



THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

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Veterans Fight Back

BILL BRANSON

From the National Office

The beating of the war drums has picked up significantly, with the 2016 presidential elections campaign well underway. The twenty-one contenders' (as of the date this article was drafted) war mongering antics are hard to ignore, no matter how ridiculous they are. Some candidates have spoken against a deal with Iran, have criticized and called on President Obama to abandon diplomacy with China after the cybersecurity attacks, and have openly called for the bombing of ISIS and of Syria. We cannot ignore their posturing, no matter how ludicrous. One of these chickenhawks may be our next President and Commander-

In-Chief.

With so many of our government officials in bed with the military industrial complex, patriotism and capitalism are very easily confused. Warfare is profit making for the rich, whether or not 'we' win. The US lost the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Soldiers, on both sides, and civilians lost their lives. A great deal of the Mideast is in utter chaos. But companies like Halliburton are making out like bandits. The war mongers are not patriots, they are not sacrificing anything, and they are not doing this work to protect our country. They don't see red, white and blue, they only see green. All of that money goes into their pockets, not to the soldiers who fought or

to the VA system crumbling under the weight of a new generation of veterans.

The VA has floundered under the pressure of the newest generation of veterans. More of us Vietnam-era veterans are retiring and requiring more health services. Over a year after the Phoenix VA scandal became public, after Shinseki was forced out of office, the wait for veterans has only gotten worse. In June, the VA reported this data along with the \$2.6 billion budget shortfall they are facing. This could force furloughs and hiring freezes, only further hindering the VA in meeting the needs of veterans. Maybe Halliburton has a couple billion dollars to spare? Maybe some of

these war profiteers should pay taxes?

Despite the longer waiting list, the VA did see 2.7 million more appointments in the last year. The VA has been working to expand its services, to make more appointments available. But the scandals continue. VVAW calls on the VA and on Congress to expand the VA system and build it from the bottom up. The VA needs more funding to provide the services that are in demand from vets, who deserve access to health care. In addition to the funding to strengthen the VA system, there must be an independently

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Eyewitness To The Capture of Saigon: It Was Not A Bloodbath

CLAUDIA KRICH

Thursday, April 30 was the 40th anniversary of the full American pullout from Vietnam. We hear a lot about those who fled and the suffering they endured.

The assumption has been that after the Americans left, there was a terrible bloodbath in Vietnam, but history should get both sides of this story correct, now, 40 years later. There was no bloodbath.

I was one of a handful of Americans who stayed in Saigon while the rest were fleeing and helping panicked Vietnamese friends and staff do the same at the end of April 1975. The propaganda had been extensive and effective in Saigon that the conquering North Vietnamese and



A tank rolls into Saigon on April 30, 1975, while curious people chat with the newly arrived soldiers. Photo from Claudia Krich.

National Liberation Front soldiers would maim, murder, mutilate and destroy. But they didn't.

I had been in Vietnam two years already, and stayed in Saigon until July 1975, thus witnessing first-hand the change of power and the first few months after the American-supported South Vietnamese yielded full power to the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese (also called simply the Vietnamese).

We lived in Quang Ngai, a poor town near My Lai in central Vietnam, where we directed a civilian rehabilitation program and hosted visiting journalists and officials. During the time we lived there, the area was controlled by

the South Vietnamese during the day, and by the Liberation Front (locals against the Americans and South Vietnamese) during the night.

As the South Vietnamese government began to crumble, we fled to Saigon. But we learned later that the transition had been peaceful. In fact, the Liberation Front had entered the town 24 hours after the South Vietnamese officials had already left.

We decided not to leave, and to see the change in Saigon for

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Veterans Fight Back

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conducted, outside investigation into the continuing higher administration cover-ups related to accessing care. There must be whistleblower protections put in place to protect workers. And there must be veteran involvement in continuing to figure out what VA systems need to be improved, what is or isn't working.

We must continue to remain alert to the calls for 'privatizing' the VA. Some of the voices raised in Congress, exposing the VA's shortcomings, are not those of our friends. All these jackals want to do is cram more money into the pockets of Big Pharma and Big Healthcare Insurance. This institution belongs to all us veterans and our families. It is not for sale to the lowest bidder!

In addition, it is time to create a single type discharge for all who serve in the Armed Services. Over 110,000 soldiers were dishonorably or other-than-honorably discharged for being gay between World War II and the end of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." As we know, these dishonorable

discharges prevent veterans from accessing VA benefits and health care. They often prevent you from getting certain jobs like civil service employment, prevent you from getting aid, and can even block you from getting a loan. All that was needed for this to happen was an accusation of "being gay." All veterans deserve access to their VA health care and other earned benefits. Veterans can apply for a discharge upgrade, but the paperwork, process and appeals can be extremely time-consuming, expensive, confusing and cumbersome. There is a bill in front of Congress – sponsored by Senators Schatz and Gillibrand and Representatives Pocan and Rangel – called the Restore Honor to Service Members Act that would streamline discharge upgrades for those who were discharged due to sexual orientation (perceived or actual). There are currently 134 co-sponsors on the sister bills. Contact your Representative and Senators to tell them that you support this legislation.

We hope you enjoy this is-

sue of *The Veteran*. You will find articles from VVAW members across the country on a variety of issues as well as several articles devoted to remembering our fallen comrade Dave Curry.

Also, this marks the last issue of *The Veteran* in the format you have been used to for the last 45 years. Due to changes in the print industry we are being forced to change the look of the paper. These

changes will not stop us from being a voice for peace, justice, and the rights of all veterans as we have been for the past 4 and a half decades. Feedback will be appreciated.

As always, thanks for your support.



BILL BRANSON IS A VVAW BOARD MEMBER AND CHICAGO RESIDENT.



Thanks to Jeff Danziger and Billy Curmano for their cartoons. Thanks to Bill Branson, Claudia Krich, Janet Curry, Robert Halgash, Ben Chitty, Ann Bailey, Susan Schnall, and others for contributing photos.

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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.

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VVAW

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Notes from the Boonies

PAUL WISOVATY

This column really is a note from the boonies.

Several years ago, at the height of the Afghan-Iraq wars, a lady walked into my office with a question. Why, she asked, didn't our hometown display attractive signs along Main Street honoring local active duty veterans, as was a common practice in nearby communities? I answered that I had no idea, and suggested that she go down to City Hall and ask them.

"Why don't you do it?" she asked. By "it," I should note, she didn't mean that I should drive downtown and ask the mayor. She meant, Why don't I just take on the whole project myself?

I tried to come up with a few good reasons why not, but she wasn't buying any of them. So the next thing I know, I'm standing up at a City Council meeting asking their permission to embark upon this project. Since a few of the Council Members had actually travelled outside of Tuscola dur-

ing the past couple of years, they were aware that other communities had been doing this. They happily granted me permission to do it (once it became apparent that I would be doing most of the work), and as I walked out of City Hall that night, I still remember thinking, "What have I gotten myself into?"

Actually, it couldn't have been easier. I started making the rounds of the local service clubs – American Legion, VFW, Lions, Kiwanis, Moose, Rotary – and they almost literally threw money at me. The local paper ran a front page story about the project, featuring a smiling photo of me proudly wearing my Polish Legion of American Veterans ball cap – I couldn't make that up – and the money came pouring in. I made it clear that I did not want any veterans' families to contribute; they were already sacrificing enough. Before I knew it, the city's street department had put up about forty very attractive signs all along the major streets. Everywhere

I went, local citizens patted me on the back, shook my hand, and thanked me for my service. After two or three beers, I even thought about running for mayor. Everything was going so well.

And the years went by. Applications for signs dropped quite a bit, something which I attributed to the probability that everyone who was interested had already turned in an application. To be honest, I didn't think about it a whole lot, other things taking up most of my time. Then one spring we received some severe storms and, when I woke up one morning in June, I noticed that well over half of the signs had either blown down or been badly damaged. No problem, I thought. Mom and Dad would call me about getting a replacement and I would attend to it. But that didn't happen. Ever. So I went down to City Hall and talked to the City Administrator, a very cooperative and hard working veteran himself.

"I'm guessing that people are just coming down to City Hall requesting sign replacements, right?" I asked. Nope. Hadn't happened there either. He then told me that, while he was surprised as I at the non-reaction by both the community and veterans' families, the City would be undertaking the project, and would get the word out. Fair enough. My grandkids were keeping me busy enough, and I was happy to let the City take over.

Another year passed quickly (happens when you're near 70), and I had not seen any progress. So I returned to talk to the Administrator and asked, rather sheepishly, "What's happening? Have you tried to get the word out about this?" His answer was a clear Yes. The City had been posting notices on something

called Facebook(?), and the City Treasurer assured me of the improbability that anyone in Tuscola with a computer would not have seen them. They also ran a couple of announcements in the local paper, and had brought the subject up once at a City Council meeting, which of course was covered by the paper. Still nothing. (I take that back; one gentleman called me about six months ago and I referred him to the City. I am talking about an entire time span of about four years.) I should also note that I recently drove through another small town not far from here, which had posted 25-30 signs on a huge wall several years ago, and there were fewer than a dozen remaining. So this is not entirely a Tuscola phenomenon.

I realize that the Mideast wars are over, at least as of this writing. But hey, nobody's joining the service anymore? What happened? I guess that my only conclusion may be that "it was a good idea at the time." The local football team is looking pretty good this year, and the only other thing locals seem to be talking about these days is The Donald. He would do very well in Douglas County.

I'd like to end on a positive note. In the past few years I've spoken with several Iraq-Afghan vets, and asked them what people had to say to them upon their return. The most commonly expressed greeting was "Welcome home."

That's a welcome change, don't you think?



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



Chicago VA takeover, August 19, 1974.

Fraggin'

BILL SHUNAS

"You a veteran?"
 "Yeah."
 "Vietnam?"
 "Yeah."
 "Thank you for your service."
 "Well, thanks. But we shouldn't have been there."
 "Thank you for your service." He seemed irritated.
 "It was a civil war and and all. Their civil war. Not ours."
 "Thank you for your service," he said again, this time with teeth clenched.

Ever get in such a conversation? Makes you wonder. In the evolution of American attitudes towards war veterans it would seem to be a good thing to be thanked for our service as has been happening over the last couple of decades. In terms of the political debates about fighting a war, or of pursuing deeper involvement in a war or demanding an exit from a war, "Thank you for your service" allows a person to show respect and avoid offending anyone, but overall that's not a good thing. That's because it kills discussion.

Serious issues - like war - need serious dialogue. Forces of reaction would probably not want serious talk about issues. They win if there is no discussion, no opposition. It is the nature of progress that it all happens when it is discussed and forced. If discussion is stifled by leaving it at "Thank you for your service," then progress is stifled.

It is hard in these days of Iraq and Afghanistan and ISIS. Americans are 15 years tired of war, even those who wanted it years ago. Because of ISIS doing some awful thing or the Taliban committing some atrocity, the attitude becomes, "We're tired of war, but what can you do?" In his book "The Operators," Michael Hastings laments the lack of opposition to these recent and current wars in American culture. He compares it to cultural opposition during the time of Vietnam. Anti-war songs started to come out with "For What Its Worth" by Buffalo Springfield in 1967 and probably some Dylan before that. Debates about that war raged while there were various art forms of protest.

Today there seems to be activism in other areas like Civil Rights, equality, environment and justice. After 15 years of the current wars, war protest seems a little tepid. Do we have war fatigue and

protest fatigue? Maybe I'm disconnected with our youth, but that's how it seems. Maybe it's because the body count is comparatively lower and because there is no draft and death and destruction are not on the TV news like during Vietnam. Whatever the reason, the American people seem to have little to say and little influence on policies relating to these wars, and "Thank you for your service" enables that.

My attitude toward the electoral process has been to vote for the lesser of two evils. In the presidential race this time around I'm going to get to vote for the lesser of 23 evils. Wait. Make that 22. Adios, Governor Perry. Usually I try not to pay attention to the political races until a month or so before the elections. This time, maybe because of so many candidates and so much money coming in from wealthy individuals and corporations, you can't get away from it. It's in full swing. It demands your attention. Or maybe it grabs you because that strawberry blond blow-viator keeps bringing out the 17 year old in all of us.

People are disenchanted and want something different. That's on both the left and the right.

Early on the focus has been on the right with all these would-be candidates. They and their followers want something different even if they're not sure of what. They want less government, outsider politicians, a launching pad for ascension and gays back in the closet. For this they want someone who hasn't been in government. And they are trying to squeeze out rational discussion. After all, rational people often have short careers in politics. So, it's easy for candidates to descend into situations where thoughtfulness gets excluded.

Then the strawberry blond talks about making America great again. And he includes being militarily strong as part of being great. Naturally all the other candidates can't let that one go. Except for the Libertarian and the Socialist, they all are going to make America great again, including strengthening the military and carrying the big stick around the world. And you hear the giant sucking sound. There go veterans benefits and a few other good programs as the military costs and foreign adventures increase.

And they want to be tough with Iran, outdoing each other with what actions they'd take if Iran violates the treaty. I don't think that even these fools would

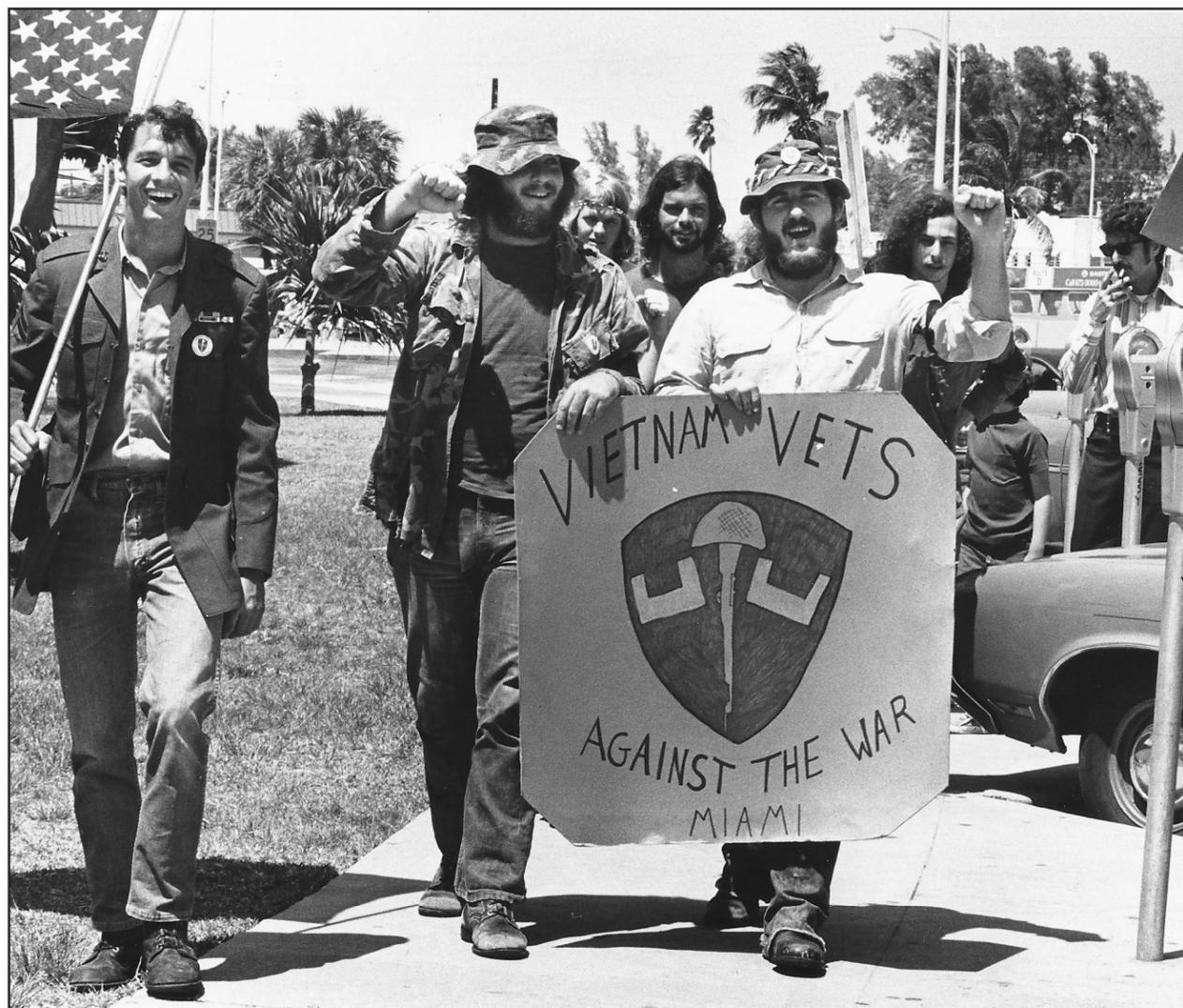
activate the nukes. An air and naval war? You'd lose shipping (oil) in the Persian Gulf with no guarantees of knocking out Iran's nuclear facilities. A ground war? Against a heavily populated country? In mountainous terrain? If you liked the unintended consequences of the Iraq War, you'll love war with Iran. Learn to live with the Persians. If fact, this treaty with Iran should have happened a long time ago - fourteen years ago. Right after 9/11 the perpetrators went to the hills in Afghanistan. Next door to Sunni Afghanistan was Shia Iran. No love lost there. Iranians would have made great allies.

