, ready to move out on a minute's notice; three days during which we could leave the barracks (after signing out) but had to stay in uniform; and three days during which we could wear civilian clothes and leave the barracks.

What stood out in my mind, in relation to the argument my landlords were having, was that, during my time at Fort Meade that we were training for riot control, we were informed in no uncertain terms that if we were sent into the city we would not be given live ammunition, at all. Besides that, we would fix our bayonets, but they would stay sheathed. I thought of that when I heard about Kent State, and I wondered: "Who the fuck authorized giving those National Guardsmen live rounds? And then who ordered them to shoot?" We could possibly have been in the line of fire near the rioting in DC, but on a college campus? And to make it especially hideous, they shot kids who were nowhere near them, kids on their way to class who had no idea of what was going on.

I still remember the discussions that raged on our campus—Iona College—about what should be done in response to the killings. It seemed to me during these discussions that, all in all, there was a lack of empathy for the students and support for the government, support that would erode over the next couple of years.

Eventually, classes were canceled, causing a flurry of adjustments on the part of administrators, professors, and students. When the academic year came to an abrupt halt, people weren't sure if they should be mad at the students, the National Guard, President Nixon, Ho Chi Minh, or someone else—or if they should be mad at all. I even wondered how all this squared with the freedom that I had saddled up to protect and defend.

I can't help but believe that there persisted in this country a sense that the people who were killed at Kent State had it coming (certainly President Nixon thought so), and I sense that such a feeling stemmed from an anger. Not that the students confronted or insulted members of the armed forces, but that they were standing up and saying that our country was doing the wrong thing. As if the

only obligation any of us has is to mindlessly follow orders and keep quiet and any protesters anywhere deserved nothing better than summary execution.

As for our riot control in 1968, after the assassination of Dr. King, we were rushed into DC, but then we camped (literally) on the grounds of the VA Medical Center, very close to The Catholic University of America, where 33 years later I would receive a Ph.D. in English, and not at all close to any rioting. For two days we played volleyball and touch football, and a troupe of entertainers came in to give us something similar to a USO show. We didn't have to dig any foxholes or send out ambush patrols or LPs. After Robert Kennedy's assassination, parts of the regiment were sent into the city, but I was in the part that stayed back, holding the fort. Six weeks later I was honorably discharged, and I got away as fast as I could.



DONALD MCNAMARA SERVED IN THE FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION FROM JANUARY OF 1967 TO JANUARY OF 1968.



Tin Soldiers and Nixon's Coming

BONNIE J. CARACCILO

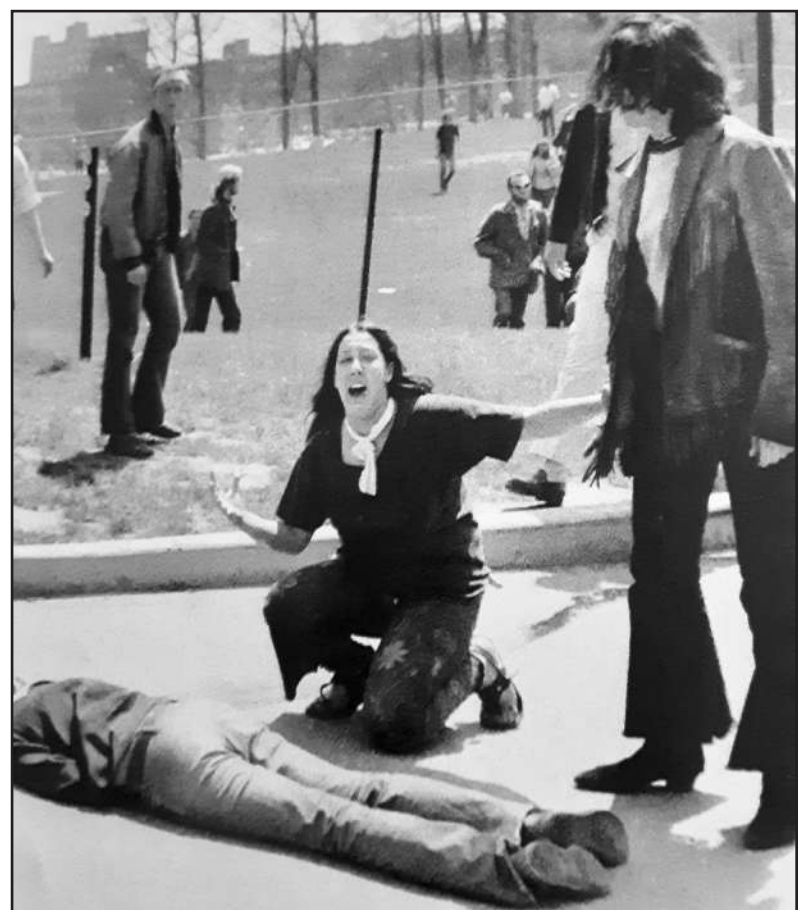
For me, this date will live forever. I suspect for many of those in my generation who were paying attention, May 4, 1970—will join those dates forever etched in our minds—November 22, 1963, April 4, 1968, June 6, 1968, and so on.

I was in Spain at the time. I was on my way to classes at the University of Madrid. There had been campus riots there, military personnel and tanks were positioned around the area in front of the building where I studied. Students around the world were demonstrating against a variety of issues at that time. I passed a kiosk early on the morning of May 5, 1970. One of those kiosks you see where magazines and chewing gum, cigarettes and lottery tickets are sold—with newspapers clipped on a string by clothespins, like flags on a

line. One picture seemed to be on the cover of just about every magazine and newspaper. I looked and looked again because I could tell that boy lying face down and the girl kneeling next to him were American kids. When I read what it was all about, I immediately slipped into a surreal state of horror and shock. Oh my God, they are shooting peaceful protesters. My life changed for good that day.



BONNIE CARACCILO IS A SUPPORTER OF VVAW AND A LONGTIME THORN IN THE SIDE OF THE EMPIRE. SHE LIVES IN BOSTON, MA.



Kent State Laments

CHUCK ASWELL

I returned home in early February 1969. It had been an eventful year. I arrived during Tet and was assigned to an armored unit in the 9th Division, just south of Saigon. Those early days were overwhelming....ambush patrols at night, sweeps during the day, and firefights all the time. Lots of Vietnamese and American KIAs in those weeks! February-May passed and there I was, still OK and slugging through each day in some village on an APC somewhere south of the capital, always wondering if tomorrow would be "The Day" or if I was going to make it through this thing. I made it through.

Upon my return, I was able to finagle myself away from an assignment to Ft. Knox and armored infantry "war games" and got reassigned to Ft. Ord, much closer to home. So my last six months as a draftee were far less uncomfortable than they could have been.

In August of '69, I was out and back to San Diego, where I had been drafted during college in April of 1967. The GI Bill afforded me a great chance to continue school, and I did so, with relish. Strangely, my months of experience with south Vietnamese peasants made me want to study anthropology in the worst way. And so I did. I re-enrolled at San Diego State University this time as an anthropology major and not a business major. How refreshing that was! I plunged into my studies and

found myself on the Dean's List every semester instead of "On Probation" as I usually was prior to being drafted.

In the middle of my second semester back, Nixon initiated the Cambodian excursion and, of course, My Lai had come to the forefront of the insidious war effort. And then, Kent State happened. It's easy to forget how shocked we were then. So much has happened since. I had quietly opposed the war since my return, but only in private conversations. I just didn't bring it up unless it was necessary. But now I was back in school and felt a visceral connection with people who opposed the war. I was one of them, but quietly so. And I had something to say. But I remained quiet, except for letters to the editor and personal conversations. My family knew of my dismay, but not of my experiences. There was never any real inquiry about my combat days.

Immediately after the Kent State shootings, there was talk of the college being closed down for a few days, to forestall any protests like those emerging around the country. In the school newspaper, I read a notice that a group of veterans who were opposed to the war was going to meet in the student center. I decided to go. How could I not? Veterans, like me, who were opposed to the war. Who knew? So I went, expecting to see perhaps 10-15 guys in a small room who had convictions and needed to vent. But

when I got there, the meeting was in a small auditorium and there were perhaps 200 guys there. It shocked me. I still remember the feeling that I had when I saw that group. I thought that maybe I was just a disgruntled, somewhat angry and resentful young vet who was atypical. It turned out that I was part of a wave. This was, in fact, an incipient meeting of a chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I was smitten. Most memorably, I recall two pilots, who had flown bombing missions against peasants, tell their emotional stories of carnage and how sorry they were. It was a tear-jerking event but very important to me.

In the ensuing days, after the school had, indeed, shut down, I went to more meetings and agreed to speak to community groups about my experiences in the war. I was still only 22, and this was not my usual routine, but I did it and have been forever grateful for that.

One of the things that I decided to do, as other vets did also was to write a letter to my dad, a conservative Orange County, CA republican who supported the war and did not show an inclination to hear about my experiences when I returned. That was very sad, and I struggled to overcome that, and I did.

In that letter, I expressed my dismay about the war, again. I even had to remind him that I had been there had been in combat and therefore

had some level of experience on the issue. How could I have to say this again but I did!

Days passed, and the protests continued and it was the news of the day. I finally received a reply from my dad. It was sharp, condemning, and without concession or understanding. I was hurt perhaps devastated. My own dad, who had been spared conscription in WWII by an employment exemption, could not bring himself to try and understand his own son's opinions that were based on such visceral experiences? I still lament that circumstance. I always admired him so much when I was young. But he got locked into that post WWII conservative mindset, and he never left it even when his son had perspectives based on actual experience that contradicted his beliefs.

My story is, I suspect, a relatively common one. Those were fractious times not unlike now. Somehow we got through those difficult days. Maybe we can do it again. But the pain lives on.



CHUCK ASWELL IS A RETIRED TEACHER LIVING IN PENN VALLEY, CALIFORNIA. HE WAS DRAFTED IN HIS 3RD YEAR OF COLLEGE IN SAN DIEGO, IN 1967. HE SERVED WITH THE 5TH BATTALION, 60TH INFANTRY, 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION, SOUTH OF SAIGON IN 1968.



Chicago, 1974.

I Will Never Forget

PHILIP J. ZAMORA

May 4th, 1970 I will never forget! I was at maximum-security in a stockade at Fort Gordon, GA, about that time after being court-martialed and sentenced to 7 years solitary confinement and hard labor at Fort Leavenworth for refusing to pick up an M16. It was a decision I had made long before I got drafted and felt that I needed to do my part in rebelling against the so-called war. Right before my departure to the Ft. Leavenworth stockade, I was visited by the warden of the Fort Gordon stockade. He said, "Private Zamora, I feel if you are willing, we can still make you a good soldier...you still have a chance. I'm going to give you a choice. We can send you to a facility to help retrain you, called CTF, or you

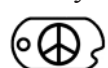
can spend 7 years at Leavenworth ...CTF in just 3 months."

CTF is a correctional training facility. What he didn't say was that it was going to be 3 months of hell. Of course, I chose three months of hell at Fort Riley, KS. For those who have never heard of CTF, it is a concertina wired 10 acre camp within the Fort Riley facility. It is protected and guarded with machine-gun nests in four corners. No one escapes CTF, and if you do, there is really nowhere to go in that part of Kansas. Everything is done by the numbers there. You eat by the numbers, you go to the commode by the numbers, you are drilled and watched and brainwashed by the numbers, by forced indoctrination,

by watching films of torture and propaganda set up by the government to convince you that communism is going to be spread throughout the United States if we do not stop it in Vietnam.

Again, I was arrested for not picking up an M16 during bayonet practice and was sent to a place called "the cage." There, I was stripped down to my underwear and was made to sit on a steel chair in a steel box with others that were caged with me who refused to obey the rules of CTF. There you are given 14 days of bread, water, and dry cereal for breakfast, and a half a slice of lettuce for dinner, while sitting at attention throughout the day until they break you. I made it to seven

days, and for good behavior, they let me go back to my company CTF. As a musician, they gave me a new position as director of music, which later I proceeded to utilize at Fort Lewis Washington. I was eventually released under honorable conditions as unfit. This is my short story.



PHILIP J ZAMORA LIVES IN SAN MATEO, CA, WITH HIS WIFE, CLAUDIA. HE'S 32 YEARS CLEAN AND SOBER FROM ALCOHOL AND HARD DRUGS, SURVIVING THE AIDS EPIDEMIC, AND STILL PERFORMING AND WRITING MUSIC AS A RECORDING ARTIST.

Changing a Vote

SUSAN R. DIXON

I was a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1970. I came late to anti-war activism, in part because of my age and in part because I had been pre-occupied with travel in Europe and the Middle East, but I threw myself into it when I returned in 1968. I based my activities at the Campus Y, the center for social justice on campus, where I was a vice-president. The following is an excerpt from *Seeking Quan Am: A Dual Memoir of War and Vietnam*, which I wrote with Vietnam veteran Mark M. Smith.

In November 1969, I marched in Washington. Many of us carried small American flags as a way of reclaiming the symbol from those who, challenging our patriotism, had used it against us. At the White House, which was ringed with school buses, I had a momentary vision: the buses became soldiers with guns turned on the demonstrators, and then they were buses again. I pushed the vision away. A few months later, at Kent State, it happened.

In May 1970, President Nixon

expanded the war while saying he wasn't. I didn't know what made me more angry, the lies or the assumption that I would believe them. When four unarmed protesters were shot at Kent State, business-as-usual stopped. Grief and fury threatened to overwhelm strategy as campus leaders cast about for a focus. As an officer of the Y, I helped plan a candlelight vigil.

We decided there should be a procession and there should be coffins. It was easy to get enough candles but the coffins were a challenge. Somehow they were found and that evening I stood in a circle of little lights, close to the Old Well, holding papers and a small book. We were poised to begin when someone told us there were students running through the dorms and coming toward us. We waited in silence. The group arrived at the far side of the gathering, their grief and anger surging up against our calm. They were given candles and drawn into the group, which grew quiet again. When my part came, I let the air settle and then read a prayer for the dead.

So many students, faculty members, and townspeople attended

the vigil that when the first people following the coffins had left the quad, circled the arboretum, turned back on Franklin Street and returned to the Old Well, the last of the procession had not yet left. The energy shifted, not just in the frantic students, or even just in those who walked in procession; the energy shifted on the whole campus. Later there would be explanations for why the UNC campus did not grow violent, as it could have and others did. Many explanations were reasonable, including the one that credited the fundamental "gentility" of the South. But the energy had shifted in that circle; I felt it happen.

Through the combined efforts of the Y and Student Government, we formed a plan: we would go to Washington to meet with our congressmen and senators. A few days later, seven buses and an uncounted number of cars converged on Washington where we fanned out through the offices meeting with our own representatives, or with anyone who would let us in. The group was so large the North Carolina Congressional Delegation met with us

in a hearing room. Senator Sam Ervin, the venerable "Senator Sam," annoyed me with his strict interpretation of the Constitution that he used to defend the president's incursion into Cambodia and then excused himself on account of the many important things he had to do. When the junior senator, B. Everett Jordan, said he would give attention to the next bill about the war that came to his desk, the room erupted in applause. When he repeated his statement more forcefully, we gave him a standing ovation. He was our new hero and he was as good as his word: when the Cooper-Church Amendment limiting the president's war powers came before the Senate, he provided a swing vote in favor and credited the delegation from the University of North Carolina for playing a role in his decision.



SUSAN R. DIXON IS A WRITER, EDITOR, AND WORKSHOP LEADER, LIVING IN ITHACA, NY. SHE MAINTAINS SEEKINGQUANAM.COM AND SUSANRDIXON.COM.

Who'll Stop the Rain

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

Who'll Stop the Rain: Respect, Remembrance, and Reconciliation in Post-Vietnam America
by Doug Bradley
(Warriors Publishing Group, 2019)

In 2015, Doug Bradley and Craig Werner published a terrific book, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War*, named the BEST MUSIC BOOK of 2015 by *Rolling Stone* magazine. They traveled America on a two-year book tour that was also, it seems, a pilgrimage to seek out communities of Vietnam veterans. In doing that, they found a nearly universal acceptance of their theory that the popular music of the time held a very special recognition and reverence for veterans, but also for our entire generation. Yes, we are the rock 'n roll generation, the Baby Boomers who grew up listening to a new musical expression that spoke to us. From incredible folks like Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard came Elvis, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Supremes,

Temptations, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Otis Redding, the Doors, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Bruce Springsteen.

Bradley and Werner visited the shrines of our music, like the Stax Museum of American Soul Music in Memphis. Somehow, they got the word out, and flocks of fans, both of the music and the book, answered the call. "The veterans' interaction with the music created an intense emotional atmosphere shared by everyone in that sacred place," Bradley tells us, and then the two headed off on a splendid jaunt around the country, peddling their book and sharing with their audiences. In the process, they were able to touch base with a few old friends, a number of musicians, and an incredible array of Vietnam vets who have spent their lives helping the veterans community, and mankind at large, in a kaleidoscopic myriad of ways. *Who'll Stop the Rain* isn't a very big book, but it is enormous! It comes at a moment in time where the young people hear our music or view

our history and respond with "Okay, Boomer," a put-down that has become the source of jokes by the hosts of the late-night talk shows. Reaching out, Bradley talks to Iraq and Afghanistan vets too, and recognizes their efforts to deal with their wars...especially through music. But the focus of this book is "post-Vietnam America," and this is a tale of intense, meaningful encounters from sea to shining sea and many all-American places in between.

The picture Doug Bradley creates, and the stories he tells, are all upbeat and positive. Perhaps that is his perspective or the happenstance personalities of the people he has met, or maybe he has carefully told us about a very specific grouping chosen from his audiences and adventures. No matter. This is a positive book, a very optimistic look at our aging generation and the variety of ways our peers have found to help their brother vets, make the world a better place, or simply create music that does far more than just entertain us. At this moment in time, in the fourth year of the

Trump experiment, as the coronavirus threatens to become a pandemic and the rising ocean threatens to flood Mar-A-Lago, it is reassuring to read about our fellow veterans, rock 'n roll fans, who have confronted PTSD, suicides, Agent Orange and all the rest, and have made a difference! Get your hands on *Who'll Stop the Rain*, read it, and enjoy it. Allow a little optimism into your life. Be proud of our "Okay, Boomer" generation and the over-achievers, the musical geniuses, and the decent, caring folks that make it up. There are thousands of book titles available at your community's Barnes & Noble, or on Amazon. If you're looking for a book that will be an emotional respite from the evening news, give *Who'll Stop the Rain* a try. "Try it, you'll like it!"



JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW, AND THE AUTHOR OF TWO BOOKS ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR.

No Where Man

JOHN ZUTZ (REVIEWER)

No Where Man
by Steve Piotrowski
(self-published, 2020)

Full disclosure: I've known the author since the mid-80s when we worked with many others to establish the Wisconsin Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which has morphed into The Highground Veterans Memorial Park.

The lyrics of *No Where Man* written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney on the first page give the reader a clue to the contents. The clues are passages printed in bold type: "Knows not where he's going to, can you see me at all, till somebody else lends you a hand, making all his nowhere plans for nobody."

The first half of the book describes the duality he experienced during the final month or two in country. The connections with his buddies and the hopes and dreams of getting home juxtaposed with the constant fear, as well as the pettiness of the Army.

He writes about his trip home and the beginnings of his feelings of separation. Those feelings grew when he got to his parent's house in small town Wisconsin.

His first weeks at home were

everything he talked to squad mates and dreamed about in the field. Bought a hot car with his Army savings—wrecked it immediately. Got pissing drunk with old friends—more than once. Got laid a couple times by a couple different girls. What more could a trooper want? *Knows not where he's going to.*

But he was still dissatisfied. It seemed that nobody cared. Nobody wanted to know what happened. Others thought they knew all about the war because they watched it on TV. Nobody was interested in what he had to say. *Can you see me at all?*

He wasn't fitting in.

He jumped at loud noises. He was on guard constantly. He patrolled the house at night. He dreamed about the buddies he left behind. He had frequent flashbacks. He drank more in search of oblivion. *Till somebody else lends you a hand.*

At the end of the book he's run out of town by an irate husband. He tries to convince himself that it's time to make his own decisions, to be his own boss, to move on. *Making all his nowhere plans for nobody.*

Because I know Steve, I was expecting more. He left home feeling

disassociated. I expected at least a little exploration of how he overcame that. Saving it for the next book? I think what was there was well done. I think it will help non-vets understand the boredom and the adrenaline rush that is war, and what Nam vets went through. It might even convince some kids to avoid the recruiter.

But it won't educate others about the process of returning mentally. And that's too bad.



JOHN ZUTZ IS A MILWAUKEE VVAW MEMBER.



Barry Romo and Bill Davis.

The Mountain Song

BONNIE J. CARACCILO (REVIEWER)

The Mountains Sing
by *Nguyen Phan Que Mai*
(Algonquin Books, 2020)

Forty-seven years after the last US soldier left Vietnam, the world has begun to hear from the children who grew up in the late stages of the violence, confronted with the aftermath of war. They lived with the devastation of their natural world, their cities and homes beyond comprehension after ferocious bombings by American B-52s, particularly in the North. These places were no longer safe, they were not habitable. Consequently, many families moved South.

Nguyen Phan Que Mai, born in 1973 in a small village in the North, is one of those children, now grown, whose parents took her and her brother south in the hopes of rebuilding their lives and taking part in the reunification of their country. Que Mai, as she is known, struggled along with her family and fellow Vietnamese citizens, in a land haunted by the ghosts of both allied and Vietnamese dead. The land is strewn with the skeletons of war machines, destroyed infrastructure, and poisoned natural environment.

This historical novel, Nguyen's first, is written in English. It is a monumental task accomplished by a journalist, poet, and writer whose real-life experiences give credibility to this work. *The Mountains Sing* is the story of four generations of the Tran family. Weaving the history of Vietnam from the 1900s to this century, the voices of a grandmother and granddaughter take

their turn sharing experiences through the Great Hunger, the Land Reform, the various foreign occupations, the American War (as the Vietnamese rightfully call it) and, finally, the reunification. This is a complex, multi-layered story that highlights the strength and determination of the women and children of war.

The Mountains Sing is a lush work that introduces many readers to the beautiful poetry and imagery of a nation all too often associated with war, with many cultural allegories and anecdotes, poems and songs, threaded throughout. While there are cold passages of death and destruction, holding nothing back, there are also many lovely moments of familial love, forgiveness, strength, and dignity. The dream of no more war, ever, anywhere.

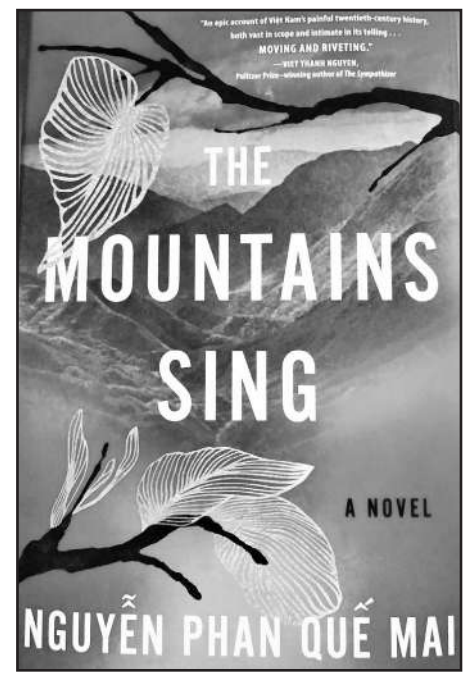
The Mountains Sing provides a look into the other side of the American War and what that looked like, what the people experienced, how they saw the world during the war and how they survived while bombs fell all around them.

Yet this novel is not just about the American War, it is more about the astounding 3,000-year history of a people having survived many challenges, about the beauty of the land, the music, poetry, and traditions handed down from generation to generation. *The Mountains Sing* is a look into the heart and soul of Vietnam and its people. It offers up the importance of family, ancestors, and traditions. Finally, it breathes life into real humans who manage somehow to be more like us than unlike us. It

reminds us that nature and the earth are at once a part of who we are.

The author describes some of her seven-year journey writing *The Mountains Sing*: "It may seem ironic that I have chosen to write this novel, by far my most personal work to date, in English, which is also the language of invasive military powers and cultures. But this language has given me a new voice and a way to fictionalize the turbulent events of my country's past, including those which have not yet been sufficiently documented in Vietnamese fiction, such as the Great Hunger or the Land Reform. I am responding, with my art, to Hollywood movies and novels written by those Westerners who continue to see our country only as a place of war and our people as people who don't need to speak — or, when we do, we sound simple, naïve, cruel, or opportunistic. The canon of Vietnam war and post-war literature in English is vast, but there is a lack of voices from inside Vietnam."

Reading *The Mountains Sing*, I was struck by the feeling that I somehow knew the characters and felt their joy, their pain, their sorrow. I have been fortunate to spend time with Que Mai and we have maintained a correspondence. She is an accomplished writer whose work has been translated and published in more than ten countries and won her many honors. Ms. Nguyen was about to launch a global book tour when the coronavirus pandemic took hold and ended the tour. Fortunately, she can be found online presenting interviews



and commentaries. *The Mountains Sing* is receiving a flood of stellar reviews from major book reviewers in the US and elsewhere, having just been released in March 2020. Please seek out this historical novel; you can find it at all good booksellers.

The Mountains Sing is a book you will find difficult to put down and impossible to forget. I know I will have to read it a second time and possibly a third.

Learn more about Nguyen Phan Que Mai at her website:
www.nguyenphanquema.com.



BONNIE J. CARACCILO, WHO LIVES IN BOSTON, WORKS AT BEING A THORN IN THE SIDE OF THE EMPIRE.



Pete Zastrow and Bill Davis on the left - Columbus VVAW.

The Empty Shield

JOHN BROMER (REVIEWER)

The Empty Shield
by *Giacomo Donis*
(Eyewear Publishing, 2020)

This is the second book I've reviewed for *The Veteran*; I don't know if there will be a third.

I'll start with the author's own description of the book: "This, in short, is a Vietnam War book like nothing you have ever read before. A wild book, set in the New York subway, end of March 1972, with Vietnam veterans carrying placards like shields, half the book dedicated to Aeschylus' Seven Against Thebes, Herman Melville as a personal anti-war writer, lots of Zen Buddhism, LOTS of Hegel's Logic—including a personal appearance by Hegel himself, in the subway, looking for a beer. Not to mention Dostoevsky's mock execution, Lee Morgan shot to death at Slug's (near

my place on Rivington Street), Mark Rothko's suicide, Monk, Coltrane, the (probable) suicide of Albert Ayler. The Fugs! I sing two Fugs songs in the subway, thinking about what a decision is and what making a decision means. Kill For Peace!"

As I said, the book is exuberant. "It is complex, extremely serious, and highly entertaining."

Shall I continue?

In brief, the story concerns a decision the author had to make when he was 21, though he began writing it when he was 69. He was 4-F, in his words a "war-hardened 4-F," and the decision - "I have a fork: pursue my (already brilliant) academic career, blow up the Williamsburg Bridge, or leave the country for good (permanent exile)." The beginning is very interesting—he presents himself at the American Consulate in Milan

in 2014, wanting to renounce his American citizenship, having lived in Italy for the last 42 years. He gets chilly reception, and I'm not sure what the final resolution of that is.

That's the first 13 pages. After that, the book devolves into an almost 500 page stream-of-consciousness reconstruction of 2 days he spent riding the subway when he was 21. The author is undoubtedly brilliant, very highly educated, and has had a long time to live and think about what 1972 was all about to him. I read every word of the first 88 pages, except for the 24 consecutive pages where he analyzed the motives of Melville's Billy Budd. After that, I started skimming because I was never going to get through it any other way.

I'll spare you some of my pain, and just mention some words I

encountered. Screech (a lot), Eteocles, Hermes, Zeus, Zen, Nietzsche, Hegel, Nixon, My Lai, Ghost Dance, college professors, Black Panthers, Winter Soldier. VVAW makes an appearance around pg. 303, where a footnote talks about a Wikipedia article.

In an afterword, the author tells us that "Gilda, my Zen cat, and I wrote this book in ferocious solitude." I'm supposed to be fair, so let me just say that, in my opinion, there might be a fine 100 page book in here, but as written, it is an unbearable slog (and I liked the Fugs).



JOHN BROMER IS A VIETNAM-ERA VETERAN WHO LIVES IN BLACK MOUNTAIN, NC. SOMEDAY HE'LL SHARE HIS SEMI-INTERESTING STORY.

Flashback

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

Flashback: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Suicide, and the Lessons of War

by Penny Coleman
(Beacon Press, 2006)

Author Penny Coleman married Daniel O'Donnell, a Vietnam veteran, in the early 1970s. They were young photographers, striving to make their mark upon the world. Daniel was a Vietnam veteran, and he drank too much and smoked too much pot. Things deteriorated to a point that Penny tried to distance herself, and Daniel attempted to commit suicide. "I can see now that he was just a kid who tried to stay alive in a situation that exploded all the rules he had ever lived by," she writes. She left him, and was already married to someone else when his sister called to tell her that Daniel had taken his own life. Penny believed his death was her fault, and she "crept into a psychic lair to lick (her) wounds in private." After a time, she was able to go on with her life, but deep inside she was plagued with guilt and shame, and constant fear that there was something wrong with her, something that might cause her relationships to end the same way.

In the late 1980s, she ran across some literature about PTSD and Vietnam veterans, and the symptoms of PTSD sounded familiar. "In the suggestion that perhaps it had not all been my fault, I found some room to breathe. Finding my way to the surface has been a long and slow process. It would be dishonest to suggest that the process is complete, but writing this book has surely moved it along."

Flashback was published fourteen years ago, and it does not appear to have been a best-seller. It should have been. This is a terrific book, filled with

many poignant messages from the survivors of Vietnam veteran suicides.