Nowadays there is only one superpower. That is us. So what does it mean to make us even stronger? In relation to whom? Maybe these people want it to be like World War II. That was the Good War. Mano a mano. None of this crap about fighting guerillas and mujahadeen. They don't fight fair.

So open a beer, settle in and watch. It's past kickoff time. This game has another year to go. If you can stand it.



BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, AUTHOR AND VVAW MEMBER IN THE CHICAGO CHAPTER.



Republican Convention, Miami, 1972.

The Importance of Standdowns

JEANNE DOUGLAS

It is a well-established fact that individuals who serve in the military and particularly those who serve in combat are more at risk for homelessness, complex medical issues and mental health problems. In addition, veterans who come home from combat struggle to re-integrate themselves into the family, to remain employed, and to enjoy the social activities that were once an important part of their lives. The obvious common denominator is the experience of combat. There is little argument that we as a country must address the damage done to these men and women, but despite our best efforts, these problems persist. The Homeless Veterans Standdown is one of many ways to address the needs of homeless veterans. For 22 years, the Chicago Standdown has provided a unique opportunity for homeless veterans in our city to gather. Our mission is to provide homeless veterans a temporary respite from the stress of life on the streets, to make them aware of the many services available to them, and to honor their service to our country.

Standdowns began in 1988 in San Diego when Robert Van Keuren and Jon Nachison developed this model to replicate the practice in Vietnam of removing military personnel from the battlefield to a place of relative security for a chance to rest and refuel. Keuren and Nachison envisioned giving homeless veterans the same opportunity to rest and consider the possible opportunities open to them. While they certainly met this goal, they also spawned a movement across the country where Standdowns are held in all major cities and in many rural areas as well. These Standdowns each have their own unique flavor, but all are an attempt to match veterans

in need with the growing number of resources available to them.

Standdowns are not government sponsored programs. While the Department of Veterans Affairs and other government agencies may participate in these events, they are independently run by community agencies and not-for-profits and funding is provided through grants and donations. It is an opportunity for volunteers, both veteran and not, to become involved in this issue. The Chicago Standdown is run by the non-profit, Chicago Veterans Economic Development Council. This not-for-profit is made up of VA employees, state employees, representation from veterans service organization and agencies, and veterans who simply participate because of their passion for the cause.

The Chicago Standdown offers medical, dental, and optical services. Veterans can see a podiatrist, have an oral cancer screen, get their blood pressure checked, and have an eye exam all in one day. Of course many of these services are available at the VA, but the charm of a Standdown is that you can access so much in so little time. Also at a Standdown, veterans can learn about housing resources, apply for their benefits, talk to employers, and see an attorney. Over 60 agencies were present in our resources area in 2015 and when veterans have soaked up as much information as they can handle, they can eat a good meal, get a haircut, and listen to some music. The obvious goal of a Standdown is to make all of these resources available to veterans in a convenient and efficient setting, but this is not the only thing that happens at a Standdown. Below are some less obvious advantages to a Standdown.

First, Veterans who come to a Standdown have not necessarily felt honored for their service. They are unlikely to have attended a reunion of their unit or kept track of buddies from this time in their lives. A Standdown provides that opportunity. Early in the morning on the first day of a Standdown, veterans come from every direction. They walk in, they ride the bus, someone drops them off – but they make their way to it. Veterans greet veterans with enthusiasm – with exchanges about units served in, friendly rivalry about branches of service, and fond stories of the people they served with and sometimes lost. Veterans at a Standdown are reminded of who they were when they served their country. They remember a time when they were productive, competent, respected. They remember when what they did every day was vitally important. Veterans who come to a Standdown from all corners of our city stand a little straighter and maybe think a little straighter when they remember the strengths, the stamina and spirit that made them successful service members. This interior change may be necessary before a veteran can tackle the hard work of changing the exterior problems in their lives.

Second, Standdown provides an opportunity for veterans to come as volunteers and reach out to their fellow comrades. Veterans helping veterans is a key feature of a Standdown. The Chicago Standdown sees about 700 to 800 veterans over two days. With the addition of agency representatives and volunteers, we may have as many as 1,000 people in motion. Given that we are working in borrowed and temporary space, we are constantly presented with

problems to solve. Veterans bring ingenuity and a resourceful spirit to the task at hand that is invaluable. Veteran volunteers may repair a generator, design a more efficient food service system, build a ramp for the wheel chairs, or stand for hours passing out socks. Just as important veteran volunteers may sit and talk with a participant, listen to an angry veteran, or reminisce about old times. At one Standdown, a homeless veteran came in intoxicated, belligerent and demanding. His behavior could have spelled trouble in the crowd, but a group of veteran volunteers surrounded him. They were not hostile or punitive, but offered a kind of hug that immediately calmed the situation. Because of the compassionate response of veteran volunteers, this veteran was able to retreat a bit, sober up and actually use the services offered to him. This is just one of many examples of the way veteran volunteers make Standdowns successful.

Finally, there are countless agencies that offer a wide variety of services to veterans. It is difficult to keep track of the ever growing and ever changing resources available. A Standdown brings together a wide variety of providers that will use at least part of their day to learn more from each other. The exchange of business cards is not just a formality. They will be far more effective at their job if they know individuals in agencies to call when they are seeking a service for a veteran in front of them.

So Standdowns are big chaotic events that can take on a life of their own. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the numbers and the "busyness" of it all. If you attend a Standdown you will see a lot of obvious activity, the distribution of clothing, a haircut, a meal or a new pair of glasses. But be aware there is far more than this going on. We are also offering respect, hope and a moment to pause and consider the possibilities. The real gift of a Standdown is the connections that people make with one another.



JEANNE DOUGLAS IS TEAM LEADER OF THE OAK PARK ILLINOIS VET CENTER AND A CO-COORDINATOR OF THE HOMELESS VETERANS' STANDDOWNS IN CHICAGO.



Five Simple Words

MARC LEVY

In Vietnam I had a few run ins with authority. The battalion surgeon was drunk the night we took rockets and mortars on a small LZ. He had a hard time with the wounded, including two friends badly hit. Someone put a frag beneath his bunk. But he found the coke can filled with diesel, the grenade wrapped in elastic bands, the spoon with nowhere to fly.

A remf lieutenant tried to send me out after I'd done eight months in the bush and rotated to burning shit on an LZ. I refused, was given direct orders, told three days they'd bring me back. I gathered my gear, filled my pack with C's, ammo, water, strapped on three bandoleers, frags, loaded and locked my M16. Waiting for the chopper, I melted down, waved off the bird, caught a second going back to battalion. From fifty yards I spotted the lieutenant. Walking forward, my M16 leveled itself to his chest. "Are you sending me out? You m****f****! Are you sending me out?" He froze. Lifted both arms over his head. "You don't have to go. I'll send someone else. It was a mistake." I walked right past that prick, found an empty bunk, threw down my gear, and wept.

After an ambush, the machine gun team blew a man's head off. My LT asked me to look in his mouth. "Doc, you gonna put me in for a Purple Heart?" he asked. His tooth was chipped. "No way, sir. It's just skull fragments from

the dead dink." A good man, he held no grudge.

I'd seen my share of combat and couldn't adjust to stateside duty. "Sorry," I said to sergeants and lieutenants, captains and colonels, "I don't pull guard duty. I don't pull KP. I don't get hair cuts. I don't salute officers." I joined an anti-war GI coffee house. Spoke to reporters. Shook hands with Dan Ellsberg on TV. With other GIs spoke on weekly anti-war segment on commercial radio. Got court-martialed twice. The Special Court Martial netted three months hard labor/dishonorable discharge. My civilian lawyer struck a deal: admit guilt, get five days jail, a general discharge. But I lost all rank. It was 1971. No one knew about PTSD.

In college I kept a loaded pistol near the bed. I had many women but little love. I had intellectual friends. I had friends who should have been locked up. Someone tried to kill me – I got fifty stitches to the head and face. The dean took me under his wing. No one knew about PTSD.

I became a social worker, an extension of medic, did my best work with crime victims. Jobs lasted a year or two, three at most. I quit or was let go.

In 1992, I lived in a mountain village in Guatemala, backpacked Central America eight months. I climbed a lot, often alone, living simple, five bucks a day. Even with flashbacks, depression, anxiety, much of the time I felt reborn.

I drifted. Spent '93 abroad, saved money, for eight months backpacked Asia, Indonesia, Europe. There were bad days, good days. One afternoon in Amsterdam I completely melted down. Once home, I spent seven weeks on a VA PTSD ward in upstate New York. Afterward, I lived three months in a nature conservancy, met a renowned poet. He rejected all my war poems, save one. "This is your voice," he said. "The rest is crap."

Between 1995 and 2001 I moved twelve times. Once settled, I saw a VA counselor for war stress. I tried meds. Refused them.

In 1986, Manhattan, NY held a Nam vets parade. In Brooklyn, we marched from Grand Army Plaza to Wall Street – renamed the Canyon of Heroes. At a small park jammed with noisy patriots, confetti knee deep, a lone demonstrator held a placard: US OUT OF NICARAGUA. I had tears. I saluted. I'm surrounded by war vets, I salute the protester.

I don't like hearing, "Thank you for your service." It makes me uneasy. Puts blood in my face. I want to say, Do you know what I did? Do you know what I've seen?

I want to say, Are you thanking me for that first ambush, when GIs picked off three NVA like paper targets, and I cried like a kid? Are you thanking me for toughening up, glad when we killed them before they killed us?

Are you thanking me for

saying "Bill, it's Doc. Everyone loves you," after Bill got shot in the head and later died? For telling his brothers what really happened, the Army stonewalling the family thirty years?

Are you thanking me for spotting Lieutenant Noble, struck down by mortars in Phuc Vinh after a panicked remf stampeded fifty GIs straight into the barrage? Are you thanking me for telling his grown daughter, an infant when he died, what I could of the dad she never knew?

Are you thanking me for shaking off the wounded grunts after the second Chicom blast? Are you thanking me for tossing lime on the dead sappers who over ran our base?

Pardon my French but I hate with all my heart the spoon fed dupes, the received wisdom gobblers, the twice yearly mobs of Sunday patriots who wouldn't know a gun barrel from a beer barrel filled with Mideast oil.

When I hear, "Thank you for your service," it makes me mad and sad and weary. The facts are well known: the US has long spied on, destabilized and toppled elected foreign governments for our own self-interest. We conquer, occupy, exploit. In the event of stalemate, as in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, we leave our mess, lick our wounds, fete our wounded, forget them. In time its off to the next war, conflict, invasion. For democracy's sake, we're told. But Marine General Smedley Butler knew otherwise. "War is a racket" he famously declared. Corporate profits. That's what it's all about.

I forgive the civic legions who've not read Wilfred Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est", or the poetry of Michael Casey, Yusef Kumanyakaa, or Bruce Weigl. But still, I shun the willful ignorance, the unschooled emotions, the media fueled piety of that oft said awful phrase "Thank you for your service." Much better, the two words Vietnam vets invoke when greeting each other, "Welcome home."



MARC LEVY WAS A MEDIC WITH DELTA 1/7 FIRST CAVALRY DIVISION IN 1970. EMAIL: SILVERSPARTAN@GMAIL.COM. WEBSITE: MEDICINTHEGREENTIME.COM, WHERE THIS ARTICLE FIRST APPEARED.

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My Experiences with the VA

PAUL J. TABONE

Several years ago I reconnected with a Nam buddy that I hadn't spoken to in decades. Because we are geographically nearby (he's in Ohio and I in New York) we have managed to see each other on a number of occasions. Beyond the many hours of memories we discussed, he mentioned to me his experiences with the VA. He lived near a local branch and was retired and therefore had the time to pursue whatever he had coming to him. He spent hours with a VA rep over many visits learning about medical coverage but as a byproduct learned what he (We!) were entitled to as 11B grunts who had served in I Corps. He gave me the confidence to pursue things myself and I proceeded to contact

the VA offices in Northport, NY. I initially made contact via email and eventually was called in to a Suffolk County Department of Veterans Affairs office for an appointment. I brought whatever documents I could gather proving my existence as well as my location of service in country. My experience with the personnel at the county office was actually quite pleasant. I was told that I would hear back within a period of time (I seem to recall it was several months). I eventually did and was requested to submit banking information for any awarded funds I might receive.

I should make an aside comment here that I was asked to submit a list of ailments I had

experienced what I felt might have been Agent Orange related. I brought whatever documentation I had with me to the initial visit. Apparently after many years of two stepping claims the VA was ordered to pay to anyone who was "boots on the ground" without any chance of challenging them. I was suffering from measurable hearing loss and had had a pacemaker installed several years prior. Both ailments were automatically considered covered. As a result I was declared a set percentage permanently disabled and received a retroactive check for the first year of the award with each subsequent month a fixed amount magically appearing in my checking account.

Since then I have also been diagnosed with diabetes and have initiated a claim for that as well, since it appears to be on the Agent Orange list of probable health related issues.

I am in no way suffering from PTSD that I know of nor was I wounded in action. For those men I have overwhelming compassion. However, the rest of us who had the misfortune of being there as well are entitled to a payout. I'm not a supporter of scamming the system, but damn it all, we did our time and if it's there to be collected, we should go for it.



PAUL J. TABONE WAS IN I/5 INFANTRY (RED DIAMOND) I CORPS 1969-1970.

A Bright Shining Lie, Revisited, Again

DALE HOEFER

I graduated from high school in 1974, so my entire childhood was spent in the shadow of the Cold War and the Vietnam War. It never made any sense when I watched Walter Cronkite. When I read Neil Sheehan's book, "A Bright Shining Lie," and John Paul Vann's "America in Vietnam," it put a rational veneer on non-sense.

I joined the Navy in 1974, after high school, so I am a Vietnam era veteran, who opposed the Vietnam War, the Iraq war and though tepidly supported the first Gulf War and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, despite the obvious problem of not having an exit strategy.

By the time I made it to Vietnam the fighting had long

since stopped. I went to Saigon in the late 1990s on a business trip. I was struck by the usual things tourists notice like the large number of motorcycles and that everyone I saw seemed to be under the age of 30. I went to an antique market looking for a souvenir and found myself overwhelmed with an emotionally crushing sense of waste when I saw hundreds of old Zippo lighters and little personal items that clearly had been owned by American GIs. I wondered about the story of each one as I held it.

The wasted sacrifices, the horror of such a flawed policy and implementation that took place mixed with the hope that we will never forget the lessons learned

here. It was very similar to the choking feeling that overcomes me every time I visit the Vietnam War memorial in Washington DC. Each step the urge to cry growing stronger as I approach the bottom of the V, hoping no one will say a word to me. Again praying that we learned.

To realize that we could not only forget the lessons we paid for and learned in less than a generation, but jump right into a similar situation in Iraq with no end-game and flawed tactics along the way really hurts. Who thought to "de-Bath" Iraq?

I hope we as Vietnam Veterans Against the War, can remain united and focused on retaining and sharing these hard

lessons to combat the perpetual state of fear, state of undeclared war reality that pervades our country now. We must be wise with our military resources and have some compulsory service. The day may come when we have to fight, or at least be strong enough to make a potential enemy think a hundred times before moving against our interests. So let's choose our House, Senate and President very carefully this time.



DALE HOEFER WAS IN THE USN 1974-1976 AND DISCHARGED AFTER NEARLY BREAKING HIS NECK AND TEMPORARY PARALYSIS. THE VA MADE EVERYTHING POSSIBLE WITH THEIR REHABILITATION PROGRAM.