Today, fourteen years later, we are still experiencing the pandemic of active-duty military and veteran suicides that Penny Coleman was trying to prevent when she wrote her book. "The US military defines collateral damage as 'unintentional or incidental damage' occurring as a result of military actions. Such damage not only can occur; it inevitably does. I am not now talking about the civilian casualties that occurred in Vietnam during what they call the American War," she writes. "The collateral damage I am talking about is here, in this country, and it has been effectively hidden from sight. It consists of those soldiers whose names are not included on the lists of MIAs or WIAs or KIAs, though they are in a very real sense missing, wounded, or dead, even if by their own hands. And it includes those of us they abandoned when they chose not to go on. Together we became collateral damage when they brought their wounded bodies and minds home to us."

Flashback is about a large, troubling number of Vietnam veterans as told by their widows and children. Their stories are heart-wrenching and, truth be told, all too familiar. As a Vietnam vet diagnosed with "severe" PTSD (which I insist the VA describe as Post-Traumatic Stress DAMAGE), too many passages in this book were like looking into a hand-held mirror! "The emotional wounds and suicides among soldiers are neither an anomaly nor an aberration," Penny Coleman tells us. "They are inevitable." She gets it! "To date, no cure short of abstinence from war has proven to be reliable." Yes! She gets it, and her advice is spot-on. Today, after eighteen years of war

in Afghanistan and sixteen in Iraq, a whole new generation of veterans are coming home troubled and hurting.

I had never encountered real-life suicide until basic training at Fort Dix. Surely, the preparation for war is, in many cases, as deadly as combat itself. We were appalled in basic training, at the physical and mental abuse afforded us by the cadre. We had never been treated with such disrespect, and yes, physical abuse, as we encountered during basic training. The military intends to "break" each and every recruit, and rebuild them as a mindless robot ready to obey without question, even if the sergeant's command will inevitably lead to one's maiming or death. Looking back on it all now, I understand that participation in a war, in combat, offers a great personal career opportunity to a military officer. Promotions are judged by the candidate's "daring" and "fearlessness" but modern warfare has segregated the commanders from the cannon fodder. In Vietnam, far too often their acts of "bravery" ordered lower-ranking GIs into a meat grinder. So widespread was this problem, by 1971 our military was routinely defying orders, refusing to go where they would be unnecessarily threatened, and so the war effort in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos had to be abandoned. Sadly, we have not seen similar refusals from the all-volunteer military.

In Vietnam, what we witnessed was man's inhumanity toward his fellow man on a scale that had never happened throughout human history, and today's young soldiers in Iraq or Afghanistan are seeing even worse! The American way of waging war is, at its core, genocide. Whether it be fireballs of flaming napalm or

white phosphorous, lethal defoliants containing dioxin, (the most toxic substance known to man), depleted uranium, the damage done by 750 lb. bombs, "MOAB" (the Mother of All Bombs), or guided missiles carried on drones, our high-tech weapons do terrible damage to the bodies of human beings, and the sight of men, women, and children ripped and torn by such weapons tattoos the mind of the beholder with indelible ink.

The vast majority of American soldiers come home, settle back into society as best they can, and they create families. The problem is, the military that changed them into obedient killers before sending them to war does not care to try to change them back before sending them home. If you wonder how that has worked out, read *Flashback*. It is a shockingly tragic story, a story told by the surviving wives and children of America's fine young soldiers who have come home and taken their own lives.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC displays the names of 58,317 American soldiers who were killed in America's war in Vietnam. The experts tell us more than 200,000, and probably more than 300,000 Vietnam veterans have taken their own lives since returning home! *Flashback* is a small book, but it chronicles the tragedy of those suicides, and their effects upon the survivors, like no other book I've ever found. Highly recommended!



JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFETIME MEMBER OF VVAW, AND THE AUTHOR OF TWO BOOKS ABOUT THE VIETNAM WAR.

US Military: Incompetence, Hubris, and Denial

ED WHITE (REVIEWER)

The Cost of Loyalty

by Tim Bakken
(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020)

Tim Bakken describes in seven chapters, and a chapter concluding his thoughts, a devastating indictment on why we should reassert control of the military and reintegrate it into civil society. The case he makes and the evidence he presents (after all he is an attorney), puts in one place all the stories you have heard and seen but never were able to connect. Have I mentioned it is devastating?

The author's focus comes from teaching at West Point for the last twenty years. In many ways, he starts with how did we get to this situation: we have not won a war in 75 years; we have 800 bases in 70 countries; the military's untouchable expenditures; they are beyond civil or

international law; and the teaching of the incompetent by a closed society built on loyalty. Loyalty, then, is everything. It is a formula that will produce a risk to American society, if not the world we live in.

The basis for the reality we find ourselves in starts with the military academies. The academies develop officers, mostly general officers, who lack imaginative solutions to unique situations, namely limited wars with no end in sight: Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, to name a few.

The military academies foster loyalty above all values, violence as a way of resolving conflicts, sexual violence to get rid of women who think they can exist in a man's world, and simply unethical or criminal behavior. All the author's examples are supported by cases, studies, and a number of reports that have never seen

the light of day beyond the incident.

As a Vietnam vet, it was particularly painful to review in detail the incompetent General Westmoreland's theory of a war of attrition in a civil war, the lying of the hawks who knew better about the progress of the war (read no real progress), the My Lai massacre, the corruption of the South Vietnamese, the Tet offensive ("everything's fine, we won"), and body counts, to name a few.

The author goes into devastating (yes, I am going to use that word again) detail about the Iraq war bungled into by the worst president in US history (my judgment), and the generals that gave lying reports on what was needed to win, another surge of troops, or torture works, or the civilians that really don't know what they are doing, i.e., Obama, or incredible corruption in rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan.

A minor issue I have is with the author's assessment of anyone in the military, or who has been in the military, is corrupting society. This is brought out when Bakken describes the Watergate scandal, citing that all of Nixon's advisors, or burglars, having prior military experience. These were simply your run-of-the-mill Republican party corrupting hacks that seem to gravitate toward the Republican party each year. Nothing new there, more of the same in our dysfunctional political system. Just sayin...

Additionally, Bakken could have mentioned Rosa Brooks' book: *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything*. This book came out before Ronan Farrow's book *War on Peace* which the author does mention. We poor reviewers don't get the final book which would have an index and bibliography, so he might have mentioned her. And so it goes...

But the point he does emphasize is that the military is making all the decisions in war and peace. The State Department is second fiddle, or not even in the band.

After extensive research brilliantly compiled, Bakken does have a concluding chapter on how to reform the military so that to criticize it does not mean you are unpatriotic. His reforms: fight wars only in self-defense, the hierarchal structure of the military should be dismantled, remove commanders from the military legal system, eliminate the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the Judge Advocate General Corps should be abolished across all branches and replaced with civilian attorneys from the Department of Justice, the military academies should be transformed into national civilian universities, create a federal law whereby generals can register dissent when they believe a war should not be fought, and freedom of speech should be implemented within the military making retaliation a criminal offense.

This is a book that needs to be read by all Americans. I do not say that often; in fact, I believe this is the first time. Tim Bakken makes the case for a re-adjustment in the way we as American citizens consider our military and how we determine the issues of war and peace. It is a devastating (yes, the last time) indictment that has long been overdue. Our society suffers from the stranglehold of the military and needs to change.



ED WHITE IS A MARINE VIETNAM VET WITH MEMBERSHIPS IN VVAW, VFP, AND VVA. HE TEACHES A COURSE ON THE VIETNAM WAR AT TRITON COLLEGE IN ILLINOIS.



Obama's Unending Wars

ED HAGERTY (REVIEWER)

Obama's Unending Wars: Fronting the Foreign Policy of the Permanent Warfare State

by Jeremy Kuzmarov

(Clarity Press, Inc. 2019)

It would difficult to believe that anyone who lived through the Vietnam Era, or especially anyone who served during that time, would find it startling to suddenly learn that "money has corrupted politics and perverted American Foreign Policy" (16). In *Obama's Unending Wars*, Jeremy Kuzmarov presents a decidedly dark and pessimistic view of the historical record of US politicians who have guided our foreign policy, starting with Woodrow Wilson, whose hypnotic manipulation of public opinion allowed him to pursue imperialist goals under the guise of a "moral crusade" (34). Wilson is not Kuzmarov's intended target in this book, however; instead, the focus is on Wilson's spiritual and intellectual heir, Barak Obama.

Kuzmarov's main thesis, clearly presented early in the book, is that Obama artfully pulled the wool over the eyes of American voters by "using identity politics and liberal guilt about race" to create a narrative that misled and "hypnotized liberals into believing he was pragmatic and a do-gooder even as he escalated bombing, drone strikes, and secret wars" (16). Kuzmarov's critical analysis contends that Obama manipulated foreign policy actions and decisions in such a way as to financially favor his supporters and donors. Again, many readers will find it unsurprising that war generally tends to make the rich richer, although Obama was able to spin a story using "intellectual sophistication and guile" (16) that made it acceptable to liberals.

Although he generally misses the opportunity to address it, Kuzmarov's contentions raise a larger issue about the way our government functions, and that issue far exceeds the role Obama played over the eight years of his presidency. The issues he raises bring into question the entire historical basis of our foreign policy goals and how we achieve them. The sins of Obama as described by Kuzmarov are not his alone. Our nation's foreign policies and actions have been marred for many decades by miscalculation and misinterpretation, and the problem persists. If there is any surprise to be discovered, it lies in the fact that a liberal Democrat like Obama can be tarred with the same brush as the warmongering, hawkish, Republicans typically blamed for advancing the cause of the military-industrial complex, among other various and sundry misdeeds.

If exposing Obama's duplicity is a major achievement of this book, one must still examine the evidence Kuz-

marov utilizes to make his case. First, it is clear that he is not much interested in exploring and evaluating sources that might present an alternative or more balanced view. As a Ph.D. trained at Brandeis, it is somewhat puzzling that the overall tone of the work leans more toward exposing rather than toward a balanced historical treatment. In that regard, the scholarship and vigor of the research seems weak and suspect. At the risk of being somewhat crass, one might view the methodology as akin to throwing something against the wall to see what sticks. If, for example, Obama used the guise of a "humanitarian imperative" (203) to justify his aggressive, imperialistic aims, any room for misinterpretation of his actions is not given due consideration. Instead, Kuzmarov routinely decides emphatically in favor of the aggrieved, as when he writes that the first evidence of Russian troop involvement in Ukraine was in July 2014, "well after the war had broken out, meaning it was predominantly reactive" [italics mine] (234). Kuzmarov excuses the Russians and finds them largely blameless, alleging they took few steps to instigate unrest in Ukraine. Satellite imagery confirmed by US State Department accounts, however, indicates that Russian tanks had crossed the border around June 11, and evidence reveals that unmarked Russian tanks were engaged in fighting around that time. Kuzmarov then criticizes the Ukrainian government's attempts to neutralize the militants and prevent the secession of much of the eastern portion of their country, accusing the government and its "Neo-Nazi" (235) militias of war crimes.

He eschews mention of any current European Court of Human Relations cases brought by Ukrainian POWs alleging torture by separatist militiamen. Obama, "swayed by a slick lobbying campaign" (234), is castigated for providing security assistance to Ukraine, a nation whose independence we recognized in 1991, and whose transition to democracy has been widely supported in an effort to bring the country fully into the Western sphere of influence and out of Russia's. Rightly or wrongly, that is our goal. Perhaps we'd be better served to mind our own business and try not to poke the Russians in the eye by enticing another former Soviet state into the ranks of NATO, but Kuzmarov does not make that case, asserting only that whatever Obama did with the situation he inherited was misguided, even though its historical roots far predate his presidency.

Despite the one-sided viewpoint, Kuzmarov reveals a number of connections between Obama's actions and the potential benefits to his political backers that are undoubtedly true. What is less clear is whether his

motivation for taking those actions was related more to it being in the best interests of US national security, or whether it was influenced primarily by mercenary motives designed to benefit his supporters. In either case, the actions were typically disguised in duplicitous Wilsonian fashion as being undertaken to further self-determination and prevent humanitarian abuses. Kuzmarov cites Obama's ability "to provide a liberal and humanitarian veneer to policies that were consistent with those of past imperial statesmen and to maintain his reputation despite presiding over horrendous disasters" (27).

To set the stage for his case against Obama's foreign policy decisions, Kuzmarov first traces the development of Obama's political brand. He alleges falsehoods from Obama's version of his youth and early political life; his embrace of the "Chicago Way" (69) that is marked by cronyism and political favoritism; and his abandonment of African-Americans who saw unemployment reach a twenty-seven-year high and median income fall by 10.9 percent during his presidency. Kuzmarov's evidence is strongest when supported by figures, such as when he notes that Obama's African policies encouraged private sector investments and saw an increase from \$43.6 to \$57 billion from 2009 to 2011. However, the motives for that are immediately questioned, and Kuzmarov alleges that the real function of development assistance there was to "subsidize US businesses including top political donors—the Chicago Way" (92). Likewise, attempts to stem the Ebola virus outbreak in Africa are seen merely as an excuse to mirror post colonialist actions by "imposing militarization and control in the name of public health" (92-93).

Kuzmarov begins his scathing critique of Obama's foreign policy actions with Sub-Saharan Africa before turning his attention to Libya. There Obama is accused of behaving like a Black man serving "the interests of the white masters" who apparently were still smarting all those years after Qaddafi ignominiously kicked them out in 1969. Greedy corporate demons licked their lips as the Obama Administration put forth trumped up charges to justify intervention.

Kuzmarov next discusses Obama's use of drone technology, citing figures that show he launched 563 drone strikes during his administration, which was a ten-fold increase over Bush's 57 and does not include more than 1,000 strikes in Afghanistan just between 2012 and 2018. He does not tell us what those strikes accomplished or how many American or Coalition lives were saved, only that it is alleged that over

1,000 civilians were killed as a result.

In the case of US citizen Anwar Al-Awlaki, who was killed in Yemen, Kuzmarov asserts the justification was flawed because that radical cleric was merely inciting others to violence against the US as a reaction to the violence associated with US wars in the Middle East. Obama made a comparison to SWAT neutralizing a sniper shooting at an innocent crowd. Kuzmarov, in turn, makes the ludicrous comment that police have to get a warrant before deploying SWAT and arresting someone!

And so it goes: the Afghan surge, Iraq, the Asia pivot, Russia and the new Cold War, the Arab Spring, Cuba, and Latin America all receive much the same treatment. Cuban policy, for example, was "driven by real-politik" wherein capitalist forces in the US sought access "to new markets" (303). Like the "still angry after all those years" instigators of Obama's Libyan intervention, others of that ilk likely sought to avenge Kennedy's 1961 failed Bay of Pigs invasion.

Kuzmarov's brief concluding chapter seems almost like an afterthought, as though he was struggling at that point to make some sense of the purpose of his diatribe against Obama. He ineffectually attempts to marshal support from political economist Seymore Melman, former US Representative Jim Wright (D-TX), and Deepak Chopra, vaguely advising us only to embrace their vision of peace and "to articulate a constructive peace agenda capable of mobilizing thousands and thousands of people" (322).

Two appendices round out the work. One is a 1983 article written when Obama was a student at Columbia; the second is a real mud-slinger that alleges homosexual behavior, drug use, and even hints at murder.

In the end, the usefulness of the book is that it opens the door for further scholarly inquiry about many of the alleged misdeeds attributed to Obama, and it drives home the fact that it's simple to rally opposition to perceived oafs spouting cowboy diplomacy, but not so easy to see through the machinations of a sly fox like Obama. Readers should be aware that the book is generally unbalanced at best and downright injudicious at its worst, so it needs to be digested with a grain of salt. Again, what remains totally unclear in Kuzmarov's presentation of these events is what our nation's foreign policy goals were, why we took that course of action, and what we hoped to achieve by doing so. Satisfying the warmongers and lining the pockets of corporate America seems to be the only suggested answers in the book. I don't mean to suggest we're always right with our foreign policy decisions, or even mostly right, just that we might be right some of the time. Kuzmarov apparently thinks not. Those prone to embrace conspiracy theories will find fodder here for a decade of stimulation. Those looking for a balanced, scholarly evaluation of the Obama presidency will want to look elsewhere.



ED HAGERTY IS A FORMER USAF MEMBER AND RESERVE OFFICER WHO SERVED WITH THE AIR FORCE OFFICE OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS (OSI). HE RECEIVED THE DOCTORATE IN HISTORY FROM TEMPLE UNIVERSITY AND IS THE AUTHOR OF A HISTORY OF OSI PUBLISHED BY THAT ORGANIZATION AND OF COLLIS' ZOUAVES, A HISTORY OF A CIVIL WAR REGIMENT PUBLISHED BY LSU PRESS. HE IS THE BOOK REVIEW EDITOR FOR THE JOURNAL OF STRATEGIC SECURITY.



Donny Dump Draft Dodger 1966

BILL JOHNSTON

I noticed a poll the other day stating a "majority" of veterans supported Donald Trump. A mind blowing statistic too horrible to contemplate. For two very personal reasons I found what was reported disgusting and beyond any understanding. Why would any veterans support such a corrupt, immoral sexist and racist lying "scum-sucker?" (To use an appropriate USAF term).

Let me return you to the days of the military draft. It is February of 1966 and I have just lost my student deferment. I no longer have a II-S student draft registration—I am now 1A! After a chat with my local draft board lady, I was informed I would be drafted at the end of the academic year in June. I read after Trump became our UN-ELECTED president he lost his student deferral the same time I did.

Few Americans at this time realized how quickly the Johnson Administration was building up the military as they dug a deeper disastrous hole for themselves in Vietnam. This is how the system worked. You got drafted for two years—went to basic training—on to advanced infantry

training, handed an M-16 and shipped to Vietnam. By the end of the year, the casualty list grew by the hundreds and a total of 58,000 before the US was forced out.

I admit I was not against the war at this time but I did have questions. I come from a family that has not been able to avoid war-time military service since the American Revolution. I had two great grandfathers in the Union Army and my Dad was in the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. My brother was already in the Sea Bees in Vietnam. I joined the Air Force.

Donald Trump's father paid off a doctor to claim his boy had bone spurs and so was 4-F (medically deferred). I had friends who opposed the war and obtained objector status and worked in community based alternatives around the country. Unlike Trump, they were not dishonest nor were they cowards. A draftee in 1966 was on his way to a rice paddy weapon in hand for a year and we all knew it! TRUMP WAS A DESPICABLE COWARD!

About this time my brother was climbing a telephone pole just out of Da Nang Air Base when he was shot

at and had to jump from the top of the pole. His back never recovered. My nineteen-year-old brother Tim was killed in a shipboard accident on the USS Hancock. During this time Trump bragged because thousands of young men were in the military overseas he had more women available to have sex with here at home. Who votes or supports this loathsome creature? Yet I have noticed the VFW and American Legion invite him to their conventions every year and give him a wild welcome. Any veteran who supports Trump should hang their head in dishonor.

My working class parents "donated" four sons to the military during the Vietnam War. They lost one. Another was seriously injured for life. They did not have the financial resources to pay off a doctor to lie for any of us not did they lacked the morality the Trump family display they completely lack.

Even more despicable than Trump himself is the Republican Party. He is just the scum on the surface of a corrupt political organization. Why would any Veteran vote Republican?

Currently, all Veteran Benefit improvements are being held up by the right-wing Republican Senate. At no time in our history has the Republican Party supported Veterans. What they have done has been a "no questions asked give-a-way" to the military industrial complex Eisenhower warned us against as it eats up the majority of tax dollars while the infra-structure of our country falls apart.

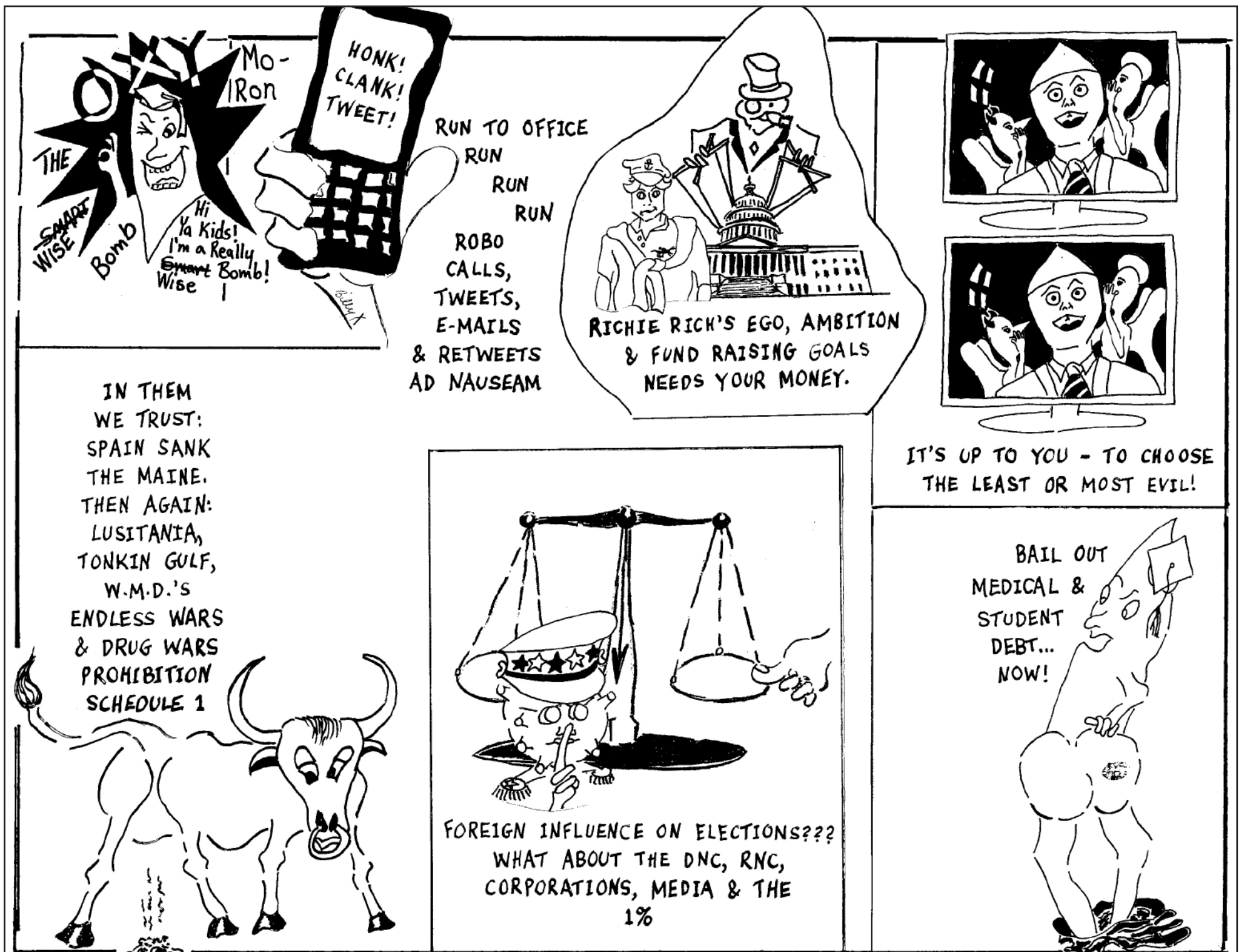
Is that what a majority of Veterans support? If they do someone is not getting the word out to them!



BILL JOHNSTON SERVED IN THE US AIR FORCE - 1966-70 - SGT.-LEGAL SPECIALIST WITH THE OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE. BACHELOR OF ARTS (HISTORY AND JOURNALISM), MASTER OF ARTS (POLITICAL SCIENCE) WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY. RETIRED STAFF - UNITED FOOD AND COMMERCIAL WORKERS UNION (AFL-CIO).



Operation Dewey Canyon IV, Washington, DC, May 1982.



Comments or suggestions? Contact Billy at billyx.net@gmail.com or visit him online at www.billyx.net.



THE VETERAN

SECTION D

Volume 50, Number 1

Spring 2020

The Roots of VVAW - Part 1

JAN BARRY AS TOLD TO RICHARD STACEWICZ

Excerpt from Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War by Richard Stacewicz, pages 192-197.

Jan Barry (JB): When I got out of the Army, in May of 1965, [I] flew back to upstate New York and immediately came to New Jersey. There was a girl here I had been writing to and therefore decided to come to this region looking for a job. I ended up getting a job for a newspaper that I'm actually working for now, in the library.

She went to a peace demonstration either in 1965 or early 1966 in New York. I wasn't in any way interested in going to this peace demonstration. She came back. I asked what happened, and she said some news person came up and asked why she was there and she really didn't have anything much to say. I remember being mad at her. "Well, why didn't you know why you were there? Why couldn't you say why you were there? Why couldn't you say what's wrong with the war?"

At that point, my sympathies were to research what was going on. I researched everything, from reading Mao Tse-tung in the original to what's behind their side of it, and whatever else I could get my hands on. I was taking college classes on Saturday, and I took economics. I did research into our economic relationship with South Vietnam. Out of this I learned that we were, in essence, turning it into an economic colony, turning a rice-exporting region into a place [where] we sell them rice. There were lots of articles in *Fortune* magazine and other kinds of places about these great deals that were being done.

I talked to people. Reporters started telling me they'd go out and interview the ones just coming back from Vietnam, [in] late 1965, early 1966, from the first larger wave that went in there, and "These guys are more bitter than you are."

At one point, I ran into one of these guys, and he was extremely bitter. He was the only survivor in a unit that was wiped out. He said "Why the hell should I prop up this rotten society?" He disappeared and no one ever heard from him again.

That was the thing that propelled me to organize something, realizing that there were all these angry guys out there, so turned off from their own society that it was frightening. Somebody had to articulate why that anger was there, what that bitterness was about. I didn't know how, but I had to learn how to do that.

I remember toward the end of 1966 I had finally reached a point of frustration. I decided to move to Manhattan and start looking for more compatible people. I didn't think [of] a peace movement. There were lots of people who were asking questions. They were thinking about raising the questions. None of these questions were visible in the news media that we worked for.

Things like "Johnson Goes on Peace Parley" would be the headline. You'd read the story, and it had nothing to do with a peace parley; it was a war parley. Everything was out of a Washington perspective. Even if the reporter from the *New York Times* or whatever was reporting from Saigon, the story got twisted around to be a Washington perspective. You learned how to read between the lines. The editors were doubting their own reporters in Vietnam. That

was very clear to me. It all added up to: The American public has no idea whatsoever of the reality. How do you convey that reality when everything seems to be closed up?

I walked into the New York Public Library main branch one day, asked for the personnel office, and said, "I'd like to work here." I took a pay cut and took the job, filing things and all the rest of the stuff.

I discovered there were all these students from all the various colleges in New York who worked there, and they were talking about something [that] was going to happen in the spring. They were so out of it. We're talking about young students who had no idea about anything. This didn't lead me to want to get involved with them until I saw an advertisement in the *New York Times Book Review* from the Veterans for Peace, saying, "If North Vietnam stops bombing us...we'll be ready to negotiate" or something like that. It turned the whole thing around. They weren't threatening us. "Join us, April 15th," I think it said, "at Central Park for the start of the march"—which was the first time, place, and invitation that I felt, Ah-hah, that appeals to me. I liked the way they turned the issue around, a twist on reality.

I went with a friend [and] several people from New Jersey. There was this mob scene. There was a huge number of people at Central Park, from Columbus Circle all the way back as far as you could see. One of the stories of the peace movement that still hasn't really been told was the diversity. It wasn't just this hippie image that has determined the legend. This demonstration that I'm seeing for the first time was full of families in their Sunday best and younger people. This was pre-hippie. People in 1967 still had straight, narrow ties. Look at all the civil rights people and the peace movement people of the time: suits and ties, short hair. I went there wearing a suit and tie and a raincoat.

As we're standing there wondering what to do next, there's this big cry, "Vietnam veterans to the front!" There's this huge group of disciplined people marching, wearing Veterans for Peace hats. At the beginning of this group of veterans someone had provided a banner, hoping some Vietnam veterans would show up. It said, "Vietnam Veterans Against the War." There were some guys already carrying the banner and there were some guys behind them. I just joined that group.

There were some young guys in parts of uniform, or suits and ties, and some women and children. I

don't think there were more than a dozen Vietnam veterans and some family members; but behind them—which to me at the time was far more impressive—was like a regimental size, I think 2,000 guys, marching in military formation wearing Veterans for Peace hats.

When we proceeded out of the park and down through Fifth Avenue and through the various other streets, people were ready to lynch, howling and screaming and throwing things. First they see a little group of dignitaries, which apparently included Martin Luther King, Jr., Dave Dellinger, A. J. Muste, and a couple of other people carrying an American flag. They're way out there by themselves taking all this abuse. Then, there's this little band of people carrying a sign, "Vietnam Veterans Against the War." You heard this sea change in the crowd. "What is this? Is that for real? [Angry tone.] It can't even be for real. This has got to be a joke." Then behind that, this group that clearly is veterans. "What!" I mean, this isn't what they expected. "Who are these people? If they're involved, I've got to rethink my opposition to all these people, hollering and screaming at them." You literally could feel and hear a change in these sidewalk crowds. Of course, behind that came a crowd that was so huge [that] they filled up all the streets in midtown Manhattan over to the UN and blocked all the traffic. The entire plaza in front of the UN was filled. All the side streets were filled, and people were still coming.

The march on April 15, 1967, brought together numerous pacifist and leftwing organizations to form the first mass mobilization against the war. It was estimated that between 200,000 and 400,000 people marched in the rain in New York, while another 50,000 marched in San Francisco. As Charles De Benedetti has commented in his book An American Ordeal, "Thousands of people found a way to express unity beyond the divisions." The media though, tended to focus on the newly emerging counterculture in the movement, rather than on the kinds of people—evidently the majority—described by Jan Barry.