Jeb Bush Visits the Subject of Iraq



NYTS/CWS Aug 16 2015 (6445)

Privatization of VA Health Care: Corporate Boondoggle

BUZZ DAVIS AND IAN SMITH

Republicans have tried to privatize Veterans Affairs (VA) health care since 1946. After 68 years, they succeeded. In August, the VA was substantially privatized by Congress and President Obama. Possibly 3 million of the 6.5 million veterans presently receiving VA care will get healthcare at private hospitals and clinics. Tens of billions of taxpayer dollars will be wasted. Tens of thousands of VA workers will lose their jobs as facilities are closed. And we will lose the major example of cost effective health care in America.

Nearly all the Democrats in Congress voted for the privatization bill (Veterans' Access to Care Through Choice, Accountability & Transparency Act of 2014) signed with fanfare by President Obama in August.

Private care will cost taxpayers 20% to 30% more than VA health care. VA health care is proven to be of better quality, with shorter appointment wait times than the private sector. Patient satisfaction surveys are higher at the VA than at most private care facilities.

Thus, taxpayers will be paying more money for:

- Lower quality care,
- Care vets may be less satisfied with, and
- Care that will be slower than VA care.

It's a bad law for veterans and taxpayers. But private care CEOs and stockholders will profit greatly. It is to last only two years but will be extended like every tax

cut for the rich or corporations. Then conservatives will argue that VA hospitals should be closed because so few veterans are using them.

It's a repeat of the hat trick President Bush pulled with Medicare Part D and the Medicare Advantage (MA) programs.

You all remember the great Republican Medicare prescription drug and the Medicare Advantage programs. Republicans have called for privatizing Medicare since enactment in 1965. Under Bush, in 2004, they succeeded in establishing a prescription drug program that wastes billions per year by not following the VA's lead and requiring Medicare to bid all drugs.

Congress also privatized Medicare by using the MA program which places insurance companies in charge of a senior's Medicare. Nearly 30% of seniors are in these MA plans. In 2012 Medicare Advantage cost \$34.6 billion more to provide health care than if the same number of seniors had been in the traditional Medicare program! Privatization does NOT save money. Usually the privatization of government services costs taxpayers more - not less. And quality and corruption problems soon follow.

So how did the Republicans bamboozle all those Dems?

1. WE HAVE A FAILED CONGRESS. They all wish to be re-elected in November. They needed some issue that they could pass in a bipartisan manner that

would get the voters' attention. The fraudulently run Phoenix VA hospital provided the issue. Soon we learned 160,000 veterans, who were new to the VA system, were not getting the health care they needed for months or a year or more.

FACTS: The VA system is overloaded with patients, is massively understaffed and needs billions of dollars of updated and additional facilities to serve the influx of aging vets and War on Terror vets. That's the basic cause for the 160,000 vets not receiving timely healthcare. The VA made an extraordinary effort and sent most of those 160,000 vets to private care. Thus the VA solved the problem for these vets before Congress cut the final deal.

The VA is big. With over 1,700 facilities and 6.5 million patients, it's the largest medical system in the USA. It is the best example of single payer/single provider health care in America. It has over 86 million appointments a year. On any given day, over 6 million appointments are on the schedule books. The VA proved that 84% of the 6 million appointments were 14 days or less from the time of the appointment. This is far quicker than the private sector average of about 18 day wait times. The VA reported 10% or 620,000 appointments are 31 days or longer away.

2. BAIT AND SWITCH: The Republicans argued the 160,000 vets were the problem and privatization was the solution.

When the VA solved that problem, the privatizers did the huckster two step, switched problems and said the problem is the 10% of veterans who wait more than 30 days and the 36% who live more than 40 miles from a facility.

The new law states veterans living more than 40 miles from a facility (2.34 million vets) and the 10% of veterans with appointments over 30 days (.66 million vets) be offered private care. Thus nearly 3 million may be sent to private care.

The "crisis" started because 2.5% (160,000) veterans were poorly served by VA management. The resolution of the "crisis" ended with up to 46% of all the veterans served by the VA will possibly be sent to private care facilities!

This law is supposed to terminate the privatization effort by September 30, 2016. By that time the government will have wasted over \$25 billion on sending vets to private care. The special interests will demand the law be extended beyond 2016.

Citizens need to contact the President and Congressional members urging them to Fix & Staff the VA - Don't Privatize It! Tell them privatizing the VA is a "special interest get rich scheme." Veterans who have served this nation deserve better than to be pawns to make the rich richer.



BUZZ DAVIS, OF STOUGHTON WI, IS A LONG TIME PROGRESSIVE ACTIVIST, A DISABLED VETERAN, A MEMBER OF VETERANS FOR PEACE AND A FORMER VISTA VOLUNTEER, ARMY OFFICER, ELECTED OFFICIAL, UNION ORGANIZER AND STATE GOVERNMENT PLANNER.

IAN SMITH IS AN ARMY VETERAN, A NATIVE OF MADISON, RETIRED FROM A SUCCESSFUL CAREER WITH THE VA SPANNING 40+ YEARS, A LONG TIME STAUNCH UNIONIST HAVING SERVED TWO TERMS AS PRESIDENT OF A 1,400 MEMBER LOCAL AND REMAINS A DELEGATE TO SCFL AND AFL-CIO.



Chicago VA Demonstration, September 1974.

And the Battle Rages On...

LOUIE DE BENEDETTE

It has been difficult writing this article since I suffer from anxiety and mood swings. I am a Vietnam-era veteran and know that many Vietnam veterans have suffered much more than I have.

In 1965, I graduated from Seton Hall University with a BA in classical languages. In 1966, I received a Masters in Counseling. For what I thought were patriotic reasons, in the fall of 1966 I joined the Army. I was assigned to Officer Candidate School in Fort Benning, GA in 1967. But I was becoming increasingly distressed. I told my CO the war was immoral and that God did not want us to fight in it. (These were my exact words and I will never forget them.) He immediately called the executive officer and instructed him to take me to the psychiatric ward at the base hospital. Indeed I was sick, but still I knew the war was wrong. In a letter sent to my sister my CO said "such a sudden thing surprised us all seeing your brother is considered the #1 man in my platoon." I then spent 4 months in the psych ward forced to take Thorazine, a drug often referred to as the "chemical straight jacket." Convincing the doctors that I wasn't violent, they released me without a diagnosis and as the war raged on, I went home to Newark, NJ.

At home, I continued to protest the war. All across our nation, buildings and neighborhoods were burning over the civil rights issues, the women's movement was moving forward at a rapid rate, and the draft resisters were becoming increasingly visible on college campuses, and black power was becoming a significant

force. Meanwhile, in New York City six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration carrying a banner that started Vietnam Veterans Against the War. That significant action took place in New York City and quickly spread across the country. For the first time Veterans were speaking out against the war and the senseless killing of both GIs and the Vietnamese. However, as the battle raged on, I had an attack in 1969 and was committed to the VA psychiatric hospital in Lyons, NJ. The buildings were ugly and menacing on both the outside and the inside. There were also huge intimidating iron bars on the doors and windows. I was assigned to a ward that was filled mostly with WWII veterans who had been victims of lobotomies. This made me very sad.

One night on the news, the TV reported the burning of draft files by Phil and Dan Berrigan at Cantonsville, OH. I was elated but the staff that seemed to be opposed to my political beliefs put me in restraints and I was medicated with injections. This went on for several days. I began to fear that I might become the next victim of the dreaded lobotomy.

An aide told me to request a sanity hearing, which I did. The VA Psychiatrist said I was a danger to society. When the judge allowed me to speak he made a decision to release me in two weeks and he would erase the entire hearing. I was grateful to the judge who apparently had some idea of the effects the war in southeast Asia was having on veterans and society in general.

In Southeast Asia the battle

raged on. I returned home to Newark to work for the county as a Welfare Caseworker. During this time I continued my anti-war protest activities. However, in 1971 I had an episode and was recommitted to the same VA hospital. The psychiatrist gave me an anti-depression medication and I was released. Shortly thereafter, I had a massive episode while driving my car. Sadly I killed the other driver. The VA fired two psychiatrists for malpractice and the court never charged me. To this day I continue to feel sad and can never forget this incident. I blame the VA and the lack of adequate diagnostic care I required.

When it seemed the war was winding down, I felt I had had enough and joined a Catholic Monastery in Michigan. I stayed for five years with no episodes. When I left I joined Phil Berrigan and began protesting again. In 1981, I was arrested at the VA during an Agent Orange conference in DC. Fortunately I was bailed out, but still, I ended up once again in the same VA psych ward. Deep inside me the battle still raged on.

In 1986, I was in jail for a participating in a protest against the Contras in Florida. Fr. Roy Bourgeois, a Vietnam veteran and fellow prisoner, urged me to contact his psychiatrist friend. He is a retired Navy psych and he diagnosed me as Bi-Polar. He also prescribed Lithium and I did not have another manic episode until 2001. It seemed it took someone outside of the VA to understand my difficulties.

I went on a VVAW-supported Veterans Peace Convoy to Nicaragua in 1989. Much of my time was spent in Peru. Father Joe Ryan, a Vietnam veteran, had invited me there where I made many friends. I met a Human Rights Worker named Guadalupe whose husband disappeared at the hands of the military. Sadly in 1990 my friend Guadalupe also disappeared. And deep inside me the battle stilled raged on.

9/11 and the Iraq War however stressed me out and I felt I would be committed. The Lithium can only do so much. I fled to Nicaragua and even protested the Iraq War there. Suddenly I had a manic episode. My Nicaraguan friends sent me to the psychiatric ward at the Nicaraguan Army Hospital. I spent 30 days with

soldiers. The treatment was good and they regulated my Lithium. Surprisingly there were no locked ward, no bars, good doctors and the VA paid for it. Finally the VA had done something positive for me.

When I returned home, I had to visit the VA since I had no place to live and I needed the Lithium. It had been 15 years since I was locked in that first VA psych ward. I was put back on Lithium and various other medications. Later my anxiety continued to get worse I was told there was nothing else they could do for me. To this day I still suffer immensely from anxiety and the battle rages on.

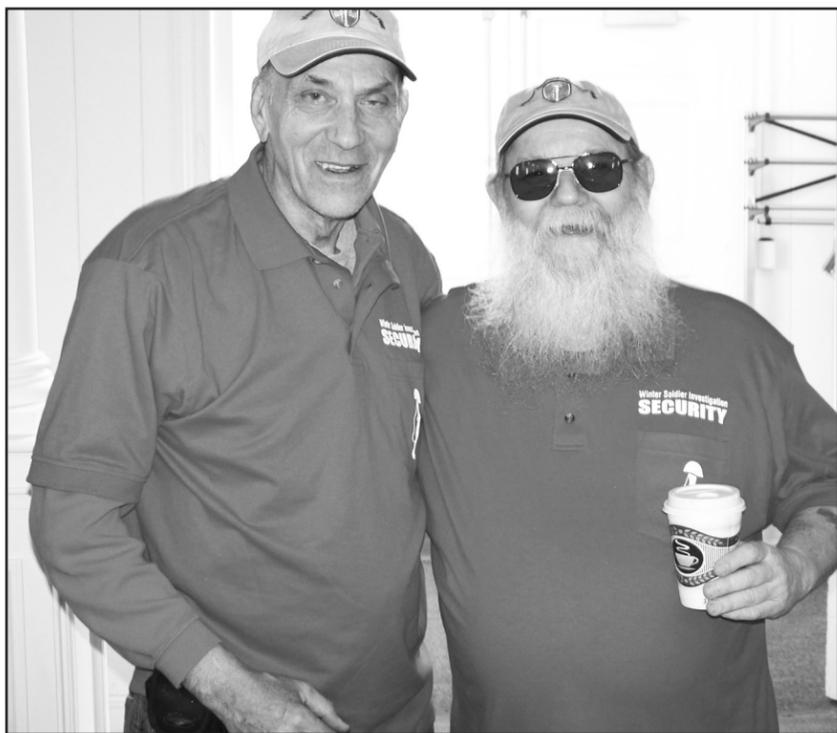
My sister Marlene deserves my deepest gratitude for standing by me. Without her I would not have survived the battle this far.

Years ago I made one of the most important decisions in my life. I joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. My brothers and sisters are very important to me and have been a stabilizing factor in my life. We have organized and protested together and in 1980 I served as a Chapter President. My VVAW brothers and sisters have stood by me during some very difficult times. I am especially grateful to Barry Romo and Marty Webster.

Currently as the battle rages on, I am still a VVAW Contact in Ithaca, NY. I am also involved in protests against the drones and anti-war activities in the Mideast with the Catholic Worker. I also demand adequate treatment and health benefits for our veterans from the VA.



LOUIE DE BENEDETTE IS A LONG TIME ANTI-WAR ACTIVIST AND A VVAW CONTACT IN ITHACA, NEW YORK. IN 1980, LOUIE WAS A VVAW CHAPTER PRESIDENT. IN 1986, LOUIE WALKED ONTO THE BASE AT FORT BENNING, GEORGIA, AND - ALONG WITH JESUIT PRIEST BILL BICHSEL OF TACOMA, WASHINGTON - CHAINED SHUT THE DOORS TO THE US ARMY'S SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS. HE HAS ALSO PARTICIPATED IN MANY OTHER VVAW AND ANTI-WAR ACTIVITIES INCLUDING SERVING ON THE VVAW SECURITY TEAM DURING THE IVAW IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WINTER SOLDIER PROCEDURES. CURRENTLY, LOUIE REGULARLY PARTICIPATES IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL ANTI-WAR MARCHES AND PROTESTS AGAINST THE DRONES.



Louie De Benedetto and Marty Webster doing security at IVAW's Winter Soldier: Iraq and Afghanistan in 2008.

Eyewitness

continued from page 1

ourselves. So when the Americans were putting people on helicopters at the embassy, we stayed.

Of course, there was danger. It was a war. There were bombs, rockets, artillery and random rifle fire by scared soldiers in the last days. America also was testing other less conventional weapons until the very end.

A few weeks before the end of the war, the South Vietnamese dropped an American CBU 55 bomb on civilian Vietnamese, killing everyone and every creature in range that breathed oxygen. The United States also tested Agent Orange and white phosphorus on the Vietnamese population.

We dropped carpet bombs and cluster bombs and, of course, planted hundreds of thousands of land mines. And there was the C5A aircraft that was packed with children, but unbalanced, that crashed in mid-April 1975, killing 138 people.

Saigon's population had been mostly shielded from the war until the end, while those who lived outside the city suffered for years and years. In April 1975, the danger and the war reached Saigon and the residents panicked.

We spent the night of April 30 in a little house on a little alley. The next morning, the streets of Saigon were jammed with relieved people, out sightseeing and curious to meet the arriving soldiers. Many of the arriving busloads and tanks carrying the soldiers were stuck in traffic. We saw people throw flowers and cigarettes to the arriving soldiers. Everyone was taking pictures.



A truck carrying North Vietnamese soldiers, foreground left, is stuck in a huge traffic jam on May 1, 1975, as everyone was out on the streets following the American pullout. Photo from Claudia Krich.

South Vietnamese soldiers in Saigon discarded their uniforms, turned in their weapons at improvised collection centers, and joined the crowds. North Vietnamese soldiers camped in the city parks, washing laundry and hanging it on clotheslines strung between trees.

They all spoke the same language, of course. In fact, many families that had been split between the north and the south met again in those first few days, after decades apart. The soldiers met each other, took pictures, and shared stories.

We spent the next few months being taken for Russians as we lived normal lives in Saigon. We observed the new government organizing to recover from war. The government sought to improve general health care, housing and education; increase access to water

and electricity; and "re-educate" the South Vietnamese high-level government officials who were still there.

But there were no firing squads, there was no murder, no torture. The new government was committed to reconciliation as the only way to unite the country and make progress.

Of course, many Vietnamese fled then and in later years. The money-poor new government immediately had to deal with a large number of refugees streaming in from Cambodia where the Khmer Rouge had taken over. They had to deal with antagonism and fighting with China, and they had to be careful in their relationship with Russia not to alienate others.

The United States embargo caused tremendous suffering. Vietnam, once a major rice

producer, had needed to import rice during the war due to the destruction of rice fields. It took a lot of time and a lot of land-mine removal before they could return to growing their own rice.

It is true that rich Saigonese lost most of their wealth. Much of that wealth had been acquired during the American war and through contacts with Americans. The post-war effort tried to reconstruct the country and to redistribute wealth.

But the new government tried to avoid retribution and there was no killing of enemies. They even wanted to be friends with America, despite the long, deadly war.

And now, America is enriched with many new Vietnamese-American citizens, and Vietnam is enriched with a peaceful relationship with America.