JB: Then everybody left. I started asking around, "What happened to that veterans' group?" I found out when Veterans for Peace had a meeting, went to that meeting, and I discovered that there was no Vietnam veterans' group. They initially said, "You should join us." I thought that we would make more of an impression upon people,

we'd have a better ability to articulate to people what's going on in Vietnam, if we stand as a Vietnam veterans' organization. I simply started asking where any other Vietnam veterans were.

By June 1st . . . we actually had our first organization meeting. I had names of maybe two dozen people. We formed an organization utilizing the same name that was on the banner. Dave Braum designed the logo, which we talked about. "Let's take that patch that has the sword going through the Great Wall of China, and put the rifle with the helmet on it, which symbolized a dead GI. We're filling the Great Wall of China with dead GIs!" There was symbolism!

We started off with a structure that had officers and bylaws and very few people. The only titles we had were for the paperwork: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer. I didn't utilize that in most of the organizing. I would just say I was a member of the national executive committee. I did this deliberately so that somebody couldn't decide they could pop me off. I had seen a few assassinations going on. I thought, I'm not going to be a target. Somebody thinks they could just kill me and that's the end of the organization. In addition, my own sense of organizing was that these guys don't want one person telling them what to do. What they need is a process in which empowerment takes place.

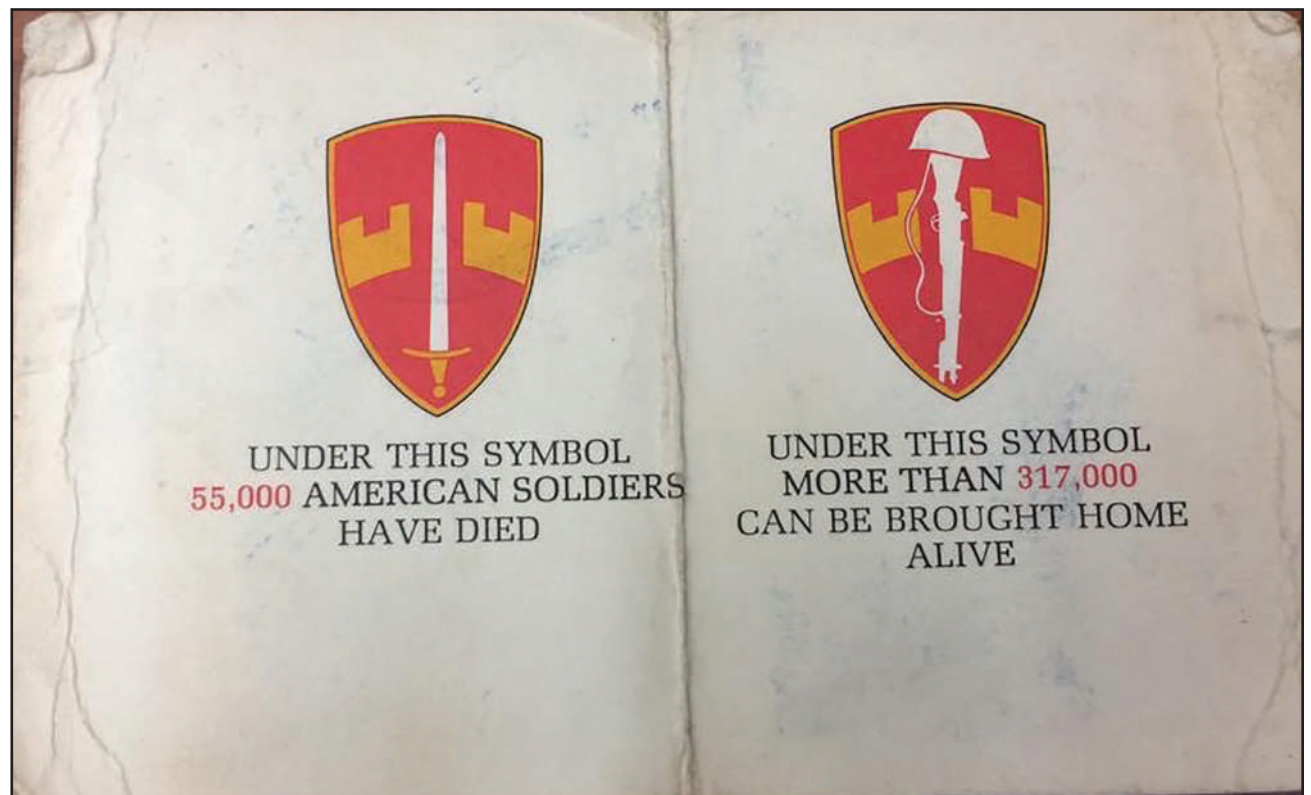
One of the things that I find astounding about this whole process is, I think, that this society provides these ready-made forms of democracy that are there if you want to use them. So without even thinking about it, we formed a democratic organization rather than an autocratic organization.

Our first office was a desk in the corner of the Fifth Avenue Peace Parade Committee. We had support from Veterans for Peace. Many of us went to their meetings. They utilized their fund-raising network to raise money and get us off the ground. It was a lot of money. By 1968, we took an office of our own on Fifth Avenue.



To be continued in next issue of *The Veteran*

Copies of *Winter Soldiers* can be purchased through Haymarket Books at www.haymarketbooks.org/books/859-winter-soldiers.



One of the original VVAW flyers.

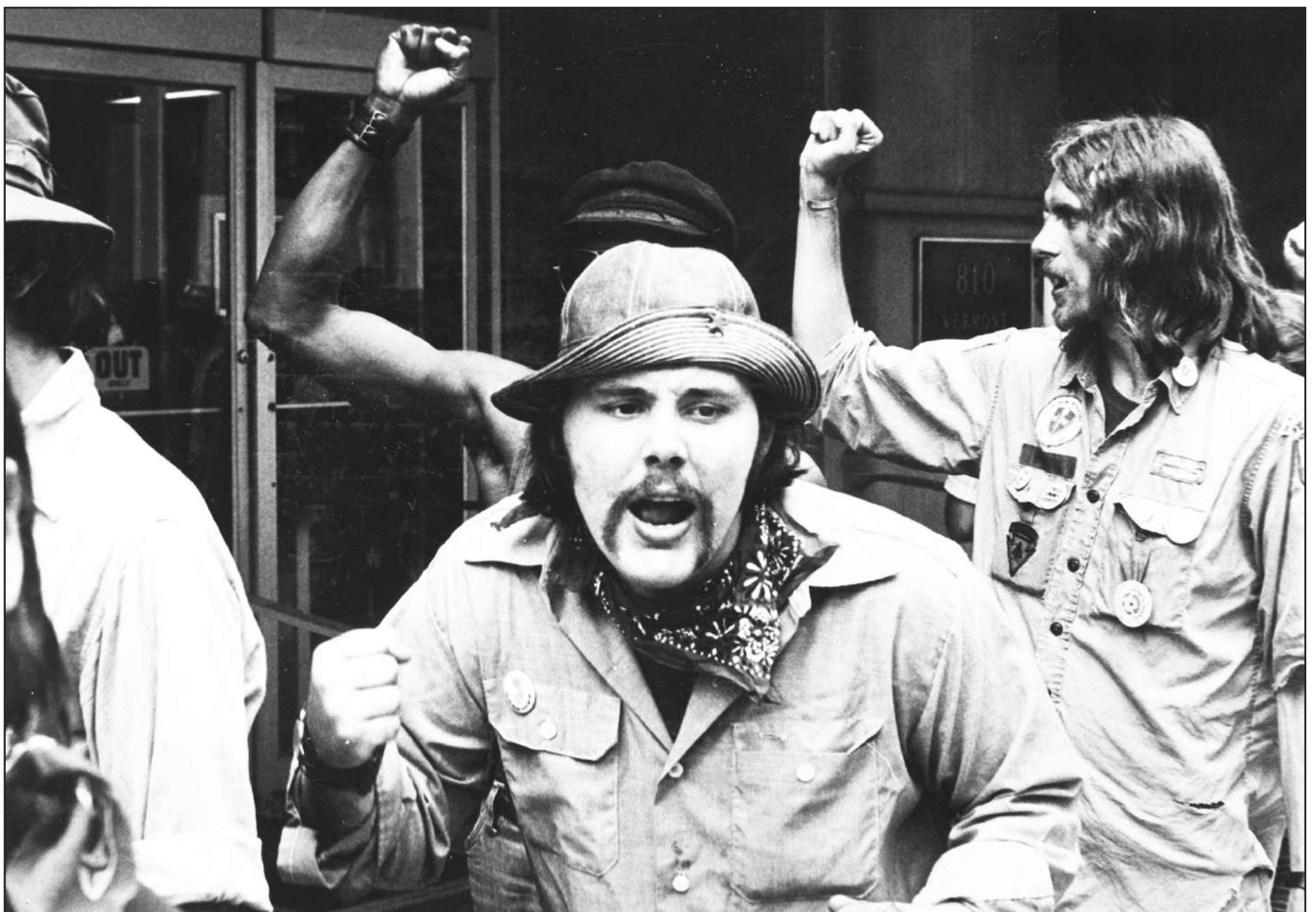
a military mythology

mass murder deployed from a position of strength
 preserving the peace by promising total destruction
 Trident floating silos of death
 when you want to murder millions of people find
 a weapon that will not be destroyed by counter-weapons
 focus on the weapons system but not on the human system

get rid of the idea of winning
 with no bones left to bury who will be left to apologize
 20 million degrees fahrenheit melts reality
 no one will be left to say we are the last generation
 no one will inhale the dust of the bodies into their nostrils
 Dexter Gordon prophesized that in a nuclear war all men are cremated equal

the bomb doesn't just have the last word
 the bomb ends the word

—Larry Kerschne



2015: At Vietnam's 40th Anniversary of Independence Day Parade

So beautiful were the faces in the sun's early light, and so young,
 parading with their colorful banners flying above their heads—
 reds, blues, whites, gold—and each so different!

I sit in the bandstand and watch each assemblage pass by—
 round, brown faces from one of the far provinces, lighter
 brown faces and taller bodies from one of the others,
 peasants and farmers and students, young children in
 school uniforms, old veterans from a war, marching in unison, struggling to keep up, brightly
 costumed villagers
 donning exotic hats and playing strange instruments
 as they walk, peasant women and women soldiers
 with hoes and rifles and wide smiles, young men and boys
 and fathers strutting past with medals draped on
 their pressed greens, rifles slung from their shoulders
 and singing battle hymns...

For a flash, I go to put my hand over my heart—
 then I realize this is not my country, not my anthem,
 not my flag—

but oh how I wished it could've been—all the young
 enthusiasm and hope of a new, free world—
 how I was, once, at seventeen or eighteen,

before this, or any war.

—r g cantalupo

From Pennridge to Vietnam: What I Knew and Didn't Know

W. D. EHRHART

A talk I gave to the students of my old high school, Pennridge, Perkasio, PA, 52 years after I graduated.

Let me start by telling you that I am a 1966 graduate of Pennridge High School. I am also a veteran of the American War in Vietnam. I was not drafted. I volunteered for the US Marine Corps when I was 17 years old, went to Vietnam when I was 18 years old, and earned the rank of sergeant by the time I was 19 & ½ years old. I was wounded in combat, and eventually received the Good Conduct Medal and an Honorable Discharge.

My first memories of television, back in 1966, were of Soviet tanks crushing the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. I'd seen and heard Nikita Khrushchev pounding his shoe on the podium at the UN while shouting, "We will bury you." I'd awakened one morning to the Berlin Wall, and I'd lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis. When Lyndon Johnson said that if we didn't fight the Reds in Vietnam, we'd be fighting them on Waikiki Beach, it sounded very much as if my country needed me.

I didn't know that Franklin Roosevelt had all-but-handed Eastern Europe over to the Soviets at Yalta in 1945. Or that the Soviet Union had lost as many people in WWII as all other nations combined, and was not about to see this slaughter repeated in another war with the West. Or that the Soviet Union was, by 1962, completely encircled by US nuclear ballistic missiles. Most of all, I did not know that what was happening in Vietnam had nothing to do with whatever worldwide struggle between communism and capitalism was actually taking place. I did not know that Ho Chi Minh had spent a lifetime trying to free his country from foreign domination. That the Americans had simply replaced colonial France in that struggle. That in fact Ho Chi Minh was deftly playing Russians and Chinese off against each other in order to navigate between them and pursue his own agenda, which remained what it had always been: independence for his country. I did not know that the nation I thought I was defending from the scourge of communism—the Saigon-based Republic of Vietnam—never really existed. I did not know that Vietnam posed no danger to my country, nor that I was in danger only because I'd gone half way around the world to make trouble for the Vietnamese. Interestingly enough, as soon as I went home, the Vietnamese communists stopped trying to kill me. But I digress.

Because of what I did not know when I got to Vietnam, imagine my confusion when I discovered that the people I was sent to help didn't welcome me with open arms, didn't seem to like me, didn't seem to want me there or appreciate my help. But as my thirteen months in Vietnam slowly ground forward, I regularly witnessed and participated in the destruction of civilian homes, the most brutal interrogations of civilians, and the routine killing of men, women, and children along with their crops and livestock. And I began to realize that the Vietnamese people hated us because we destroyed their forests with chemical defoliants, burned their fields with napalm, flattened their villages with 500-pound bombs, and called them gooks, chinks, slopes, dinks, and zipperheads while turning their sons into shoeshine boys and their daughters into whores. No wonder my so-called allies and brothers-in-arms, the South Vietnamese army, seemed to be indifferent cowards with no will to fight while my enemies, the Viet

Cong, seemed willing to fight to the bitter end, though they possessed only the most rudimentary of resources.

I once, for instance, killed a man in an ambush who was dressed in a thin cotton shirt and pants with sandals made from discarded tires (we called them Ho Chi Minh sandals). He had in one pocket a few balls of rice wrapped in a banana leaf. His weapon was a 1936 French bolt action MAS-36 with a bent hide-away bayonet, a stock held together with wire, and a bamboo strip to replace the leather sling that had rotted away a decade or more earlier. He had five bullets, and the barrel of his rifle was so pitted that I dared not fire it for fear it would explode in my face. And that is how that man had gone out to do battle with the most powerful army on earth.

. . . when I got to Vietnam, imagine my confusion when I discovered that the people I was sent to help didn't welcome me with open arms . . .

You can kill people like that, but you cannot defeat them.

One has to wonder why one side that seems to have everything going for it won't fight while the other side that has nothing going for it won't surrender, and I sure as heck did wonder. But I had no way to find my way through the myriad welter of information and experience that was pouring in on me as my time in Vietnam unfolded. It simply did not make sense. Nothing made sense. It was all just crazy. Or seemed so.

I returned to the United States from Vietnam in March 1968. I spent the next two years and two months trying to convince myself that it didn't matter to me what was happening in Vietnam anymore because I was out of it, and I still had all ten fingers and all ten toes; it was no longer my problem.

Then in early May 1970, soldiers of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on students protesting the war at Kent State University, murdering four of them and leaving another permanently paralyzed. The news stunned me. It wasn't enough to send us halfway around the world to die, I thought; now our own government was killing us in the streets of our own country.

That was the day I joined the anti-war movement. It was also the day I set out to discover what was happening in Vietnam and why. What I discovered was even more shocking than what had happened at Kent State.

I learned that Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh army had been allies of the US in fighting Japan during the second World War, that American OSS officers had worked with Ho, training and equipping his men. I learned that State Department diplomat Abbott Moffat had spent time with Ho, and had determined that Ho was first and foremost a nationalist, and urged the US to support Ho's bid for independence from French colonial rule. I learned that instead, the US had supported France's war to retake its colony, paying 80 per cent of the cost of the French War, and when France finally threw in the towel, I learned, the US had plucked an obscure Vietnamese Catholic mandarin from a Maryknoll seminary in New Jersey and set him up to be the leader of South Vietnam, a nation invented by none other than the United States.

I learned that the regime this man, Ngo Dinh Diem, created was no more democratic than Ho Chi Minh's regime in North Vietnam, nor—when Diem failed and was overthrown by

a US-backed coup d'etat—were his successor military governments any more concerned with democracy. I learned that the attack on the USS Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin in early August 1964 was not unprovoked, the Maddox was not operating in international waters but within the territorial waters of North Vietnam in support of combat operations against North Vietnam, and the Johnson Administration knew it at the time. The second attack a few days later never actually happened, and the Johnson Administration knew it at the time. The Johnson Administration knowingly and flagrantly lied to the American people and the Congress of the United States. This is not speculation. This is fact, provable by examining the documents compiled

at the order of Robert McNamara himself and commonly known as the *Pentagon Papers*.

I learned a whole lot more than these few facts, but time does not permit me to give you complete history lesson. If you're interested, you might read Marilyn Young's *The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990*, which is by far the best single-volume history of the war.

But perhaps the most important thing I learned about is the long history of China and Vietnam. From the 2nd century BCE to the 10th century AD, China occupied and ruled Vietnam. Maps of China all through this long millennium show what was then Vietnam, extending down as far as Hue, as a province of China. The Vietnamese saw things differently, however. All through this period, there was rebellion after rebellion after rebellion—the Trung Sisters, Li Bi, Ly Tu Tien & Dinh Tien, Mai Thuc Loan, Phung Hung, Duong Thanh, or Hwang Chao—all led rebellions, and all were crushed, until finally in 938 the Vietnamese rebelled yet another time, and this time succeeded in defeating their Chinese occupiers and throwing them out. Three successive Chinese invasions, along with two Mongol invasions and a Siamese invasion, were all defeated over the next nine centuries before the arrival of the French on Vietnamese shores. A thousand years of resistance to Chinese occupation, nine hundred years of successfully defending Vietnamese independence, and—what I have not yet mentioned but will now—immediate and unceasing resistance to French colonization even before French rule had been fully consolidated.

The US began to intervene in Vietnam in 1945, first by proxy via the French, then from 1954 to 1965 through increasing levels of direct support to a succession of dictatorships in South Vietnam, and finally by direct insertion of US combat troops on a massive scale. Within three years of the arrival of the first Marines in 1965, the American people were growing skeptical of the war. Within five years, huge numbers of Americans wanted the war to end. Within seven years, most Americans no longer cared what happened in and to Vietnam so long as young Americans stopped dying there.

The Vietnamese resisted Chinese domination for a millennium. For one thousand years. Americans were tired of it within a decade. When you understand that the Vietnamese were

prepared to fight us for as long as it took: 10 years, 50 years, 500 years; when you understand that there never would come a time when the Vietnamese would lay down their arms, accept foreign domination, register Republican, and go shopping at the mall, the idea that Americans could ever have won the Vietnam War becomes, quite frankly, chimerical, absurd, even ridiculous.

Let me tell you about an interesting evening I spent in post-war Hanoi in 1985. I was having dinner with two old North Vietnamese generals who between them had six stars and 85 years of experience with war and fighting. When I learned that one of them had commanded a unit fighting against the Marines at an outpost where I'd been stationed called Con Thien, I asked him what he thought of the Marines.

"You were—brave," he'd replied, a twinkle in his voice.

"You are too diplomatic," I'd said. "Seriously, what did you think of us?"

"Your fixed positions were useless," the general replied. "And you were too dependent on your helicopters and air support. You did not know how to become one with the land, and so you sacrificed true mobility for a false sense of security."

"Would it have mattered if we had done things differently?" I had asked.

"No," he'd replied after a pause. "Probably not. History was not on your side. We were fighting for our homeland. What were you fighting for?"

After an even longer pause, the only honest answer I could give him was, "Nothing that mattered." And indeed, though the communists won and the US was sent ignominiously packing, the world did not come to an end, the universe did not implode, all of you are still able to worship in the church of your choice and marry whomever you like and think whatever you want to think.

Not only that, but the US and Vietnam are now great friends. The Vietnamese government and military receive financial and technical aid from the US. The US and Vietnam regularly hold joint naval exercises. Just recently, the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson paid a port call to Da Nang, the first place in Vietnam where US Marine combat forces had come ashore in March 1965.

Why are the US and Vietnam so chummy these days? Because the US needs all the help it can get to counter the rising influence of China in Southeast Asia. But the question should not be "why are we so chummy these days," but rather why didn't US policymakers know enough in the 1940s and 1950s and 1960s to realize that we could have made Vietnam an ally over 70 years ago, saving millions of Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and Americans a whole lot of blood and grief and treasure.

And it makes me wonder what obvious realities and truths are US policymakers missing in the world today as we wage war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and elsewhere in the Muslim and Arab worlds. What preconceived notions and arrogant assumptions are US policymakers making today that will appear, in the cold light of history, to be sheer folly and head-shaking stupidity?

You might want to ponder all that before you thank me for my service.



BILL EHRHART IS A MARINE VETERAN OF THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM, AND A LIFE MEMBER OF VVAW.

Young Man Goes To War

ALLEN LEONARD MEECE

I enlisted in the US Navy in 1962. I joined to learn a trade and see the sea. I did not join the service to kick ass halfway around the world at the whim of big shots who control the government and hate socialists of any kind.

I trust in peace but I'm not a peacenik. I would gladly defend democracy with a gun if my country were invaded by armed forces. Damn right. But today it seems that American democracy is being attacked by unarmed internal forces like those big merchants who love fascism, the system that marries government with commerce and strives to control the lives of consumers and producers worldwide. I can't force them to behave but I can right their lies and vote carefully. They hate that. They rig elections to fight the smart votes.

I would not have donated four years of my life had I known that the Central Intelligence Agency was violently enforcing the big shots' goals and covertly provoking war against the Vietnamese who had defeated the French capitalists eight years earlier and were now displaying the nerve to try to run their own country. "Oh no you don't," said the sneaky bunch whose career assignment was, and always will be until they're abolished, to exploit every sovereign nation in the world by helping the big corporations to politically and commercially dominate mankind. [Now you know what the slogan, "protecting American values" means.]

The CIA began their Vietnam War with "Operational Plan 34A." It's gone now but its principles of destabilization are still working where countries took their oil resources away from big oil big shots. It's a dirty tricks campaign of sabotage and anonymous acts of war. Those barbarous crimes were deceitfully termed "military conflicts." Subservient US advertisers' media accepted that fake phrase like a sizzling filet mignon on a platter. "Mmmmm, free news," they lazily said. "Don't need to check it or pay a reporter on the scene. Boom! Just

copy it down in your own words and you've got a cheap news story that people will have to believe because it's 'authoritative.' We can treat it like it's the pure, unadulterated, truth."

So, in 1962, there was not one jot of public information about such a huge thing as my country creating a war of great death. On that basis, I joined the military. Two years later, I found myself shooting PT boats in the Tonkin Gulf.

In *Tin Can* my current Vietnam naval novel on Amazon.com, I describe how it felt to be an innocent kid riding a destroyer through the night toward a military conflict: "What's a conflict? Fencing? Jousting with cushioned lances? Suction cup arrows and rubber bullets? Maybe it's like war movies with explosions that can't kill anybody and misses the good guys. Movies show and confirm that we'll be okay because we're the good guys." I hadn't learned yet that movies are just another corporate media.

Near Da Nang, my ship dropped anchor in the war zone in 1964. We pulled hazardous duty pay, twenty-five dollars a month for the risk of being killed. That's how much they thought of our contribution. We parked the ship five nautical miles offshore from the lovely hills of Vietnam and began pumping five-inch shells into the leafy canopy. We received three hot meals a day, slept on clean sheets, and we had a free coke machine. The machinist mates couldn't keep it working and it dispensed warm brown syrup. Disgusted users would leave their coke cups all over the ship and this angered the Executive Officer, the second-in-command of a warship shooting at people in a self-proclaimed war zone. He wrote this in his Orders of the Day, "Due to paper cups littering the ship, the coke machine is no longer free but charges one nickel per drink."

It was stupid and it was wrong, period. Crew members couldn't admit what they were doing. They ignored the gun mounts banging on the steel bulkheads around them.

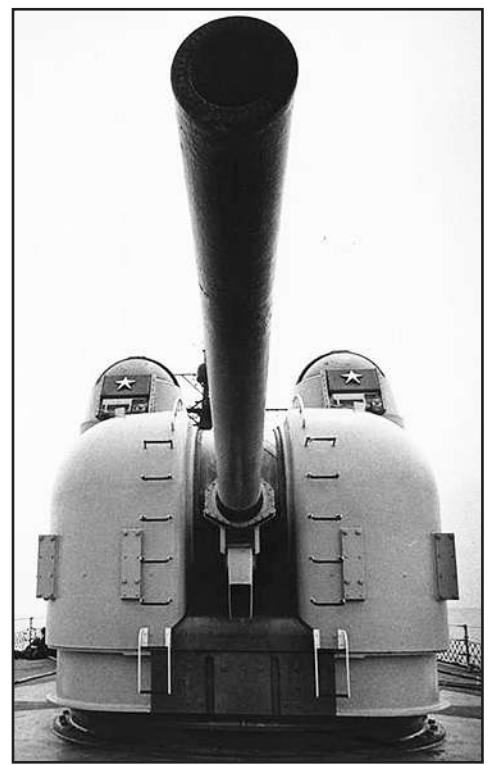
In *Tin Can*, chapter 3, *Tonkin Gulf*, I describe the mood onboard the ship during shore gunfire support: "... the USS Abel bombarded the rainforest for six days and no one talked about the gunnery. The crew ate and slept and worked to the jolt of big-bore rifles firing heavy projectiles every ten minutes. There was nothing you could say or do about it. It was Navy policy to shoot people in the woods. Their destroyer was doing what it was meant to do; destroying life and property, consisting of huts, canoes and maybe a few tricycles, maybe children on them, you couldn't tell from way out here.

"At noon on the seventh day the gunfire stopped. Jack and Obie went up to the flying bridge to survey the results: None. The puffy green jungle parasol had swallowed the Abel's shots like popcorn farts."

Then I wanted out of the service. Enlisted people weren't allowed to voluntarily quit. We could volunteer to get in but not to get out. Even after the military moved the goalposts way outside the park of human decency, anyone could legally shoot us if we walked away from a war zone, even if it was an insane war in a fake zone. You got killed or you got a discharge. Involuntary servitude means Total Ownership. Not Partial, Total.

When I say I was in Vietnam, I quickly add that I was in the Navy, the offshore "blue water Navy." The usual image from the Vietnam War is of firestorms in the jungle. It wasn't like that in my Navy. We fought by remote control. I did not realize back then that I was getting a guilty conscience from the experience of crewing a ship that was killing unseen people for months from a safe distance. It induced a subconscious post-traumatic disorder that turned into twenty-five years of chronic drunkenness for which I apologize to all whom I hurt or baffled. It won't happen again to me or any generation of good young people, I sincerely hope.

The United States ship took me



5-inch, 54-caliber naval gun
(US Naval Historical Center Photograph).

where I wasn't wanted, the Tonkin Gulf, and made me fight for my life to get out safely. That's the pathetic simplicity of war. The answer is; don't sign up to let the owners carry you where you don't belong. Make the greedy freaks of commerce leave other people alone. It's not rocket science. Unless warriors threaten your borders with weapons, leave them the flock alone. Fear the horror of an unjustified war more than you fear those whom the owners will call "Those People," the "sub-human socialists" and those whom your handlers give you some peanuts to make disappear.

All I could do, much later, was to write a darn good literary novel that got it off my chest and helped me feel better. In the book, I imagined that I fomented a mutiny and took my warship out of that long, slow-motion atrocity called, by the people who bore it, the Vietnam American War.



FORMER PETTY OFFICER ALLEN MEECE WAS IN THE THIRD TONKIN GULF INCIDENT AND WROTE *TIN CAN*, AVAILABLE AT AMAZON.COM.

Lethal Betrayal: The Purple Heart We Never Got

When I left Vietnam as a soldier, I processed out at Cam Ranh Bay, like so many thousands of others returning to the United States.

My group was assigned to a large transit barracks. We were there for a couple of days dealing with all of the paperwork, and we all had to be tested for traces of heroin in our urine.

We were called out the next day, and those who tested positive had to stay in Vietnam for a couple of extra weeks to be treated in a shake and bake addiction treatment program.

What I remember the most about the 2-3 days we were in Cam Ranh Bay was the graffiti that was written on the walls of that transit barracks. It was written on every square inch of those walls. American soldiers were expressing everything they had stuffed during the year they were in Vietnam. The anger and rage they had suppressed toward their government and President Richard Nixon came pouring out of their souls. Their truth was extraordinarily articulate as any profound piece of writing I have ever read. They all felt used by their government for absolutely no reason, except for war profiteering. They all had hate for the politicians who sent them there. This is a microcosm of

history that has long been forgotten. It is all down the memory hole of the tragedy of the Vietnam War.

The last day I was in that transit barracks, a soldier in the bottom bunk next to me, got up from a drinking blackout and pissed on the wall against that graffiti. For me, that was a powerful moment of encapsulating the entire atrocity of the Vietnam War.

Far more Vietnam veterans have committed suicide than were killed during the war.

Many of my friends did not die in Vietnam, but as a result of being there.

During the year I was in An Khe, Vietnam, I not only saw dead and wounded American soldiers being brought in by helicopters, but I saw the end result of US soldiers committing suicide and homicides, along with rampant heroin addiction.

This is the legacy of that god awful war against Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. For every US soldier killed, there were 100 indigenous people killed by the United States Government.

When I left Cam Ranh Bay, the graffiti and the piss on the wall didn't lie...

Lying is the most powerful weapon in war.

—Mike Hastie, Army Medic Vietnam



Kill Today, So Tomorrow Will Not Come (excerpt)

R G CANTALUPO

In May, 1970, I was in a hospital in Yokohama, Japan, when I heard the news of the Kent State shooting. With the acceptance of the shooting came the realization of my own psychological pain and fear of coming home. This is a description of what I was going through during that time.