And we have moved on to other wars.



CLAUDIA KRICH, IS A LONGTIME DAVIS CALIFORNIA RESIDENT AND RETIRED TEACHER. AFTER ATTENDING A SCREENING OF THE DOCUMENTARY "LAST DAYS IN VIETNAM", SHE WAS MOVED TO WRITE THIS ESSAY. THE DOCUMENTARY REKINDLED MEMORIES OF THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE SHE AND HER HUSBAND KEITH BRINTON SHARED THERE 40 YEARS AGO. FROM 1973 UNTIL JULY OF 1975, BRINTON AND KRICH CO-DIRECTED A CIVILIAN REHABILITATION PROGRAM AND HOSTED VISITING JOURNALISTS AND OFFICIALS IN QUANG NGAI, NEAR MY LAI, IN CENTRAL VIETNAM. BRINTON ALSO WORKED THERE FROM 1966 TO 1970. THIS ARTICLE ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE DAVIS ENTERPRISE.



Claudia Krich, kneeling at left, is one of three American women and 12 Americans altogether who stayed in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. Here, they pose with three North Vietnamese soldiers who were eager to have their photo taken with American women. Photo from Claudia Krich.

40 Years Later: Remembering the Legacy of the Vietnam War

DIK COOL

The PBS documentary "Last Days in Vietnam" is an excellent piece of cold war propaganda. What could be better than to show two hours of Vietnamese fleeing the (gasp!) advancing "communist hordes." The map drips red, the people flee and the talking heads intone that Saigon is "falling to the communists." But wait, aren't the communists also Vietnamese and isn't this their country? So Vietnam has fallen to the Vietnamese? Isn't the US the invader, the occupier, the imperial force that has tried to subjugate a nationalist movement? In 1776, didn't we fight to expel the occupying British? A more accurate description would be that the capitalist invaders had finally been driven out by Vietnamese forces committed to freedom and independence for their country. Their only sin was that they believed in a different economic system, communism, for their country.

Perhaps a brief history will bring perspective to all this.

During WWII, US flyers shot down by the Japanese were frequently rescued by Ho Chi Minh's guerilla force, the Viet Minh, the only reliable ally that the US had in the area. After the war ended, at a million-person rally, Ho declared Vietnam's independence from France, using language from the US Declaration of Independence, a document he revered. The United States, led by anti-communist zealots, chose to betray Ho Chi Minh and support France's re-colonization of Vietnam.

In 1954, at Dien Bien Phu, the Vietnamese defeated the French, by then 80% financed by the United States. The Geneva Accords temporarily divided Vietnam into north and south, with elections to be held in 1956. The United States refused to support the elections because, as President Eisenhower admitted in his memoirs, "Ho Chi Minh would win." Washington proceeded to install a series of puppet dictators in the south, claiming it was defending democracy and freedom. By 1967, the United States had 500,000 troops in the south, was regularly bombing the north and using the carcinogenic herbicide Agent Orange over vast areas. The anti-war movement, military and nonmilitary, grew rapidly. Immolations, the ultimate protest, occurred in the south and in the United States.

The Pentagon does not want you to know any of the following information: the GI movement against the Vietnam war was perhaps more important to ending the war than the civilian peace movement. By 1971, with 500,000 troops in Vietnam, the US military was on the verge of collapse and the brass were panicked. Officers were being fragged, whole units were refusing to fight, drug use was rampant, black GI's had coined the phrase "no Vietnamese ever called me n----," and anti-war GI coffeehouses and newspapers had sprung up at most US bases around the world. In April 1971, several thousand Vietnam vets, in a powerful, moving demonstration, threw their medals on the steps of the US Congress. Vets symbolically occupied the Statue of Liberty. US soldiers realized they had been lied to by a country they trusted. They came to understand that the people they were killing had done nothing to the US, they simply wanted to control their own destiny. The veterans then and now had to bear a double burden. They had fought a war and then had to fight to stop a war they realized was unjust. The toll this took on our soldiers is staggering. Over 150,000 have committed suicide, far more than died in the war, and the suicides continue to this day. Veterans also have had to fight to get the VA to acknowledge the effects of toxic Agent Orange and PTSD. They deserve better. Much better.

Mass demonstrations, draft resistance, civil disobedience, tax protests and lobbying involved millions in the United States and millions more internationally. In 1970, students were killed at Kent and Jackson State while protesting the US invasion of Cambodia. Most campuses went on strike. The United States signed the Paris Peace Agreement in January, 1973. US forces withdrew and prisoners of war were returned. The agreement guaranteed US aid to rebuild a devastated country. The United States violated the agreement, instead imposing a trade embargo. The war's horrific toll: Vietnam - 2 million dead, 3 million wounded, 13 million refugees, 200,000 missing in action. The United States—58,000 dead, 304,000 wounded, 1,900 MIAs.

Frequently the war is

described as a tragic mistake, an aberration in US foreign policy. As the Pentagon Papers showed, it was not a mistake, but a calculated attempt to suppress a popular movement that was unfriendly to capitalism and western domination. Similar actions against Guatemala, Chile, Nicaragua, the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, Iraq and Afghanistan, show US foreign policy is not guided by democratic ideals. But if they said it was guided by corporate profits who would support it?

As with US veterans, the war's legacy continues to exact a horrible toll on the Vietnamese. Since the war's end 40,000 people have been killed by unexploded ordnance (bombs, grenades, mines, artillery shells) and another 65,000 maimed. There are millions of these killers still in the ground. In areas heavily sprayed by Agent Orange (produced by Monsanto), birth defects are an epidemic as are neurological diseases. From 1961-1971 about 20,000,000 gallons of toxic herbicides were sprayed on southern Vietnam (*The Nation*, 3/16/15). Many US veterans have returned to Vietnam to help repair this devastation. They have also helped push the US to do the right thing, and finally the Obama administration has begun to do so.

What are the lessons of Vietnam? The Pentagon and its PR firms learned to never again televise a war, it breeds opposition. Witness the almost total censorship of the Gulf War, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. We the people learned a painful lesson. Our government lies to us, and its agenda is almost always aligned with the rich and powerful, in spite of assertions to the contrary.

We also learned that all authority must be challenged and held accountable to the needs of the people and that this process never ends. Whether it is the US government, multinational corporations, the Pentagon or state governments, the need for vigilance, resistance and community-building is essential.

In late 2014 retired general Nguyen Van Vinh was asked how the US could make amends for the war. He said, "Admit the truth and acknowledge that a great crime was committed here."



DIK COOL FIRST OPPOSED THE US WAR ON VIETNAM IN 1964. HE WAS IMPRISONED IN 1967-68 FOR DRAFT AND WAR RESISTANCE. IN 1970 HE JOINED THE STAFF OF THE SYRACUSE PEACE COUNCIL AND SPOKE AGAINST THE WAR AT COLLEGES, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS.

1975 40th Anniversary End of Viet Nam War 2015

VIET NAM

NHẬT ĐỊNH THẮNG / 승리할것이다 / 越南必勝 / SHALL WIN / VINCERA / 勝利 / VINCERA

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"Nothing is more important than
independence and freedom."

KHÔNG CÓ GÌ QUÝ HƠN ĐỘC LẬP, TỰ DO

- Hồ Chí Minh

40 Years After End of the Vietnam War

MERLE RATNER AND AZADEH SHAHSHAHANI

Forty years ago, on April 30, 1975, the US war against Vietnam finally ended with a victory for the national liberation forces. After decades of struggle against French and US intervention, Vietnam was finally independent and at peace.

Millions of Americans took part in anti-war activities during the 1960s and early '70s. Together with the civil rights movements, this activism changed the body politic in this country. It made it harder for US administrations to wage full-on land wars until the Persian Gulf wars. Today as the US wages simultaneous land and drone wars in several countries, the lessons of the Vietnam War are under attack as never before.

The US Department of Defense has a website commemorating the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Vietnam War. Dedicated to whitewashing history, the website's goals are, "to highlight the advances in technology, science, and medicine related to military research conducted during the Vietnam War." One wonders whether these advances include the development and use of napalm, Agent Orange and other weapons that killed millions of Vietnamese people along with US veterans. Veterans who fought in Vietnam are fighting against this revisionist history.

The US government clearly has an interest in obliterating the lessons of the war as it slogs on with brutal interventions in the Middle East and attempts at intervention in Latin America. American drones, white phosphorus, depleted uranium, and other weapons of destruction are built

upon the "advances" in technology lauded by the DoD's 50th anniversary website.

The DoD and others are working hard to obscure the history of the Vietnam War because they seek to blunt criticism of unpopular US interventions and to give the Pentagon a freer hand in conducting future wars. They seek to spend more of our tax dollars on military hardware and weaponry for use in their wars. What are some of the myths that the right is trying to spread about the Vietnam War?

A major general in the USAir Force who served in Vietnam told an anti-war veteran recently that the US could have won if it had committed enough resources to achieving victory. During the war, General Curtis LeMay suggested that the US could bomb Vietnam "back into the stone ages." While the US did not use the atomic bomb due to international pressure, it did everything short of this, deploying more air and ground munitions than were used in all of World War II.

Despite overwhelming US military superiority, the Vietnamese liberation forces won because they had the support of the people. Use of more US firepower and troops might have prolonged the war and the killing, but it would not have changed the outcome. A people who are organized and dedicated to winning their independence cannot be truly defeated — a lesson the US government has yet to learn in conducting its international affairs.

Another shibboleth of the

right is that the US conducted an "honorable" war in Vietnam with only sporadic human rights violations such as the massacre at My Lai. The Winter Soldier Investigation, conducted by Vietnam Veterans Against the War in 1971, painfully documented the massive scale of the massacres, torture of civilians and other war crimes perpetrated against the Vietnamese people.

Testifying before Congress on April 22, 1971, a young John Kerry, then representing VVAW, spoke of, "war crimes committed in Southeast Asia, not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command." He went on to describe the testimony of his fellow veterans, who, "personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war, and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country."

Nick Turse's well-documented book describing US atrocities in Vietnam, "Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam" is a more recent recounting of the war crimes Kerry testified about. The book has unsurprisingly been

attacked by conservative pundits.

Connected to the whitewashing of US war crimes is a denial of how US racism fueled the war in Vietnam. General William Westmoreland, the four-star general who was in command of all US military operations from 1964 to 1968, famously said, "The Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as does a Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in the Orient."

Vietnamese people were referred to by the racist expletive, gooks, and outright murder of civilians was justified by the "mere gook rule" which held that the death of any Vietnamese person, including women and children, was justified. Today, bigotry directed at Arabs and Muslims in countries the US has attacked and occupied and at home eerily echoes such racism as does the police murders of black men in cities across the US

Perhaps the most tired of all the myths the right is trying to perpetuate is that anti-war activists' actions dishonor US soldiers. This goes hand in hand with the myth that US soldiers returning from Vietnam were routinely spat upon by anti-war activists. Soldiers involved in illegal and immoral wars benefit greatly from anti-war movements (which they often lead upon their return). Ending US wars of intervention saves human lives abroad as well as the lives of our soldiers.

The soldiers who come back from US wars are not dishonored by anti-war movements, but by the callous disregard for their welfare shown by the US government which refuses to provide adequate treatment, rehabilitation and jobs. The impact of the violence of unjust wars echoes long after the wars are over and beyond the ranks of the soldiers and their families. Seymour Hersh, the reporter who documented the My Lai massacre, told Amy Goodman of *Democracy Now* that when he spoke to a mother whose son had been involved in the massacre, she told him, "I gave them a good boy, and they sent me back a murderer."

The final lesson that is being undermined by the revisionists is their contention that the war is long over and is ancient history. In fact, wars are not over until those



North Vietnamese soldiers set up camp in a city park in Saigon after the Americans pulled out.
Photo from Claudia Krich.

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HR 2114: The Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015

SUSAN SCHNALL

April 30, 1975: Reunification of Vietnam, the day the last Americans fled in helicopters from the roof of the Central Intelligence Station in the city that was then known as Saigon. That day that marked the end of the American War in Vietnam. That day the Vietnamese reclaimed their country. 40 years later, Congresswoman Barbara Lee introduced HR 2114-the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015 to heal the wounds of that conflict and help ameliorate the terrible suffering caused by the use of Agent Orange/dioxin in south and central Vietnam.

During the American War in Vietnam, the United States dropped 7.8 million tons of munitions, more than used in World War II on Germany and Japan combined. An estimated 800,000 tons failed to detonate, contaminating 20% of the land. 2 million gallons of Agent Orange/dioxin were sprayed over 18,000 square miles, covering five million acres of mangrove trees and forests, destroying 500,000 acres of crops. Today, 20 years after the United States and Vietnam have reconciled, the toxic legacies of the unexploded ordnance and contamination of the land and

people remain.

The Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign, a project supported by VVAW, was organized in 2007 to heal the lasting legacy of this war and to work with the Vietnam Association for the Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin. Toward that end, we have written the legislation Congresswoman Barbara Lee presented on April 30th. This legislation would:

1) provide health care and social services for the Vietnamese harmed; 2) provide medical assistance and disability benefits to affected children of American Vietnam veterans; 3) provide health care for affected Vietnamese Americans and their offspring; 4) clean up the land and restore ecosystems contaminated by Agent Orange/dioxin in Vietnam; and 5) conduct research into the health effects of Agent Orange on Americans and the Vietnamese.

The Veterans Administration currently compensates American veterans if they served in Vietnam 1961-1971 for a variety of cancers, skin disorders, and endocrine imbalances. They also cover about 16 birth defects for the children of female American veterans, but only spina bifida for the children

of male veterans. We believe there must be parity for all children who have been affected because of their parent's service in Vietnam.

Although the US Senate has authorized over \$84 million for the cleanup of Da Nang Airport, there are still an estimated 27 remaining hot spots in south Vietnam where the US had military bases and used large amounts of Agent Orange. The main victims in Vietnam were civilians whose villages were repeatedly sprayed; they ate the contaminated crops, drank the ground water, and gave birth to children with severe defects.

We need your support. Contact your congressperson in the House of Representatives and request s/he become a co-sponsor of this bill. Congressman Raul Grijalva has again signed on as

first co-sponsor. A delegation from Vietnam will be visiting Congress this fall, and we hope to have many representatives welcome them.

Please contact your congressperson in the House of Representatives and request they become a co-sponsor of HR 2114-the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015. For additional information, please contact the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign at: www.vn-agentorange.org.



SUSAN SCHNALL IS A CO-COORDINATOR OF THE VIETNAM AGENT ORANGE RELIEF AND RESPONSIBILITY CAMPAIGN. SHE IS A MEMBER OF VVAW, VFP AND APHA.



South Vietnamese soldiers arrive on May 1, 1975, at Van Hanh University in Saigon, where they discarded their uniforms and guns, then left as ordinary civilians. Photo from Claudia Krich.

40 Years After

continued from previous page

harmed by them receive justice and compensation. The Vietnam War killed four million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans. But the war continues in those still suffering from its legacy of unexploded ordnance and Agent Orange, a dioxin-laden chemical weapon.

Agent Orange causes cancers and other diseases as well as horrific birth defects in the children and grandchildren of those exposed. The US government has done precious little to provide redress to the Vietnamese victims or to Vietnamese-Americans who were exposed. While US veterans fought for and won some compensation from the Veterans Administration, the children of US veterans who suffer with disabilities due to birth defects related to exposure to Agent Orange receive no aid at all. To address this, Representative Barbara Lee is introducing the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015 to provide medical, rehabilitative and human

services to several generations of Vietnamese and Americans suffering with diseases and disabilities. The Vietnam Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign is working to build public support for US aid to the victims to heal the wounds of war.

Progressives also espouse myths about the war. One that some among us perpetuate is the portrayal of the anti-war movement as a mainly white student movement and ignorance of the leading role of black and other movements of color. While students did play an important role, the role of returning anti-war veterans, the Vietnamese-American anti-war movement, and movements of color was crucial.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech in 1967, *Beyond Vietnam*, helped turned the tide of public opinion in the US against the war. Even before Dr. King, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee (SNCC) came out against the war in 1965 as did Malcolm X. Muhammed Ali lost his heavyweight title and was convicted for refusing to fight in Vietnam. While there was media coverage of the National Guard shooting of unarmed white anti-war protesters at Kent State, scant attention was paid to the killings of black anti-war students at Jackson State. Vietnamese-Americans, particularly the Union of Vietnamese in the US, played a crucial role in analyzing the events in Vietnam even as they were often sidelined in some rallies for fear they would be identified with the "enemy." The national veteran's anti-war movement, led by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, brought formidable credibility and a working-class base to the anti-war movement. Seeing and giving voice to those who truly made up the anti-war movement is crucial if we are to build a strong and successful diverse anti-war movement today.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once called the United States, "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world." He noted that "a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of peace and independence in Vietnam, it is important that we bring the unadulterated and true lessons of the war forward as we build the movement to end wars of aggression and to invest our resources in projects of social uplift.