Against the black, moonless night and the distant snow-capped mountain, I could see the bare branches of a large tree out the second-floor, hospital window.

The bare branches sketched onto the mountain's vast white mound like lifelines on a palm. Spare, without leaves or buds, the branches looked like frayed wire.

Frayed synaptic connections reaching toward the nothingness in the dark sky of my brain: The severed synapses in my frontal lobe, cauterized by the red-hot pieces of shrapnel piercing my skull and liquidating my frontal lobe's soft flesh, no longer connected to emotional memories.

Janice, my mother, my friends, my past life before Vietnam, gone, liquidated into nothingness in the wormhole created by the shrapnel's path.

No wonder I want to climb up Mount Fujiyama and lie down in the snow.

White on white, a severed synapse frozen in time, unable to connect with what is gone.

Janice, my wife, my first love, making sweet love; our birthdays, our Christmases, the love at first sight moment we touched eyes; joyous moments, heartbreaking moments; the miscarriage and death of our child—Rose we were going to call her—Rose after my Aunt Rose who gave my mother the money to leave New York, to leave my abusive, war-haunted father and buy a bus ticket to California, to start a new life—gone, gone, gone, like Devil, like Lonny, like Baby San; two pieces of shrapnel inside my brain, no larger than the BB's I shot birds with when I was twelve; tiny wormholes in my brain like wormholes in an apple, the pink blossom of my frontal lobe riddled with empty space where memories

of Janice and my mother used to be.

Janice, Janice standing at the gate of FTA Airlines.

An air kiss blown to me as I turn toward the long ramp heading toward the open door.

Janice's face juxtaposed over mine in the night ward's transparent window.

My face. Hers. Translucent in this glass.

Our faces appearing and disappearing by a simple shift of my head; a slight turn and we are double-exposed, transparent, and then gone.

Beyond, black night, bare branches reaching up toward the distant, snow-capped mountain.

New buds nub the branches; white snow now gone from the mountain's foot; black ground sifting into gray-white snow, and then on up into pure whiteness, holding our transparent faces like thin, skeletal hands in the window.

Janice. Janice and I. Held. Buds sprouting from our lips, noses, eyes.

Janice blowing a kiss.

A kiss made of air, a dream image translucent in the window; thin, skeletal, cherry tree hands holding our faces, and close by Panda's moans, "Ooooh, ooh, ooh..." in the bed beside me; and far off, in another dream, Janice moaning, "ooh, ooh, ooh..."

Oh, Janice, Janice. I cannot hold your face.

If I shift, I lose you. If I close and open my eyes, your face vanishes from the glass.

By day, the buds rise on the pink, bark skin.

The branches wave in the gentle breeze, wave as ghostly hands might wave.

On the way to Sonoma, grape vines waved at us from the highway as we drove past.

Our honeymoon?

No.

After.

Before I got drafted.

We drove up to the wine country, though neither of us could drink, or visit the wine-tasting bars because we were too young.

We just drove past up into

redwood country. Sun and shadows flickered through the car's windows, a kaleidoscope of shapes and shades on our skin.

I touched Janice's bare thigh and slid my palm up along her soft flesh. Warm. Warm.

She's so young, so beautiful. Her blue eyes are moist with love.

My palm moves up to her breast.

Janice, my cock stirs in my pajamas, rises.

The buds on the cherry tree rise like nipples.

Janice. Janice.

And then she's gone, gone into the blue sky, gone beyond the budding branches and into the melting snow-capped Mount Fujiyama.

My palm sweats from her imagined thigh; my cock's hard from phantom love.

Pink now, the buds blossoming open.

Tiny pink flowers opening against Mount Fuji's black foot.

Each day the snow melts a little more and the blossoms burst open against the bright, turquoise sky.

Pink like Janice's pink cheeks when I kissed her long and full, when we made love and she came and I came and we shuddered together and hugged and held and loved so voraciously to hold back the dawn; the day I would leave, walk up the ramp to the plane and sit down in a window seat and search, search for her one more time; still searching for her as the plane rolled and turned toward the runway, toward the Pacific sea and Vietnam; lifting up into the clouds and gone, gone to a war neither of us understood; loving so hard that last night my lips hurt from kissing as I sit back in the seat and close my eyes and imagine her—as I still imagine her—as I will always imagine her.

Pink blossoms, pink like Janice's skin, like Janice's pink cheeks as she blushed the first time I told her I loved her.

Pink cherry blossoms and pink skin—oh how I want to touch her tonight, to embrace her pink warmth—pink like a newborn's cheeks; like our unborn daughter; like the pink skin of the open wound on my forearm.

Birth, death, rebirth, the green buds bursting open into pink blossoms, and I, this new I, crowning from my brain-damaged mind; this I without emotional memory, without love, self-love, hope; this I who holds a Zippo flame to my skin to feel real, who blossoms pink blisters from my skin; pink to red, red, pink deepening into red, into blood, wounded dreams, bleeding friends; pink night-terrors covered over with pink rice paddy blood; turning into pink mud, into Lonny's blood, into Devil's, into Baby San's; pink flowers bursting from their arms, legs, mouths, eyes, heads; pink blossoms birthing from the pinkish brown branches, rising up against the white, snow-capped mountain, against the white, empty, blank spaces in my mind.

Birth, death, rebirth—this I born on the killing field, and gone; gone into the spider hole, into the mortar pit, into this dark place.

Pink petals raining down, down, down.

Birth, death, rebirth—oh how I wish I could roll out of the hospital, roll down the sidewalk and be gone, down onto the grass, down under the cherry tree as the petals fall and fall, raining down on my face, my eyes, my life.

Oh, bury me under a blanket of pink cherry blossoms.

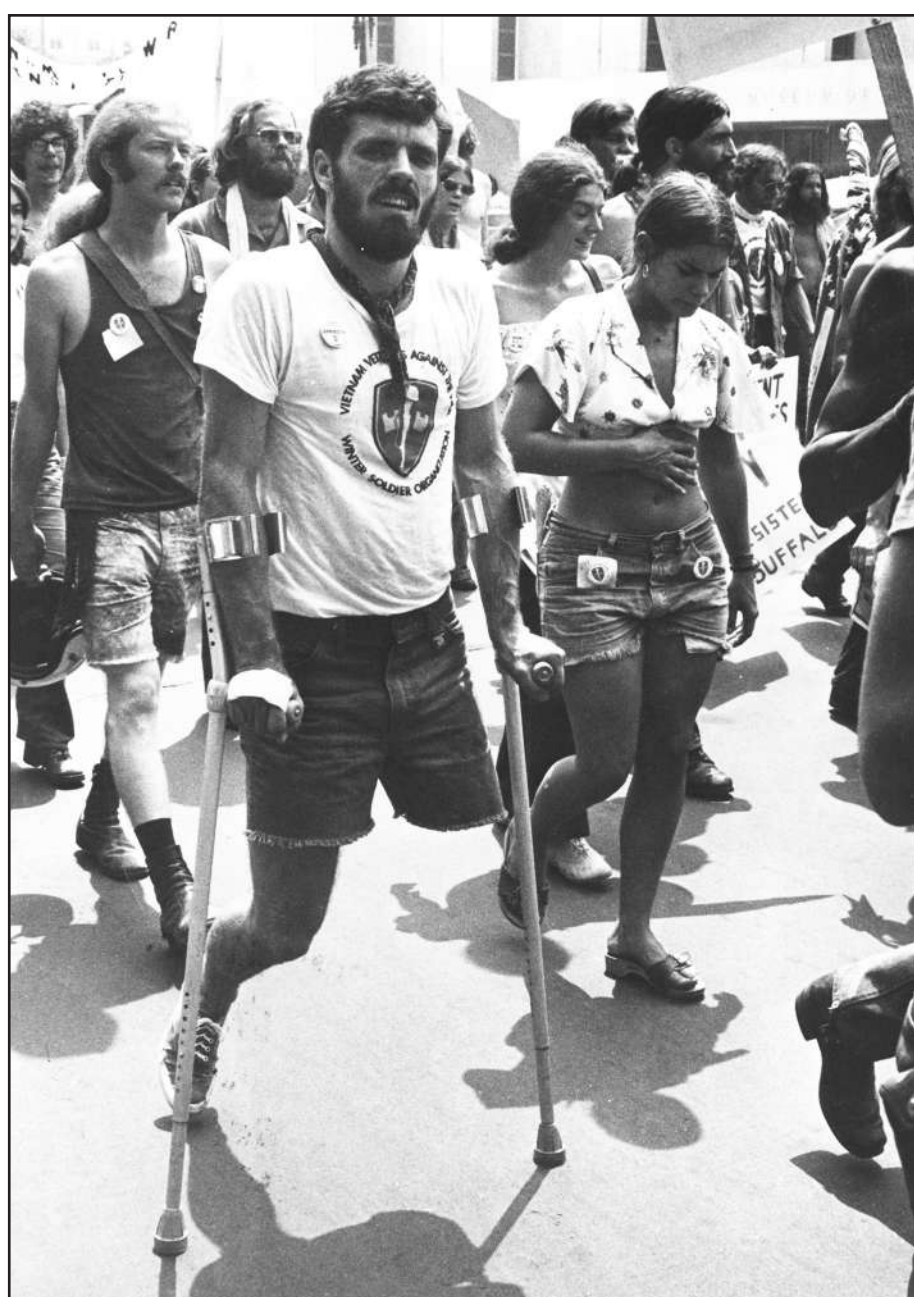
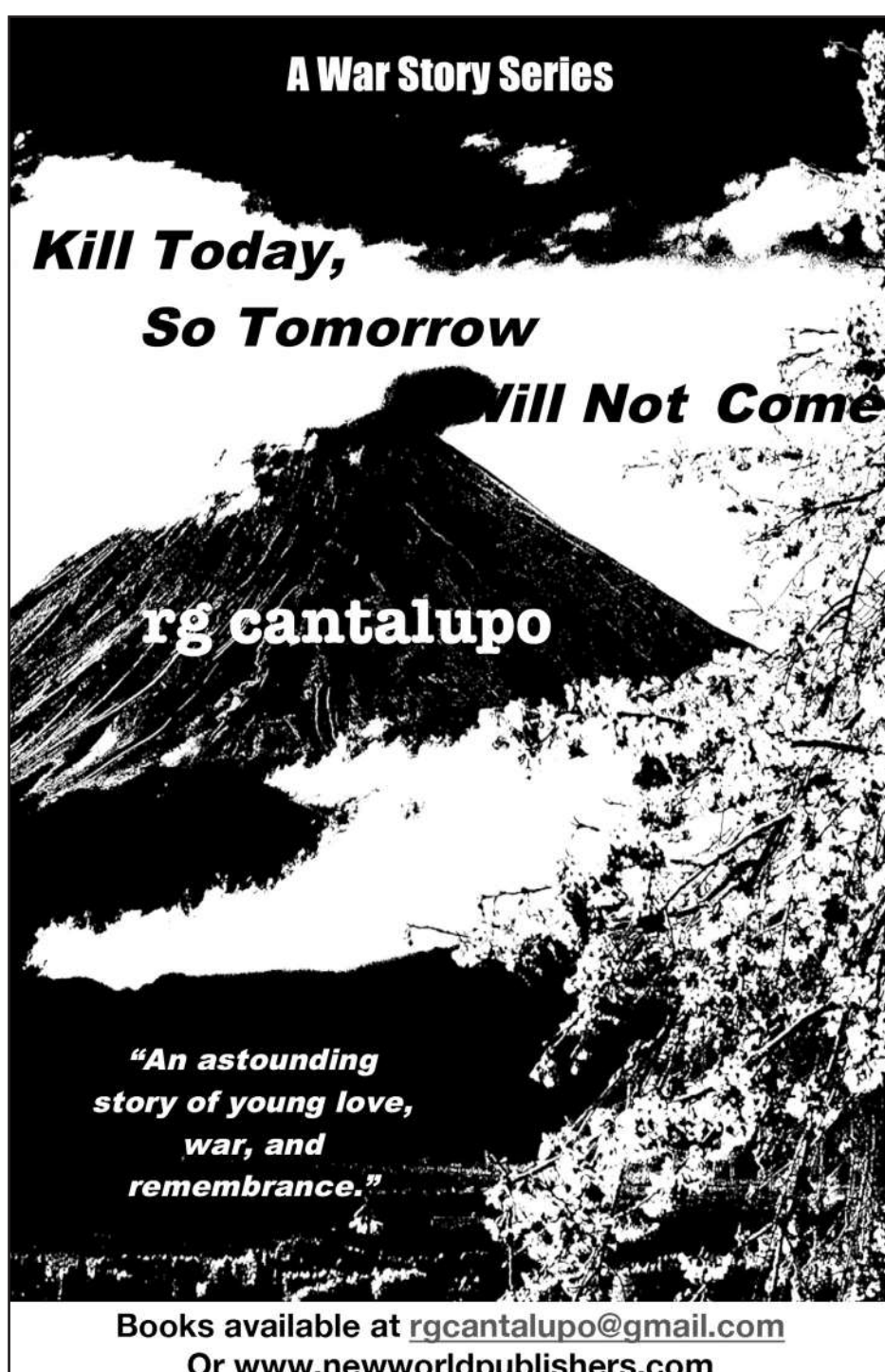
Oh, let me lie naked under the pink petals falling, falling like pink snow, thousands of pink petals falling like pink snowflakes kissing my skin.

I want to wash my body with their fragrant, pink kisses.

I want to cleanse my dreams with their sweet, pink breath.



RG CANTALUPO, (ROSS CANTON), IS A POET, PLAYWRIGHT, FILMMAKER, NOVELIST, AND DIRECTOR. HIS WORK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED WIDELY IN LITERARY JOURNALS IN THE UNITED STATES, ENGLAND, AND AUSTRALIA. HE SERVED IN THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION AS AN RTO FOR AN INFANTRY COMPANY FROM 1968-69 AND RECEIVED THREE PURPLE HEARTS AND A BRONZE STAR WITH A COMBAT V FOR VALOR UNDER FIRE.



Invisible Wounds - Part 1

JOSEPH GIANNINI

Veteran's Statement

*Re: VA claims for post-traumatic stress disorder and hearing loss
Service: USMC 1966-1970
Military Occupational Status:
Infantry
Vietnam 1967-1968
Rank: Captain USMC*

I am 70 years old. My father, Victor, was an Army veteran who served twice. Once during The Great Depression. Then again as a tanker with the Ninth Armored Division during World War II.

He was stationed at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma when my mother, Gertrude, gave birth to me in Kings County, New York. My mother at this time was working for the Federal Government. When I was about six years old, my father moved our family to Plainview, Long Island.

My dad was very patriotic. He raised me to believe in "My Country, right or wrong." Starting as a child, I was very interested in war and playing war games. I remember when I was about 10 years old reading about the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The battle that ended the French Indochina War and marked the beginning of our Vietnam War. My war.

On June 25, 1961, I graduated from Massapequa High School. I played football in Junior High and wrestled through High School. I went to Hofstra University in Hempstead, NY with the help of a wrestling scholarship. I majored in Political Science and graduated with a B.A. in January 1966.

On March 15, 1966, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. While going through Boot Camp at Parris Island, I applied to Officer Candidate School. After completing Boot Camp, Advanced Infantry Training and Basic Specialist Training, I was accepted to OCS.

On October 5, 1966 I reported to Officer Candidate School in Quantico, Virginia. I graduated in December of 1966 and received a commission as a Second Lieutenant. After OCS, I attended The Basic School for Officers from December of 1966 until April of 1967. While at The Basic School, I received my MOS: 0302, Infantry Officer, and volunteered to serve in Vietnam.

On June 12, 1967 while on leave I married my girl, Annette Pagnotta. Twelve days later I left for Vietnam. The day before my 24th birthday. I had orders to report for duty with The Fleet Marine Force, Pacific. Vietnam.

In early July I choppered into the DMZ, or Dead Marine Zone. Joined the First Battalion, Third Marines, also known as The Home of the Brave. They had just gone in to reinforce the First Battalion, Ninth Marines. 1/9 had encountered a large North Vietnamese Army force. When I arrived, 1/3 was mopping up. Mostly collecting dead Marines from 1/9.

1/3 was part of the Special Landing Force in Vietnam. Two battalions that stood offshore on Amphibious Assault Ships and were deployed mostly into hot situations. When I first came on board I was assigned to Headquarters Company and given command of the 81mm

Mortar Platoon. Their Platoon Leader had just been killed in the DMZ. Shortly after, I was reassigned to Bravo Company and took Command of Bravo One, First Platoon. This was the first of four Rifle Platoons I would command during my 13-month tour as a Marine in Vietnam.

On August 12, 1967, I suffered my first fatal loss. We were in Happy Valley, southwest of Da Nang. Corporal Joseph Listorti, a Machine Gunner attached to my Platoon, was accidentally shot in the head by another Marine. In the light of a full moon, I ran over to the Machine Gun position. Knelt beside Joseph. Saw thick dark blood oozing from his left eye. He was moaning softly. Within a few moments he was dead. We wrapped him in his own poncho and lifted him onto a Medevac to start his journey home. As the chopper rose I felt a twitch in my right eye. It would come and go during my whole tour. I often wore dark glasses to conceal it. I believe the twitch was caused by stress. Leading my Marines in combat. Knowing that any mistake I made could be fatal to them. I was responsible for their lives. My life was expendable.

On August 17, 1967, I suffered the second loss under my command. In the early morning hours.

This time in total blackness. Machine Gunner Cpl. David Calabria was killed by an NVA grenade during a vicious hill fight in the Que Sahn Valley. Also known as the Valley of the Walking Dead. Corporal Calabria was only with us three days. He was Corporal Listorti's replacement.

It was around this time I realized we were not fighting in the name of freedom and democracy for the Vietnamese people. Nor were we fighting Communists there so that we would not have to fight them here in the streets of America. There was a civil war going on between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese. Our presence was only making it worse. We did not fight for high ideals. We fought because we were Marines. We fought for our battalion, for our company, for our platoon, for each other. We fought to survive. We loved each other to death. We fought to get on the Freedom Bird back to The World.

I wound up having an unusual but lucky tour. Our Battalion was hard on young Lieutenants. Most that came on board before me and after me were killed or wounded. I remained on the line. Served with three consecutive rifle companies: Bravo, Delta, and Charlie. Unusual. Infantry Officers stayed on the line for six or seven months and then rotated to a safer position. Many times I was scared. Incoming rockets terrified me. I realized there was nothing I could do. Surviving was a matter of luck. Lucky. I survived without a scratch.

I sensed a change within. An ongoing struggle to retain a bit of my humanity. A battle for my psyche. In sum, I did some very bad things and some very good things. As we say in the Marine Corps, "There it is."

On my 25th birthday, June 25, 1968, I was a short-timer. Less than 30 days to go In Country. Due to the high attrition rate of lieutenants I was

both the X.O. of Charlie Company and Platoon Leader of the Third Platoon. At the beginning of July I turned over the Third Platoon to Second Lieutenant John Murphy. My replacement.

On July 21, 1968, I was with Charlie Company at LZ Stud. Not far from the Khe Sahn Combat Base. Khe Sahn had been under siege, successfully defended, relieved, and abandoned in April. I got a radio call to report to the Battalion Commander. When I entered his command bunker, he said to me, "Lieutenant, your orders came in. Go home. Good luck." This came as a surprise to me. I did not expect to leave for at least two more days. I grabbed my gear and boarded the next chopper out. Left without any goodbyes. Including John Murphy.

On my way home, I kept making connecting flights, without any layovers. Ended up back in The World one day before anybody expected me. I thought being home meant the war was behind me.

When I got back, I still had a year and a half to do in the Marine Corps. I did this at the Landing Force Training Command in Virginia Beach. Avoided anything having to do with Nam. Hardly ever spoke about it. Never with my wife, Annette. I threw myself into work, working out, and surfing. Realizing now that the working out and surfing were safety nets. Self-therapy. This did not stop the onset of recurring nightmares. About being overrun. Incoming. Beginning a second tour with a rifle company. The nightmares quickly became debilitating.

When my commitment to the Corps ended I decided not to re-up. I knew that if I did, I would be on my way back to Nam and most likely be given command of a rifle company. Just like in my dreams.

At the end of my commitment, Annette and I moved back to Brooklyn, to work, and also for me to attend Brooklyn Law School on the G.I. Bill. I was still avoiding Nam. Did not talk about it. Did not follow it on TV, did not read about it.

Before enlisting in the Marine Corps, I had smoked marijuana one time. That was the extent of my drug use. Back in Brooklyn, I started smoking marijuana on a regular basis and then added the use of cocaine and amphetamines. It could be that surfing stopped me from falling into addiction and serious drug abuse. I never got arrested. On occasion people have asked me what it is about surfing. I tell them that I do not live to surf, I surf to live. I think that surfing has always been a buffer in that way, a balance. An addiction, but a healthy one.

In 1971, Annette and I separated during an unplanned pregnancy. Our son Ron was born on January 3, 1972. I struggled to stay in law school. Graduated in 1973. Admitted to the New York State Bar in 1974. Have been in private practice as a criminal defense attorney since 1975.

When Ron was 35, he had what psychiatrists told us was a break with reality. It was serious. Ron was hospitalized in a Mental Ward and diagnosed as suffering from Schizophrenia and Severe Paranoia. Shortly after being released, he tried to

kill himself by carving deep x-marks in both wrists with a steak knife.

Ron is now 40. Medications have helped him some but not enough. Ron can no longer work. He is on Social Security Disability. He lives at home with his mother in Brooklyn. He cannot be left alone. I have an agreement with Annette where I go live with Ron several times a year, for a month at a time. So she can take a getaway break. This arrangement has put a strain on my relations with my current wife Nikki and our 27-year-old son Victor.

Nikki and I met in 1973 and got married in '78. She says I never mentioned being a Marine or being in Vietnam until we had been together for almost five years. The only other person I told that I was a Marine and had been in Vietnam was my friend Lou Schwartz. He was a fellow student at Brooklyn Law School who became a close friend.

For 34 years, from 1968 to 2002, I mostly avoided Nam. Hardly ever mentioned to anyone I was a Marine that served in Vietnam. This would change during the summer of 2002. By chance, Annette and my Mother returned to me hundreds of letters I wrote while in the Marine Corps and Vietnam. I did not know they had saved my letters. Included with those returned by my mother were the letters written to my Dad marked "For your eyes only." Meaning not to show these letters to Mom and Sis. These contained hurtful truths and graphic descriptions of the fighting. Early on in my tour, Annette asked me not to write any more about the fighting. It frightened her too much.

One afternoon shortly after, I sat down with my letters and started going through them. I ended up reading almost non-stop. Picking up each day where I left off the night before. It took about a week. Every letter took me back In Country. I saw vivid images. Re-heard sounds. During my reading of the letters I started to watch Vietnam War movies. Particularly *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Deer Hunter*. Over and over.

One evening Nikki came home from work. She found me in the living room surrounded by letters and watching a Vietnam War movie. She walked straight over to me and said, "I want you to do two things for me. One is to get some counseling. The other is, you've talked about writing, do it." She handed me a college catalogue and said, "There are some writing courses being offered in Southampton."

I did both. I got into counseling in the fall of 2002 and enrolled in a Southampton College Continuing Education course called "What Is Remembered." After a few weeks, the instructor of the writing class, Barbara Wersba, told us the weekly assignments were suggestions only. We could write about whatever we wanted. There were no rules. "If it makes sense when you read it, that's what counts," she said. The first story I wrote was *Double-Time Duffy* (printed in the Spring 2005 issue of *The Veteran* www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/?id=548), a tribute to my commanding officer at OCS, Capt. Patrick Edward Duffy. It is a war story. Tragic. The first of many I would write over several semesters about my time in the Marine Corps and Nam.



To be continued in next issue of The Veteran

JOSEPH GIANNINI, A LOCAL CRIMINAL DEFENSE ATTORNEY, SERVED IN VIETNAM FROM 1967 TO 1968 WITH THE FIRST BATTALION, THIRD MARINES. A VICTIM OF AGENT ORANGE, HE IS CURRENTLY WRITING A BOOK OF SHORT, NON-FICTION STORIES ABOUT FATE, SURFING, AND WAR.



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 46 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.



RECOLLECTIONS

What Are the Odds?

PATRICK FINNEGAN

Gonna tell you a story. Actually two stories. Both of them are hard to believe, but none the less true. Both happened in those magical crazy '70s.

Bear with me. I Derosed and ETSed in early October 1969. Back home to Metro NY. Now it's the following spring of 1970 and for some reason, I can't possibly remember, I'm in a rented rowboat in a NYC Central Park Lake with a high school girlfriend that I hadn't seen in 5 years.

This is the first and only time I ever rowed around a lake in NYC. Ronnie and I are floating around, catching up on the years gone past.

I'm rowing, Ronnie is listening and interacting. I have so much to say and yet I for the most part don't know what or how to say, about so much that I have to speak about. The army and VN are still all too close to make any sort of sense of it.

I'm jabbering, ranting away and slowly ram into another couple also rowing around with the rower not paying attention. The other rower is a tall solid built guy with a nice 4-5 inch afro. I look closer and I'll be damned if it ain't Doc.

Carmello Villar. My 3rd platoon, "Delta Dew Master" VN field combat medic. The Medic of the "Delta Dew Masters" is rowing around Central Park on this fine spring day and I just ran into him.

I DEROSed and ETSed on 5 October 1969.

I got to the 3rd platoon Delta company 1/503rd Abn. Inf. Bn, 173rd Abn. Bde. on the 15-16th Jan 1969. Doc "Smiley" Villar got there maybe around the 30th-31st.

Time passes. Doc is in his 11th month in country when his WW II veteran father dies back in the Bronx. Doc gets pulled out of the country after 11 and 1/2 months in the field. Doc could not put up with the rear bullshit and opted for pulling his 6 months in the rear duty that all medics were entitled to, in the field.

Tuesday, he's in Bihn Dihn Province RSVN. Thursday, he's at an NYC airport. But he doesn't know where he is.

Doc, your Dad is dead. You are going home. Here's the paperwork. Just hold on. We'll take care of it. One to two days later he's back at an NYC airport, wondering where the

fuck he is.

Doc had my phone number and knew I was in the general Metro NYC area and maybe I'd be home. So he calls. He takes a shot and he calls.

I was home. I listened to Doc's description of the terminal he was at. I figured he was at La Guardia and told him to hold on. If the traffic wasn't too bad I'd be picking him up in my newly purchased for \$700, candy apple red 1963 Austin Healy 3000.

I grabbed Doc from the curb, on the run and took him home to Fox St. in the Bronx. I used my parents 6 seater Plymouth through Doc dad's funeral service and burial. Doc still had well over a year to finish with the Army. I was starting my college life. Time passed and we kinda lost touch. Fast forward to spring 1970 and I'm ramming Doc in Central Park. Doc s on his first date with Melba, His future wife and the mother of their 3 children. Doc's afro is too long for the military so I ask him, "What's up."

Doc looks at me and tells me, "I quit."

With the death of his father, Doc is now the patriarch of the Villar family. There are Doc's mom and 5 younger siblings. Doc asked for a compassionate reassignment at Fort Dix, NJ to put him closer to the Bronx to finish out his Army service requirement. That didn't happen. The Army assigned him to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, NC.

Doc tried that for a month or so and it wasn't working so he "Quit."

Lots of stories about what happened to Doc after that. Those stories are separate tales to be told. This tale just deals with the "What are the odds?"

Years go by and now it's the summer of 1973. I'd just stopped driving a cab in the Metro NY area and I'm heading south to Nashville to rehook up with the woman I'd hitchhiked across the width and length of America a few times since the summer of 1970.

The month after my encounter with Doc in Central park, like Simon and Garfunkel I went *Looking for America* and found Sally Johnson in Minneapolis.

I'm driving south through Pennsylvania on a hot sunny day and I see 2 long haired freaks up ahead

walking the side of the road and going in my direction.

I'd done hundreds maybe thousands of miles myself the same way. You're at point A and you gotta get to point B and no one is giving you a ride so you walk. Maybe occasionally you stick out a thumb, but after a while, you just keep walking.

I figure I'd check them out and maybe offer a ride. Believe it or not. most hitch-hikers are not psychopathic mass or serial killers. Most are just people without an excess of cash that have a need to get to a place far away from where they are. So they hitchhike. It's a whole subterranean culture of America, especially in the '60s and '70s.

I slow down and stop. The two freaks walk up to the passenger door of my F-150 Ford VCan and open the door.

Wow. There standing in the road looking in at me is Paul Mount or Mounds. Never knew which his surname was. It was one or the other and whichever it was he was my squad's M-79 man from Vietnam. Here it is almost 4 years since I last saw Paul and that was back at LZ Uplift

in September 1969. Now I'm picking him up hitchhiking in the middle of Pennsylvania in the spring/summer of 1973. If I'm an hour earlier or later. Paul isn't there. A day before a day later. he's not there. He changes his departure times on that day or day before and also he isn't there to be picked up on that day and time I stopped for him. Weird how that all works out. Beyond weird.

The universe was not going to allow me to forget Vietnam. Not that I was going to forget, but the universe was gonna keep jamming it in my face anyway.

10 years have gone by and I'm forgetting Vietnam and then BAMBB, my gun team partner ammo-bearer from Alabama is at my door selling Cable TV Programs and hook-ups. That didn't happen but it would have if I had forgotten about Vietnam.

What are the odds?



PAT FINNEGAN 3RD PLATOON, D
COMPANY 1/503RD 173 RD ABN BDE.,
USA 8/1/66-10/4/69



America First!

WELL, ACTUALLY
YOU GUYS FIRST.



Jan 8 2020 (9471)

DANZIGER
The Rutland Herald
Washington Post Writers Group