MERLE RATNER IS THE CO-COORDINATOR OF THE VIETNAM AGENT ORANGE RELIEF & RESPONSIBILITY CAMPAIGN.

AZADEH SHAHSHAHANI IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ATTORNEY BASED IN ATLANTA AND PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD.

Why They Died

ALLEN LEONARD MEECE

58,220 Americans died in the Vietnam War for various reasons. Their memories at the Vietnam Wall in Washington DC stand for something. They gave up their lives in a foreign place that wasn't threatening them.

Some died to protect California from an invasion by the "falling communist dominoes." My company commander actually made that proclamation during Navy recruit training in Milwaukee in the winter of 1962. The establishment defined, and still does, any socialism as Russian-style communism with a monolithic obsession to run the world just like capitalism wants to do.

Some died for the power surge they got when scaring socialist nations into subservience by showing that "civilized" people can become uncivilized and go berserk to intimidate victims.

Some died because they were

physically hauled to a place where they shouldn't be, and given no option to live but to fight their way out. A federal conscription law said that healthy men had to go shoot peasants, period. The men thought it smarter to gamble their lives than become "felons" and go to a federal penitentiary for five years.

Some died to prove that they believed the propaganda. There is no shame in believing what the big shots say - once. There IS shame in NOT learning from reality and not questioning authority.

They died to gallantly protect democracy by waiving their "inalienable right" to freedom and equality. They submitted to involuntary servitude and gave their honor to the military which sacrificed them for rich peoples' ideology. Those idealistic men deserve respect. They deserve color guards and flowers laid on their gravestones by lovely

women. There was no shame in their simple naivety. They were noble and fine. They believed the fallacy that they were protecting democracy. Time has shown that one goofy president harmed democracy more than any number of Vietnamese ever will.

They died to prove to the following generations how chauvinistically wrong it is to invade and try to run other peoples' countries. America withdrew from Vietnam in 1975 just as the French colonizers had withdrawn in 1955 - with nothing gained and many lives needlessly lost. We should have sent more diplomats instead of soldiers who might be with us now if we had.

We are still invading countries and pretending that we can run them better than their own people. We have to withdraw and leave them worse-off than they were before we "helped" them but now their oil fields are privatized

for our big corporations. We force them to think like we do even if we have to kill them. That is not fair to our dead. It is telling them that we learned nothing from their sacrifice - that maybe they died for nothing.

Fortunately for humanity, there are organizations like the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the next generation Iraq Veterans Against the War, who remember that sacrifice actually means giving too much for too little. We honor our departing veterans when we teach what they really stand for - peace.



ALLEN LEONARD MEECE WAS A SONAR TECHNICIAN WHO SERVED ON A DESTROYER THAT WAS ATTACKED IN THE TONKIN GULF (USS EDWARDS DD950, 1964 - 66). HE IS THE AUTHOR OF THE VIETNAM NAVAL NOVEL, "THE ABEL MUTINY," WHICH IS AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON.COM.

Letter to the Wall

JIM WOHLGEMUTH

Dear So Many,

There are more than 58,000 of you on this Wall, So Many. I remember the first thoughts of building a memorial to Vietnam Vets and I am so grateful for Jan Scruggs and the many others who made it possible. I contributed cash but they made it happen, so that future generations could see the names of So Many. It has been nearly 44 years since I first saw the hills around DaNang, since I saw the jungle at Chu Lai and the mud of the Mekong Delta. I was in the Navy, on the Westchester County LST 1167. To my knowledge I was a replacement for one of the crew who was killed by a sapper's mine the previous November 1, 1968. I didn't want to be there. I never wanted to be there, but I was so grateful to my Mother for making sure I was wearing Navy blue versus Army green, like so many of you.

My service was not yours. I was rarely in harm's way, sitting at the mouth of the Mekong River Delta providing support for Huey gun ships and PBRs. I was close enough to hear the roar of the fighter jets, the endless rhythm of those damn helicopters and the gut wrenching thud of some far away bombing run. I was close enough to see the tracers, the sparkling trail of VC rockets, and the eerie

motionlessness of flares. I was close enough to be a spectator but you all were there. So Many of you were there. And that haunts me everyday.

I left the Navy after three years, nine months and eleven days, a number I will never forget. I went to college, got a job, got married and had children. I had

a good life working in offices in and around Washington DC. Every Veteran's Day after The Wall was built, I would visit you all, look at the names of So Many who I did not know personally but who I would cry out for and ask why. Why were you now just a name etched on a stone black wall, while I lived on? So Many, 58,000 etchings that seemed to go on and on and on. Why was I the lucky one to be left off the wall. Why was I the one who would continue to go to ball games, enjoy a beer, drive a little too fast with the radio turned way up, make love, be a dad and a husband and now a grandfather. You the So Many would never hear the call of G-PA from a child of your child.

I tried in my own way to honor your life. When the second Bush administration chose to go to war with Iraq, I marched, I wore "no war" buttons. After years of war, I helped organize a vigil in Asheville to remember those young people who were now joining you, the So Many. When I became a teacher, I would

show the students my picture of the Wall with So Many names. I would try to bring it home to them by showing them the list of you from North Carolina. I would bring it down to two of you, Ricky Propst and Ricky Lowder who had learned in classrooms where they now learned, walked the halls where they now walked, played on the fields where they now played, lived in the community where they now were growing up and died before their time. There were always two or three of my students who would notice that Ricky Propst died on his birthday. They would also notice my voice cracking and a tear trailing down my cheek.

I tried, I still try to help get

your message out that you were real, that you were young, that you had futures, that you were So Many left behind. I worry now that the wall is becoming a memorial to the Vietnam War and not you all who are on it. I worry now that as we, the people who remember, age out, the people left behind, the people rewriting history, will think or promote Vietnam as an honorable endeavor. I worry now that people will misconstrue your honorable, brave service and your forever sacrifice with an honorable cause.

So I am now asking you, So Many, to come haunt the hearts and minds of the young today to stand up and say no. Say no to a life ended too soon; say no to So Many with PTSD or TBI; say no to fighting an "enemy" more misunderstood than threatening; say no to their war profiteers. If we don't go they cannot war. So I am praying to you So Many. Please come change the course of this country so that this time we can choose NOT to go, not to war.

With that just remember You So Many are never far from my mind and you are always in my heart. May God Bless You and Keep You.



JIM WOHLGEMUTH IS A MEMBER OF VVAW WHO LIVES IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

It has been nearly 44 years since I first saw the hills around DaNang . . .

Me and Veterans of Foreign Wars

BILL EHRHART

About a month after I got to Vietnam (February 1967), I got a letter from my father saying that the local VFW chapter, Forrest-Post Lodge, wanted to make me a member and they would cover my membership fee as long as I was on active duty. I wrote back that it seemed kind of weird to make me a veteran of a foreign war while I was still in the war, and only recently in it at that. My father, who was neither a member nor a veteran, wrote back saying that it didn't matter; they would make me a member immediately and pay my fee. I figured, what the hell, why not, at least I'd be able to get a beer when I got home. I would be 19 and the legal drinking age was 21. And when I got home from Vietnam, I dutifully went

to the VFW Post to be officially made a member.

I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. My father was a minister. The members of the VFW Post were the fathers of the kids I'd grown up with, I knew them and they knew me. It felt kind of weird sitting at the bar drinking beer with these men who were a generation older than me, and men I'd known most of my life. One of the members was one of my teachers and some were members of my father's church. Very weird. This was compounded by the fact that when I came home from Vietnam, I was an emotional and psychological wreck. On multiple levels, I had nothing to say to these guys, nothing to share with them. I don't remember the conversation

at all, I only remember an intense feeling of discomfort.

And then the formal meeting began, and the first thing they did was swear me in as a member. I mean, they literally swore me in. I had to raise my right hand (I don't recall if there was a Bible involved or not) and solemnly swear to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic. Seriously. I had to swear to the exact same oath I'd taken when I had joined the Marines nearly two years earlier. I did not know this was coming. I remember thinking, "What the fuck is this? I thought I was joining my local VFW, not the National Home Defense Force. This is Perkasio, Pennsylvania, for chrissake! Enemies foreign and

domestic? Like the Hippies?" As soon as that meeting was over, I beat it out of there. And I never went back. This was March 1968.

In retrospect, I realize that those men probably meant well, but we had about as much in common as a Maine lobster and the Man in the Moon. Within a few years, I got involved with Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I'm still involved with VVAW 45 years later.



W. D. EHRHART HOLDS A PH.D. FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WALES AT SWANSEA, AND TEACHES AT THE HAVERFORD SCHOOL IN SUBURBAN PHILADELPHIA.

The VA Saved My Life

JIM WILLINGHAM

In 1975, I went to the VA front office in Detroit looking for information about VA educational benefits. A man said, "No wonder we lost the war." I got angry and told them, "Get him out of here!" He went in the back room. I tried to wait, but was so uneasy that I left.

Later, I went through a VA representative at Wayne State University in Detroit and it was okay. In 1980, I went to a Vet Center in Manhattan. A smiling younger man sat down with me. I told him I was having difficulty socializing. He said, "Why don't you just get out and socialize?" I left, unable to say I was a Vietnam Veteran.

In Shreveport, Louisiana in 1981, I finally went to a VA hospital, told them I was a Vietnam Veteran in distress. An older, kind woman talked with me and asked me, "Are you into Zen?" Yes. It was her last day. So I talked with a kind gentleman for awhile, got into a general veterans group. One afternoon, this guy from the group showed up at my place, said he wanted to show me his .38, waving it in my face. Of course, I yelled at him to get out.

Next meeting, this genteel complacent counselor told me I was an elitist, so I told him off. Fortunately, in 1984, a Vet Center opened there and I felt acceptance.

However, I didn't discuss openly my prior experience with VVAW.

I found an ad for Gerald Gioglio's "Days of Decision," an oral history of conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War in *Mother Jones* magazine about 1987 and was given the opportunity to talk with him, for me tearful, intense and real for the first time. But I couldn't talk about the combat, the killing. My Vet Center counselor said, you knew he was going to be anti-war. Why had I done it? I told him that I needed to reconnect with my roots.

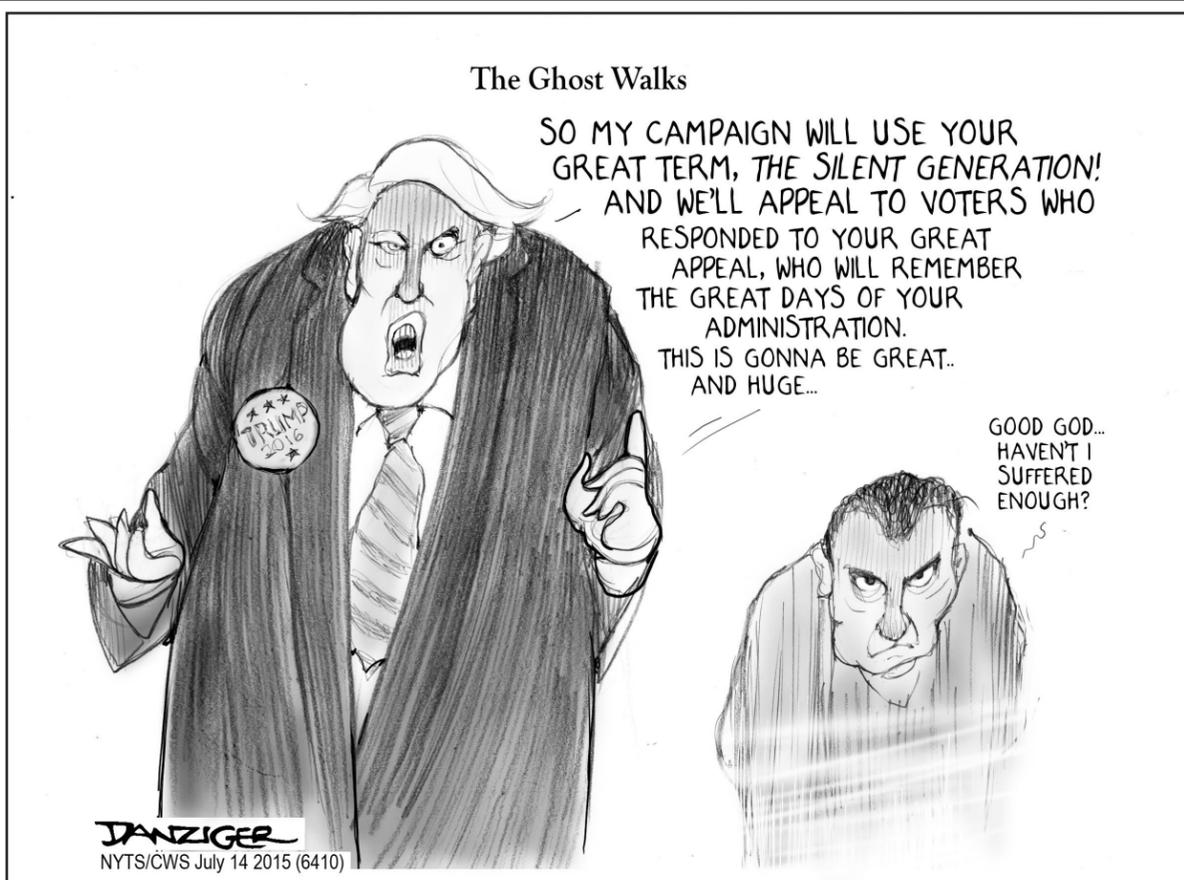
In 1988, I moved to Tampa Bay, been here ever since. I walked into the St. Petersburg

Vet Center and the team leader told me, "I don't kill people, I kill Communists!" I left. I was working temporary jobs. Later, I went back and talked with a kind younger woman about stress at work. She referred me to a VA psychiatrist who put me on an anti-depressant. I had the experience of sailing through work without getting upset.

I graduated from practical nursing school, stopped going to the VA and well, just coped. I was going to a Quaker meeting in St. Petersburg. Got married at 52, life was good. At age 63, I began having intense visceral flashbacks. My wife left me. I couldn't work so I went to the VA. They were very helpful. I was put on a mood stabilizer and eventually a better anti-depressant. I applied for PTSD disability, initially 30% then 70%. Meanwhile I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and the VA gave me an additional 30% disability for Agent Orange exposure. My medical treatments have been incredible. I have been treated with respect. The best part is that I may stubbornly survive this. I have nothing but praise for the VA in St. Petersburg, Florida, where I am "tethered" getting my healing medical treatments. The VA in St. Petersburg, Florida, saved my life.



JIM WILLINGHAM IS A VVAW MEMBER WHO LIVES IN GULFPORT, FLORIDA.



Honorable Service, Shameful War

RAYMOND REED HARDY

I served in the 1st Cav in 1968/69. It was not all that much fun. When I got back to the World, I pushed it all out of my head. Gone. A few people asked me, "What was it like?" But most just didn't seem to be aware that I was a veteran and that was fine by me. I was ashamed.

That was then, this is now. I am no longer ashamed of my service. I am still ashamed of my country for doing to Vietnam what we did and for doing what we did to Iraq. If I were president on 9/11 things would have been very, very different. But hindsight, though it may not actually be 20/20, is still better than foresight.

But, I owe a huge debt to the VA for the recent transition from shame to pride for my voluntary service in Vietnam. That's right, I was RA. How stupid was that? But, you guys who read these VVAW newsletters, you remember how it was. I was 1-A fresh out of college. I KNEW I was going to Vietnam. Maybe I can control my fate by signing up? On the other hand, there may have been a tiny urge left over from my adolescent hormone storm telling me that it might be fun to be in the Infantry. Maybe, I'm sayin'. Maybe....

But regardless. I came home totally, totally fucked up! I mean what sane man would not have come home from serving in Vietnam in the US Army Infantry totally messed up? Really! Think about it. There we were in a beautiful country burning down bamboo villages, shooting children and bombing civilians in North Vietnam the whole time. This was, in my opinion at the time, unAmerican! I have since decided that maybe such acts are actually quite American. At very least, they are in keeping with Republican Americans like George W. Bush, Richard Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld not to mention Donald Trump. Not nearly as unAmerican as I thought. Still...

So how did the VA help me find my truth and relieve my guilt? The short answer is PTSD counseling. I had no idea that I even HAD PTSD. I thought it was perfectly normal to shout at my kids, throw what I considered poorly-cooked beef roast in the garbage and smash my guitar to smithereens in a fit of rage. NOT! I mean now my wife's counselor agrees that she has been suffering from PTSD from living with a

PTSD veteran. And I think she is right! So, what happened was dramatic. I was encouraged to see this VA counselor who could determine if I was possibly suffering from PTSD. She asked me a bunch of questions. They seemed pretty neutral mostly. I mean like where do I like to sit in restaurants? Do I ever feel a little nervous when in super large groups like a football stadium? Etc...

What happened when the questions were all answered was really the beginning of my new life. She said, Well, according to the numbers here, you have a pretty severe case of PTSD. When I heard this, I cried like a baby. Why did I cry? I was again ashamed. I did not want to be one of those veterans who had been "broken" by the experience. I did not want to know that my family and I had been suffering all these years and I didn't do anything about it. But there it was, right in my face.

Over the next three years my counselor and I worked through most of my rage. I cried and I laughed. We used EMDR very successfully to uncover stuff that I had tried so hard to forget that it hurt. Here I will tell just one little story to help you see how this kind of work can help. I was doing EMDR and just trying to remember stuff. I mean I still can not remember most of that year. But this was the first day in the field after that little training thing the First Cav put us through when we arrived in the Nam. No actually, it was the second day. I had arrived on the chopper that had carried the supper rations out to the company. That night I "slept" on one of the trees they had blown down to make the pad. It was at about a 30 degree angle, but I chose to sleep there because some of men said there were leeches on the ground.

So, early the next morning we move out. I am outfitted with two bandoleers of M-60 ammo and told that I'm a part of the machine gun team. Okay... So, we are moving down this nice trail when up in front all hell breaks loose. Small arms fire and grenade launcher explosions shatter my hope of an uneventful year in the Nam. A man shouts "I'm hit! I'm hit!" and then all is quiet again. Of course, by this time, I am practically a part of the nearby vegetation as I take cover under a fallen tree. Then I

hear a man stage whisper, "Hey Ray..." I don't answer. After all, how does he know I can hear him? Then again, a little louder, "Hey Ray!" I wait what seems forever, but at least long enough for him to know I'm scared shitless.

Then I say, "What?"

"Come on. It's all clear."

So I go ahead and walking with my M-16 at the ready in a semi-crouch, I round a corner in the trail and all of a sudden there everybody is standing around watching me slink around the corner in full combat fear mode. What made it worse was that they were all smiling like Cheshire cats! I felt totally and irrevocably ashamed of my cowardice. There I was the first day with the company and they all knew I was a fucking coward. Total humiliation. Needless to say, it didn't take me long to forget that experience.

But, as I sat with the EMDR machine pulling my eyes back and forth and the sound in my ears pulling my attention along with my eyes, I saw it all from the point of view of a more mature man. I suddenly understood that those men were not thinking I was a coward. They were looking at the new guy as he rounded the bend in the trail with his rifle at the ready expecting anything. They were saying, without the words to say it, "Welcome to the 1st Cav." I had passed the test. I had the balls to walk TOWARD the gunfire.

Suddenly as I saw young and terrified self from the point of view of my more mature self I knew the truth and I cried again. I cried great tears of relief. I had

been carrying around this bolus of shame deep within. Never allowing myself to look at it, yet always feeling like I was unworthy. The relief I felt was palpable. What a wonderful thing.

Since those early days of counseling I have come to recognize that it was precisely BECAUSE I was so afraid that I was a hero. I was scared to death and I still rounded that corner. I am not saying I was the only hero in that company. Later that year I watched every last man in that company do hero's deeds time and again. From the Captain to the lowliest E-2 we served with pride and distinction. Company A, Fifth Battalion of the Seventh Brigade.

Let there be no doubt. Many of us felt shame because we were serving in a war that was not right, but we served our country as well as we could in spite of that shame. And, because of that shame, we came home with more than physical wounds. We came home with psychological wounds and even more troubling we came home with moral wounds.

Did all this make me any less an American? Not at all. This is my country. And now, instead of fighting with weapons I fight with words, dollars that support my candidates, and my vote. It is what American patriots do. How about you?



RAYMOND REED HARDY IS A VVAW MEMBER LIVING IN GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN. HE WAS IN THE ARMY FROM 1967 TO 1969.



Chicago Peace March, January 20, 1973.

Drafted: My Year in Vietnam as a Gay Anti-War Soldier (An Excerpt)

HARRY HAINES

Like most other young guys in 1969, I spent a lot of time figuring out how to avoid the Vietnam War draft. As I completed my undergrad degree at Southern Illinois University, I knew my time was running out. I had managed to secure the college deferment, and I even made the smart move of transferring my Selective Service board from my native New Jersey to Illinois, gaining some extra time as the bureaucracy slowly played out.

A couple of fellow students inspired me with their Beat the Draft stories. One of them returned to campus after a holiday trip back home to Chicago and proudly announced that his father had bribed the right Selective Service operative with \$4,000. He was home free with a coveted 4-F draft designation. We all wondered how to scrape together \$4,000.

The other guy had the good luck to be taken out by his buddies on a drunken spree on the night before his induction physical was scheduled 123 miles away in St. Louis. The guy passed out from drink, so his pals left him slouched on the bench at the bus pick-up. In the middle of the night, he fell off the bench, rolled into the gutter, and defecated in his pants. When the St. Louis bus arrived, he managed to pull himself on board.

At that most humiliating moment in the Army physical examination, when the line-up of naked young men were ordered to lean over, spread their cheeks, and present themselves for hemorrhoid inspection, he did exactly what he was told. Only, no member of the medical team would have anything to do with his filthy rear end. Rack up another 4-F! When the guy

finally got back to Carbondale, the party resumed, and we hailed him as a hero, wondering if we might get away with the same ploy.

I had a vested interest in failing the physical. For me, college was a way out and up from the working class. In fact, I was the first member of my family to earn a degree, and I was bound for a TV news anchor job in Florida. Boxes were packed. Used car was bought. And I had a line on a cheap apartment in Jacksonville. By 1969, we all knew that Vietnam was a lost cause. Like Dick Cheney, a champion recipient of six draft deferments, I had other plans.

All I had to do was take the bus to the St. Louis induction center and fail the physical exam. I had two things going for me, or so I thought. First, my eyesight. I am near-sighted in one eye, farsighted in the other. My depth perception was so bad that I had a hard time understanding the concept of perspective in my Renaissance art class. On those unhappy days in high school when we were turned out to play ball, I was consistently knocked on the head as I tried desperately to catch the damned thing out in center field.

As I told the coach, "I can't see the ball until it's right in front of my face, and then it's too late." Who would trust such a person with a weapon?

Second, I had discovered my sexual orientation in college, and it was gay, specifically precluding me from military service. The "gay thing," as I secretly called it, was my ace, my get-out-of-Nam card, my ticket to ride to my first real job in the news business. But I had

to play it smart.

I knew that I could increase my chances of rejection if I had some "good paper," a medical record that identified me as a homosexual, something official that I could present to the examiners. So, off I went to the campus counseling office. My assigned shrink turned out to be a grad student in psychology who told me, "Look, I don't know anything about you guys, I just don't like it when you molest children. And you really don't look like a homosexual." So, that plan didn't work out. I decided to take my chances without the paper work.

The induction physical was not altogether unpleasant. For one thing, I was surrounded by other young guys, and a lot of them looked really hot in their underwear. Little did I know that similar visuals would come my way over the next couple of years, one of the erotic perks of the Green Machine.

The eye exam lasted about ten minutes. I was approved for military service with the proviso that I would always have to wear my Army glasses. The "gay thing" took a little longer. At the beginning of the process, we were told to fill out a questionnaire that included little boxes for us to check off items that pertained to us. For example, the Army wanted to know if I had ever been a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the American volunteer unit that fought against the fascists in the Spanish Civil War back in the 1930's. Membership in this heroic unit would have made me about 60 years old in 1969, so there was no point in checking it off, as much as I admired the brave Americans

who fought against Franco.

But I did check off "homosexual tendencies," my ace in the Game of Draft. Granted, the "gay thing," by 1969, had become more of a trend than just a tendency, but the Army was apparently interested in knowing if I was just tilting in that direction, not a fully paid-up member of the homo tribe, which I was. So, I was interviewed by a civilian shrink working on contract for the Army, and I made the big mistake of not lunging across his desk and kissing him on the lips.

The guy asked me if I liked women, and I said yes, another big mistake. He asked me if I had dated women, and I foolishly told the truth. He asked me if I had experienced orgasm as a result of intercourse with a woman, and again I told him yes. Sex with men was not among the questions.

I could have described in great detail the hot affair I had experienced with another student who eventually dumped me, because he was afraid of discovery. I had nursed a broken heart for more than a year, but my first big love affair was not on the shrink's agenda. I could have described in detail the dormitory orgies that included a couple of top tier basketball players and a guy who later helped bomb Hanoi as an Air Force pilot. I might even have talked about the furtive locker room action that followed my daily four mile run as the unofficial mascot of the cross country team, but I never had the chance.

Nope. I was officially categorized as a Grade-A, All-American straight guy, a member of the heterosexual club, butch beef on the hoof. And I was soon headed for basic training at Fort Leonard Wood.

I would have done better if I had shit my pants.



HARRY W. HAINES WAS BORN IN MOUNT HOLLY, NEW JERSEY AND WAS DRAFTED, MUCH AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGMENT, IN 1969. HE SERVED IN THE US ARMY UNTIL 1971, INCLUDING ONE TOUR OF DUTY IN SOUTH VIETNAM. HE HAS BEEN A PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATION FOR 40 YEARS AND IS WRITING A MEMOIR ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE AS A GAY, ANTI-WAR SOLDIER. HE TEACHES AT MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY.

Peace At Home, Peace Abroad

BEN CHITTY

Report on a conference sponsored by the Veterans Peace Council and the Dave Cline Commemoration Committee New York City June 6, 2015.

Introduction

Is it possible to achieve peace abroad without achieving peace at home? Or to achieve peace at home without peace abroad? If we had a desegregated, equal opportunity, green US military, would it not still be the military arm of the US empire? When hundreds of thousands took to the streets to oppose the invasion of Iraq, the media called them "the second superpower," so why did we not stop the war?

In his 1967 Riverside speech "Beyond Vietnam," the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the obstacles to peace and justice. "We must rapidly begin the shift," he said, "from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society... When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered." Until we overcome these giant triplets, we will remain a country which fights wars like Vietnam, or Afghanistan, or Iraq.

As long as we measure success by the things we buy and not by the kind of future we make for our children and their children, we will leave them a world without peace and without justice. Progressive movements are many and diverse: we work to end racism and sexism, or to save the environment, or to transform our toxic culture, even to oppose US imperialism. Worthy goals, but each tackled alone will not succeed in transforming our society. That transformation requires a shift in social consciousness, and the giant triplets bar the way. We can constructively discuss these issues only so long as we maintain respect for one another.

Racism/Sexism/Misogyny

Racism encourages us to see enemies as "the other," deserving extermination. The Nazi treatment of Jews, gypsies, and homosexuals is the paradigmatic modern example. But racism and sexism are more than individual attitudes and choices, they are structural forces entrenched in our society.

Health care is representative:

in Baltimore's minority neighborhoods, life expectancy is 66 years, similar to that in Kazakhstan or India; elsewhere in Baltimore, it is 71 years. Household wealth: African American borrowers pay more interest on home loans than whites - \$15,000 over the life of the loan.

Why is this a veterans issue?

First, because justice is indivisible: an injury to one is an injury to all.

Second, globalization links these issues as it links economies: global economic structures exploiting racial and sexual oppression siphon profits to the 1% (whose interests the military protects and serves).

Third, our organizations suffer from "white skin privilege." This is not just a minority membership numbers game, but a collective difficulty in grappling with issues affecting minority communities. For example, drug use may look like a matter of individual choice, but drugs function as a means of social control, and the racialized enforcement of drug laws devastates minority communities diminishing economic opportunity and suppressing political participation.

Veterans grasp solidarity with others and enjoy a high level of social respect. Our participation in movements for social change is valuable. We can reach out to fellow veterans and their families who have been impacted by war, economic injustice, and racism. We can testify to the corrosive effects of the rank misogyny used to train recruits. We can speak from experience about joining the military to young people, a demographic targeted by a multi-million dollar public relations campaign.

Militarism

Militarism is almost everywhere you look.

Military spending—including veterans benefits—approaches two thirds of the US budget, and we spend more than the combined totals of the next ten countries in the world.

Military technology is transferred to domestic police forces for use in the "wars" on drugs and terrorism, almost half a million pieces of equipment since 1997, including Tasers and APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers), deployed everywhere, and LRADs

(Long Range Acoustical Devices) which cause permanent hearing loss, severe headaches, and panic, used in Chicago, Pittsburgh, Oakland, and NYC. More are on the way: "Skunk" crowd control weapons which discharge a foul-smelling liquid that induces nausea and vomiting, and ADS (Active Denial System technology), which excites water and fat molecules in the skin, heating them much like a microwave oven. Many of these so-called "non-lethal" weapons were developed for crowd control in occupied countries.

Police forces adopt military tactics like surveillance, including cell traffic and social media ("open source intelligence"), "shock & awe" (overwhelming force), arbitrary detentions. Dissent = terrorism. Environmental activists, anti-NATO/WTO/WB protesters, animal rights activists, are subjected to treatments used on alleged adherents of Al Qaeda or the Islamic State - surveillance, entrapment, provocation, arbitrary detention.

The US military enjoys legal "impunity" abroad - "status-of-forces agreements" exempt US military personnel from most local laws and prosecutions. Behind the "blue wall of silence," police enjoy impunity in the communities where they impose public order.

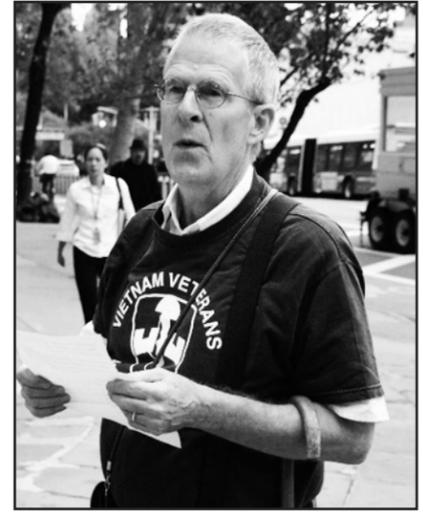
Force is preferred to negotiation, war over diplomacy. Force suppresses challenges to US economic and political interests abroad, and rebellions against injustices at home.

Materialism

Materialism refers both to mindless consumerism and to an economy planned to support and enhance private profit.

Consumer spending is the linchpin of the for-profit economy, and popular culture promotes and nurtures habits of getting and spending. This undermines the organic solidarity of communities, whether veterans, workers, or even neighborhoods, and leaves them defenseless against changes which appear to be impersonal and inevitable—job loss, urban blight, and toxic waste deposits.

The economy is structured and restructured to enhance profits. Social services are privatized. Charter schools compete with underfunded public schools. Congress hobbles the Post Office with a mandate to over-fund its pension plans, making it difficult



Ben Chitty.

to compete with private carriers. Prisons, hospitals and nursing homes, highways, can all be milked for private profit.

Even military force is privatized. The ranks are filled with "volunteers," many seeking the opportunity denied them in a hollowed-out economy. Mercenaries and contractors conduct military operations abroad; at home private security supplements police. Military bases (like prisons) become sources of employment and economic stability, making them hard to close even when they are no longer (or never were) needed.

Veterans in the Movement for Peace and Social Justice

The Veterans Peace Council can promote the participation of veterans in the movement for peace and social justice.

We may focus on domestic issues, but we cannot neglect international issues—the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, Russia in Ukraine, China in the South China Sea—or veterans of foreign military forces such as British Vets For Peace or Combatants For Peace in Israel and Palestine.

Veterans groups are not political parties, but we can learn from organizations resisting austerity like Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

Corporations - empowered by Citizens United and other court decisions giving them constitutional "personhood" - are the main obstacle to progressive social change. Why? Because their profits depend on exploitation of the status quo. We could work to revoke their charters, a proposal in the spirit of Thomas Paine.

continued on next page

A Warrior's Psalm From Viet Nam

Take hold weary warrior,
we, who sense your doubt
take hold for your recovery
is what our's about.

I know well the horror
the truth of that been said
an empty consolation
if spoken to the dead.

I can only promise you
your must stay alive
to realize the purpose
of soldiers who survive.

Yes, we're all expendable
a maddening hopeless fate.
To give up tho a greater sin
to self-capitulate.

We warriors know the dues of war;
a burden quite enough.
We need you now to hear this cry
"Of death I've had enough!"

The burden of your private hell
is only painful now
a psychic exorcism
a purging you must allow.

It doesn't mean you're going mad
and here's the litmus test:
The wicked never know your pain
so dude, give it a rest.

The challenge now to stay alive
keep that first! Protected
and day by day to face the ways
we all have been affected.

The newness of the pain you feel
the anguish of your soul
as broken as you might feel now
you'll once again be whole.

I don't suggest the sorrow and
the sadness won't return
but the crippling desperation
we'll teach you to discern.

The passion you young warriors feel
has you doubt your worth
you've already died a thousand deaths
it's time now for rebirth.

—Sgt. Charles F. Harrienger Jr.



Peace At Home, Peace Abroad

continued from previous page

The Council could reestablish a local veterans speakers' bureau, with a focus on counter-recruitment and the real history of the American War in Vietnam. Individual veterans already speak in schools, but if the effort were coordinated, every request would be filled.

The Council could campaign to award the Medal of Honor

to Army Warrant Officer Hugh Thomson (1943-2006) who intervened to stop the massacre at My Lai in 1968, and to replace slave-owner Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill with Union veteran Harriet Tubman.

The Council could coordinate congressional delegations, where groups of veterans visit local congressional offices to promote

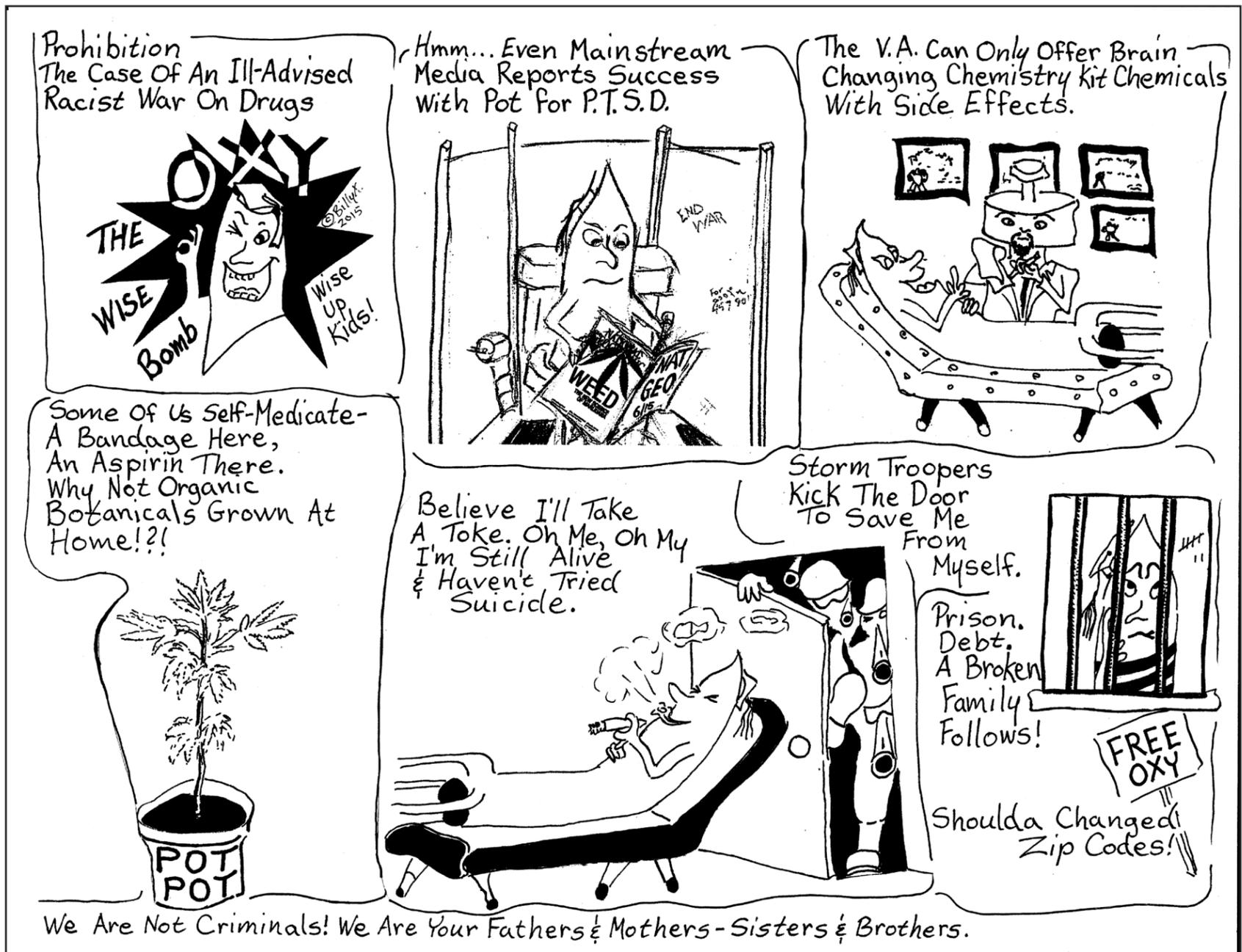
the "peace economy," as well as specific issues like the HR 2114 Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015.

The Veterans Peace Council of Metro New York and the Dave Cline Commemoration Committee are joint projects of the local chapters of Veterans For Peace and the Clarence Fitch Chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Last June, the Council sponsored an all-day

conference on the topic, "Peace At Home, Peace Abroad." This report was drafted by VFP Associate Wendy Fisher and VVAW Member Ben Chitty, and reviewed by the Council.



BEN CHITTY IS A SHELLBACK NAVY VETERAN OF TWO DEPLOYMENTS TO VIETNAM, AND A LONG-TIME MEMBER OF VVAW.



Comments or suggestions? billyx.net@gmail.com www.billyx.net

Home Grown or Big Pharma

BILLY X. CURMANO

Suicide among the military and veterans has reached epidemic proportions. It would seem obvious every avenue of prevention would be thoroughly explored and yet Federal drug laws have hindered some very promising research with marijuana for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The June 2015 cover of *National Geographic* magazine boldly proclaims, "Weed The New Science of Marijuana" with an issue largely devoted to the theme. Much of the best research is carried out in other countries because of US law. A lab in Spain has not only shown evidence that cannabinoids are possibly anti-cancer agents, but that they can also protect the

brain from trauma. Biochemist Manuel Guzman heads the lab and is quoted in *National Geographic*:

"And you have to forget what is not good for your mental health - a war, a trauma, an aversive memory of some kind. The cannabinoid system is crucial in helping us push bad memories away."

Neurosurgeon and *CNN* chief medical correspondent, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, who was offered the position of US Surgeon General by President Obama has stated he was initially concerned about the potential for substance abuse with legalized marijuana until he researched it and found "...it doesn't have a high potential for abuse.

Nobody overdoses on weed."

Dr. Gupta continued in this September's *Playboy* interview, "Look around the world. Israel has done some incredible research in this area. We visited and talked with scientists like Dr. Raphael Mechoulam about marijuana's anti-cancer effects and the benefits for those suffering from PTSD."

The Fed classifies marijuana as a dangerous Schedule I drug with no medical value. The police and prison industry have a vested interest in keeping marijuana illegal. There are jobs on the line and drug seizure laws that profit the criminal justice system. I believe politicians that use law enforcement concerns as an

excuse to continue the prohibition are either ill-informed or have special interests of their own.

I am a combat wounded Vietnam Veteran diagnosed with a high degree of PTSD. When I returned home, I found the Veterans Administration hospital so stifling I basically dropped out and self-medicated my traumas away. I made it. I'm still alive. The VA has changed for the better and I'm back in the system. There are therapy sessions and a chemistry kit of pharmaceuticals with varying degrees of side effects prescribed for PTSD. I'm reluctant to take them. I would prefer a plant I'm familiar with and one I could even grow at home. Cannabis isn't new. The Chinese have used it in medicine for thousands of years and charred seeds from about 3000 B.C. have been found in Siberia.



BILLY CURMANO WAS A PARATROOPER SERVING WITH D COMPANY, 4TH BATTALION, 503RD INFANTRY, 173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE DURING 1968 AND 1969. HE WAS WOUNDED NEAR TUY HOA.





THE VETERAN

SECTION B

Volume 45, Number 2

Fall 2015

David Curry: How Atheists Sing in Church

JANET BONHAM CURRY

As many of you surviving spouses may know, the first few times we are called upon to tell our loved one's story, without him or her around, it is not easy. Among the most completely bizarre and entirely fitting truths about David Curry is that he wrote by far and away the best account of his own life while already years—deep into the multiple afflictions that finally took his life this April. The story I want to tell here though starts with a story his father, Minter Glen Curry, told by David, from the beginning.

By the time I met David in Chicago in 1985, he had survived early childhood in the town of Kimball, McDowell County, aka the Free State of McDowell, in West Virginia, where his dad and grandfather were coal miners. In the terms of this region, 66 years old is long-lived. Kimball is northeast of Coalwood, where Homer Hickam, the nonfictional rocket boy of *October Sky* was born, 5 years before David. Kimball is also just east of Welch, the McDowell county seat, where David's dad took him to see the blood on the county courthouse steps where Matewan Sheriff Sid Hatfield was assassinated.

Matewan is the town in Mingo county, adjacent to McDowell, home of the Battle of Matewan, in which Sheriff Hatfield refused to allow the coal company's hired Baldwin-Felts detectives to evict unionized miners from their homes in the spring of 1920. Albert and Lee Felts had carried out several evictions and were on their way back to Bluefield when Sheriff and Mayor Cabell Testerman determined the Felts' warrants for Hatfield's arrest to be fraudulent. Hatfield and Testerman confronted the Felts to discuss the matter. The Felts failed to anticipate the armed miners watching, hidden in doorways, just behind windows, up on the roofs. The Battle left 7 detectives, including two of the Felts brothers, and 3 townsmen dead, including the Mayor.

This was the precursor to the more well-known Battle of Blair Mountain, 5 days in August

and September in 1921, when 10,000 miners hiked to Logan County, faced down 3,000 law enforcement and scabs; a million rounds were fired, plus remaining bombs and gas from WWI were used by the US Army to try to school these righteous miners in correct worker decorum.

Hatfield, though acquitted by the jury of Matewan Battle-related murder charges, was brought up on conspiracy charges from another case in 1921. On Hatfield's way to that trial, along with his co-defendant and their wives, unarmed, he was shot to death by Baldwin-Felts agents, who were never convicted, claiming self-defense.

By the time David's dad had been withered by a life of the heaviest physical labor, black lung, two legs and an arm paralyzed by strokes, he was using

his good arm to leaflet on behalf of striking nurses at his WV nursing home, stashing more literature in the one bureau drawer he could reach.

As a kid, David had rescued his younger sister and brother from a would-be fatal encounter with a hornet's nest; and had also rescued Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in a fierce debate with his 5th grade hard shell Baptist Creationist teacher. Somehow, the early fear that stayed with him, though, until he began to take Zoe to the zoo, was when a bullying older girl had told him that giraffes are able to spit poison.

The family moved through Appalachia to Virginia, then to Mississippi, as the mining jobs disappeared, as McDowell, nationally famous for its coal production records, began, in the late 1950s, to set state records for

highest percentage of loss. While plenty of fathers left their families behind, David's stayed together, though the times and typical family dynamics took a great toll from his mother, and ultimately, took childhood from David, as he worked his way from job to job, trying to help out.

His prodigious math scores, his community college and ROTC experience, and his Vietnam ordeal and stunning aftermath are best read in his Third Turkey essay (on pages 24-27).

I met David while I was in grad school at the University of Chicago, and as I was getting to know him, to know this story, and now that you know a bit more of it too, you can probably appreciate the sheer bewildered joy with which I learned that the nickname



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Memories of Dad

ZOE MICHAELA CURRY

So here's a Dad story. My Dad, David Curry, was trying to help me set up a new monitor for my older desktop. I was trying to put it together myself, but I didn't really know what I was doing. And of course, my dad, tech genius, in the middle of writing a zillion articles for a zillion conferences and grading a zillion papers and writing a zillion grants, agreed to help me. He had the monitor facing the wrong way while he was monkeying with it, so I thought he was putting it in incorrectly. I thought a part I saw on the desk belonged on the monitor. It didn't.

I was harping at him the whole time. Dad, you're doing it wrong!!, knowing I was really just mad that he knew more than I did. At age 11, when everything your parents do is definitionally mistaken from beginning to end, I picked up the piece, dashing across the study, Dad! It's right HERE, it goes to the...face-plant. I no doubt tripped over the box with the directions in it.

He could have said What a dork!!!, or Zoe do you have any self-control?!!, or, tragically, are you ok??????. Or the classic Robin Williams, we're not laughing at

you; we're laughing next to you. What he said was "Yeeeeees. You were saying?"

Part classic Dad annoying passive aggression: it seemed to allow a certain saving of face, not a full-force so now who's the wrong one, not over-played. Even so, as tweens do, I filed it instantly in the dis category. We both knew he knew how to fix the thing, he knew he knew it. It was also part funny in a warm way. Yeeeeesss.

This is how I think of my dad, and most of our VVAW friends. No one is more cruelly/hilariously ironic when it's called

for, especially when they are all together. But his temper was so controlled, so often. Not everyone can go through what he went through and be as stable as he was. How did he not lose his brain? How did he not lose his heart. Just now that I'm old enough (21) to get more about that, I'm on my own.



ZOE IS DAVID CURRY'S DAUGHTER, AND FELLOW WEST VIRGINIAN CO-CONSPIRATOR. SHE IS MAJORING IN PSYCHOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI AT ST. LOUIS.

David Curry: How Atheists Sing in Church

continued from page 21

his 5th grade Unitarian religious education students had for him was Mr. Boring. An aspirational title beyond those boys' and girls' wildest dreams.

As I saw him with his students, specially chosen for their regular teacher's designations as 'incorrigibles', two things shone through for me. First, the way these kids just glued themselves to him, waiting with total greed for the wicked dry humor lines, and took off with keen interest in his lessons on Islam, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Judaism – he built these relationships

with these kids as fellow-travelers. And this is how I saw him relate to every other student I met or heard of since, to his dissertation advisor's grandkids whom we babysat together, to his math students in medium security, to Hannah and Kathleen's cats, to my own preschool students, to his undergrad and grad students at West Virginia University, and then at the University of Missouri at St. Louis. He was fully entitled to pull rank in a dozen dimensions – academic, military, poverty-cred, leftist; and he certainly had a ROTC commander's voice if

needed; but that was not him. He was the best possible partner, the best possible father.

Second, when he sang in church, and the Unitarian sacred music list included all kinds: We Shall Overcome, Lift Every Voice, Hatikva, Des Colores, John Henry, 16 Tons, This Land is Your Land – he sang not loudly, not softly either, but in a far deeper, rounder voice than I ever heard him use anywhere else. Here was a voice, I thought, that had sang out from that coal-mining spiritual DNA going way, way, back in time, way back through the days of Tom Joad, of the Russian Revolutionaries, of

the nation of Haitian ex-slaves, of Thomas Paine, of Galileo, of all the unnumbered ones who worked, who read and argued back, who stood up against oppression, who mourned their dead and fought like hell for the living.

David never had much faith in an afterlife, but he did warn that he had a really long list of human suffering-related, laser-sharp U of C-powered questions, should it turn out, unlike Apocalypse Now, that there is somebody in charge. There he'll be, in that scenario, doing differential equations on the back of envelopes while he waits in line. Nelson Mandela might not be finished yet. Freddy Gray probably made a new, helpful friend.

Either way, however that big mystery turns out, one thing I know, without question, without doubt. Your dad, Zoe, is here, right here, for always, guarding you, from the bookshelf (1), and through so many of you VVAW comrades, Barry, Bill, Charlie, Joe, Jeff, Claudia, Janette, Alba, Hannah, Kathleen, for ever and for always.

1. image from 'Becoming a Book', a poem by Howard Schwartz, The Library of Dreams. Kansas City: University of Missouri-Kansas City BkMk Press, 2013.



JANET, VVAW MEMBER SINCE 1986, MARRIED DAVID CURRY ON BASTILLE DAY, 1988. THEY MOVED TO WEST VIRGINIA IN 1989, WHERE THEY ADOPTED THEIR DAUGHTER ZOE. JANET CURRENTLY TEACHES HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT AT UNIVERSITY CITY HIGH SCHOOL IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.



David and Janet.

Remembering Dave Curry

BARRY ROMO

In 1972, Dave Curry saw me being interviewed on a morning television show during the Republican National Convention in Miami, inviting veterans to join Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in protesting the convention. Dave had just gotten out of the service. He hitchhiked from Appalachia down to Miami to join in the action, and from then on, was a part of VVAW.

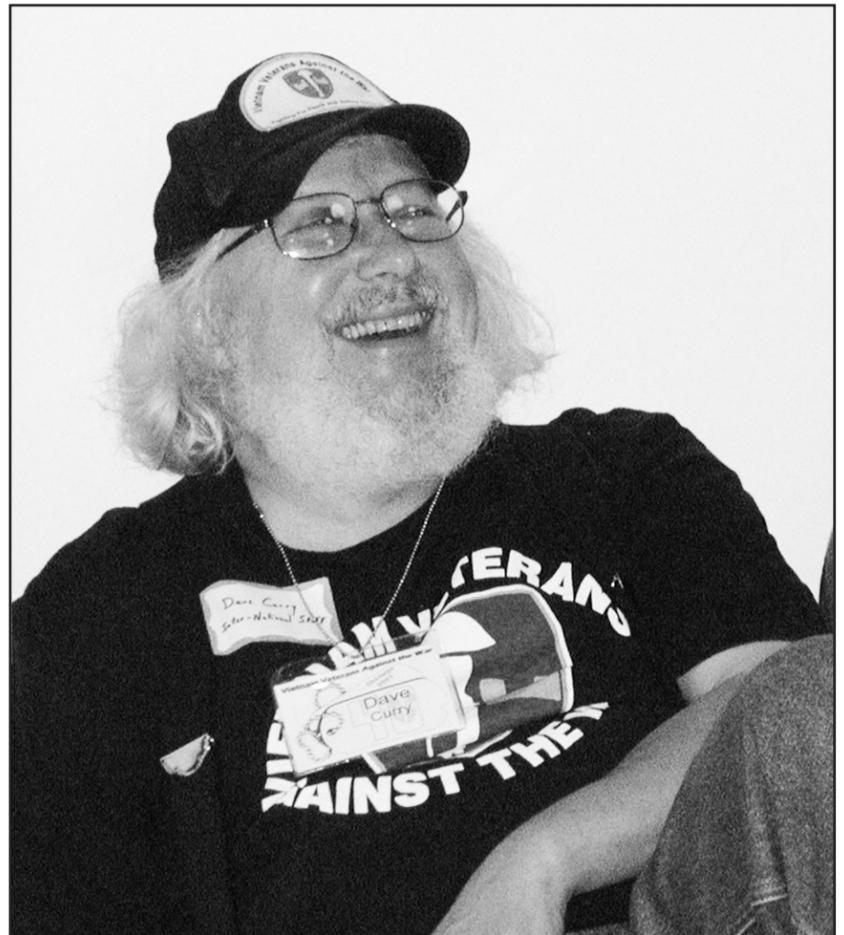
Dave came from a poor working class mining family. His family often stayed in abandoned homes while he was growing up and his father was looking for work. He was the first person in his family to graduate from college. He joined ROTC when he went to college to pay for his education. The first shirt he ever had that didn't have a hole in it was bought by his ROTC sergeant at Ole Miss. ROTC not only paid for his education, but he received a stipend, military clothes, and came into the service as an officer. He went to school and got his Master's degree.

He came on Active Duty and was sent to Laotian school because at the time, the US was planning to invade Laos, a failed operation which ended up being led by Vietnamese soldiers instead of US soldiers. When that didn't pan out, he was sent to Vietnam as an intelligence officer to gather information, to check out the location of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese. He didn't wear a uniform – he wasn't just an intelligence officer but also counter-intelligence. He talked to POW's after they

were captured. He received a letter of commendation for the valuable information he was able to get out of prisoners. The other Captain whom he worked with would rough up prisoners and was generally a horrible person. Dave was not that kind of person so when he received the letter of commendation he felt it proved that you could do things the right way to get information.

However, he soon felt differently. Due to his commendation, he was invited to visit one of the intelligence locations, and was told how valuable the information he gained was. When he got there, he saw the instruments of torture - the equipment and the dental chairs. He realized in that moment that the information he was passing on was allowing these prisoners to be tortured that much more. He had a gigantic crisis of conscience. He was a Captain in Vietnam in early 1972. He tried to resign his commission and of course, they said no. He was forced to finish out his tour and he became an alcoholic during that time. He was so ashamed that even when you try to be a decent human, the war machine you are part of is that blood thirsty that it still had horrible outcomes.

Dave was a lifetime member of VVAW. He helped VVAW with security and participated in the silent marches. He loved the members of VVAW and VVAW itself. He was the coordinator of a state chapter. He came to Chicago to get his PhD in Sociology at the University of Chicago. Dave



participated in the early rap groups and helped with VVAW's "war on the VA" to get recognition and benefits for veterans suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

After receiving his PhD, he worked at a veteran's outreach and counseling center in Mobile, AL. It was there where he was framed for selling drugs. An undercover cop came to the vet center. Dave was trying to help out who he thought was a vet in need and was arrested for selling this undercover cop a small amount of cocaine on federal property. During his time in Mobile, he had been working with the Southern Poverty Law Center and with the local NAACP. He was an outspoken anti-war activist.

The judge on his case utterly despised him. He was sentenced to 34 years in a federal prison in Florida. He was later re-sentenced to six years, and moved back to Chicago for post-doctoral work. Dave was pardoned by President Clinton on November 21, 2000.

We (VVAW) had been friends with Harold Washington from his time as a state legislator and a US representative. When VVAW went to Washington, DC to demand recognition for Agent Orange service-connected disabilities, Harold was an ally. He helped get VVAW members into Arlington National Cemetery to see Medgar Evers' plot. When Harold Washington made his run for Chicago mayor, Dave played a key role in mobilizing veterans to vote. Dave served as the Secretary and Treasurer of Mayor Washington's Welcome Home Parade.

Dave also served on the VVAW Board of Directors, as a National Coordinator, and as national staff at various points. Dave was also the godfather of my daughter. Dave was just a brilliant guy. He was a nice soft spoken guy in the wrong place during Vietnam. I don't think he ever was able to reconcile what he had been a part of in Vietnam. I really do miss him.



BARRY ROMO IS A LONG-TIME VVAW MEMBER AND CHICAGO RESIDENT.



A Prisoner Story: The Third Turkey

G. DAVID CURRY

This paper was presented at the 2012 Annual Meetings of the American Society of Criminology in Chicago on November 15.

"Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things, creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong, of society that it should force them to do so."

—Oscar Wilde

A Bus Ride

The night was one of those nights when I wasn't sure if I slept at all. I was excited. Something was going to change, but I didn't know exactly what or how. The only person whom I was able to reach by phone on the day that I found out that I was going to be moved was my friend Jane. Prison phone calls are like that. There is no leaving of messages. There is no making two calls without stressing potentially fatal line etiquette. I could only hope that Jane, whose own husband, was incarcerated would be able to reach my ever stalwartly protective attorney Arthur Madden. I was a pro bono case for Arthur, but that was not a qualification affecting his actions on my behalf.

As I hopelessly tried to sleep, I distinctly remember the shadow of prison bars on the top bunk a few feet away. The shadow of the bars were a stark reminder that I was caged in what e.e. cummings (1934) called an "enormous room" with other - at least fifty other - men (no women here). At the lower end of medium-security, enormous rooms or dormitories are an effective correctional tool and a far superior life-style for inmates. Impossible in cell blocks, but possible in dormitories are inmates' ability to shut up screamers, restrain firebugs and suicides, and apply immediate first aid to injured or sick friends.

Finally, just before dawn, a hack (correctional officer) came to my bunk. Whether I was finally asleep or lying there awake, I'll never know. Holding a flashlight and Polaroid file photo of me, the guard asked, "Are you Curry?" I was instantly excited that my waiting was over and just as instantly terrified about

what my next step would be. "We've been looking all over for you." Yes, the Federal Bureau of Prisons can sometimes not find a specific man in a medium-security prison. All jails and prisons have administrative incompetence in common.

As the guard led me past friends sleeping the restless sleep that caged men sleep, I lugged my box of books. My anxiety about what might happen next grew, increasingly replacing any earlier wish to sleep. When we entered the halls of what was known as the "control" area, I could hear men talking in the distance. One particularly loud young voice was complaining about being stuck there for two hours while the hacks look for one "asshole." "Okay," I thought, "they're all going to be angry at me on initial contact." At least some of them considered me responsible for their delay and waiting. It was time for me to try to appear other than the soft compassionate person that I had worked to appear to be since I smoked that first joint sitting on a bunker in Vietnam. Suppressing my fears as I had to do those first days in Vietnam over a decade before, I pretended that I was someone else.

I looked straight ahead and ignored the men into whose midst I was led. The Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) officer who brought me into the room led me to a tray of cold fried eggs, bacon, and toast lying on the floor against the wall. The hack said that he was required to feed me breakfast, but that I should be "quick" about it because he needed to return the tray to the kitchen. I took the tray and banged it on the floor, knocking the cold meal on to what I knew to be a spotless convict-scrubbed cement floor. I banged it twice, though the second bang may have been unnecessary to dump my food onto the floor. I shoved the tray to the hack trying to act as nonchalant and as animal-like as I could. The officer whom I didn't know and who didn't know me looked as uncomfortable by my behavior as I could have wished if I had been a movie director telling him to look uneasy. I sat down on the floor and began to gobble down the cold breakfast as if I were a dungeon resident being fed for the first time in months.

After I had wolfed down my breakfast, things got even better



for my newly chosen role as someone not to be "messed with" (or in the deadly play-yard chatter of my youth - kicked, crying, and begging). The ranking transfer officer told me that he wanted to talk to me away from the other prisoners. "Great! They'll think that I'm some kind of snitch." Once out of earshot, the hack with a hint of empathy in his voice said that all of the other prisoners in the holding area were being transferred to level 1 or Federal Prison Camp status. He said that he believed that the transition to "camp" status was one that should be gradually affected. I was touched by the hack's concern for his prisoners and thought, "How sad it would be, if I were forced to kill him in some escape action." I knew that I could do it. I have a wonderful ability given me by the military to think of adversaries as less than human. Prison is a great place for such survival tendencies to burst from deep in the ego and possibly even in the id to conscious recognition and utility. "But," the hack turned stern on me, "You have a 34-year sentence. I cannot possibly transport you the same way as these other prisoners. I need to know that you won't file a complaint that I transported you differently from these other prisoners." I slowly gave the head hack my word that he need fear no legal or other action from me for sparing my fellow travelers restraint on the remainder of their bus ride. The alternative would have been more stupid than any hack could have imagined. Had I balked at the hack's offer, he would have made sure key inmates on the bus would have known that their being chained was my fault. As the head hack's subordinates wrapped

and fitted me with chains, it was hard to act like this was something that I was used to. I repressed signs of my amazement and fascination. I hoped that this wouldn't have some permanent effect on my mental health or worse my sexual tastes. Being chained among men with no chains made me more vulnerable to attack than anytime in life (except for several anti-Klan and anti-Nazi non-violent marches when racists hurled rocks and we sang insipid protest songs back at them).

When the head hack announced to the other assembled inmates that I had consented to special treatment in order to make all of the other prisoners more comfortable, a range from respect to awe from the other inmates on the bus ride was easy to perceive. One very burly prisoner with a bushy beard pushed others aside to grab my box of books. "I got this, brother," he said. That was good, because I hadn't imagined just how restraining shackles can be. In the back of my mind, I wondered, "How can I defecate, wipe, and urinate without hands?" The hairy inmate, who was truly a mountain of a human, asked if I were a "vet". After my answering affirmatively, the huge shaggy creature responded "special forces, two tours." I shared, "Special Ops, Army, only one tour, late in the war." Talking quietly the mountain advised, "I don't know how you got here, but, if they take their eyes off you for even a second, run." I had already noted the two shotguns possessively clenched by the two hacks supporting the

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head hack. Though always being a good runner, I had no intention of trying to outrun buckshot.

To myself, I thought as I hobbled along, "Would the hacks be going to all this trouble if they knew that I was a tenured associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of South Alabama with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, with my first academic book already at the publisher?" The bus ride was largely uneventful. After the other bus riders had been deposited at Eglin AFB Federal Prison Camp (Florida), I was delivered to the Santa Rosa County Jail. My sainted lawyer had arranged for a federal marshal to be waiting for me there. Otherwise, I could have ridden buses and visited local jails for days. The prison officers appeared surprised when the Federal Marshal ordered my restraints removed and offered my box of books and me a ride on to Mobile, Alabama where I began the torturous process of re-sentencing and appeal denials. Homeless, I lived as a volunteer groundskeeper and custodian at the Unitarian-Universalist Church (where else?).

The shackles and bus ride were my deepest penetration into the imprisonment experience. While I knew that things could get more restrictive, more painful in Sikes' terminology, more "totalitarian" in Eric Olin Wright's (1993) terminology, I had already been caged in structures suitable for restraining the fiercest predators this planet has to offer. I had become that most extreme opposite of a citizen of our society, the convict. I will never be the same. In my unconscious mind, I still wear those chains. Few other memories have made a greater mark on my mind. But, I did follow the old convict's advice, I ran away, at least in my dealings with the legal system. I decreased my defiant declarations of injustice and slowed my radical politics for a few years (except for some writing, "bad" associations, and refusing to testify against others). From then on, I did not resist superior force or even the morality it claimed. I still didn't cooperate with prosecutors, the FBI, or the DEA. But "the man" was already on my back, and I was a long way from being out of the prison experience.

The Illusions of Minimum Security

When I was a toddler, my cousin Judy often babysat for me. Maybe it was because I was a whiny, fearful little know-it-all, Judy fed me a steady diet of substantially dramatic prevarications. One most unnerving for me was the story of the "snake doctors." Judy told me that dragonflies were snake doctors. When a snake was injured or even killed, a snake doctor could heal the damage. When I was three, I stepped on a copperhead in our front yard, but my granny hacked off its head with a hoe before it could bite me. Once I'd been in the military and seen helicopters flying in formation, dragonflies make me think of Huey's as well as snake doctors.

It was a very warm day. I had the jogging-walking path to myself at Eglin Federal Prison Camp, meeting not another person within half a mile. When I skirted the bird shelter located behind the sparsely wooded area at the back of the camp, the shoreline of the swampy lake bordering the west side of the camp was dotted (within my endorphin reverie) with snake-doctors and tiny garrisons of Huey helicopters.

On my return pass along the shore, I spotted a Puerto Rican prisoner friend running in the opposite direction. He raised his right hand as we drew close. We "high-fived" and exchanged defiant "Que-pasas?" Endorphins were hard at work in both of us. I felt great. But any sense of freedom was as illusory as the dragonflies being snake doctors or Huey's. However we might feel in the moment, my friend and I were in captivity.

In his 1973 *Politics of Prison*, Eric Olin Wright suggested that maximum and medium-security would not be able to exist without minimum-security. Wright (p. 153) quotes Sheldon Messinger's unpublished dissertation (UCLA) to describe the act of providing a prisoner with greater freedom, "...it was, at best, a move from a position in which subordination was insured by rigid regimentation and continuous surveillance to one in which these immediate controls are relaxed, the inmate having proved his willingness to maintain a subordinate posture on his own."

After my lonely appeal bond year spent as a post-doctoral assistant at the University of Chicago, I spent seven months assigned to Eglin Federal Prison Camp. Eglin FPC is a beautiful place. The only real stress is provided by the staff whose persistent harassment of inmates seemed more predicated on their embarrassment by their being assigned to "Club Fed" than any past or present behavior by the inmates. Eglin FPC is the kind of place where I would feel morally comfortable sending my own political enemies to be rehabilitated. Late in my time at Eglin when I became head clerk-typist in the education department, I found a former inmate's hidden stash of official stationary deep in my new desk – Marvin Mandel, Governor of Maryland. I used the governor's desk with pride. Eglin is not unlike the minimum-security camp in Kurt Vonnegut's *Jailbird* (1979, p. 43) where there are so many lawyers that "If you find yourself talking to somebody who hasn't been to law school, watch your step. He's either the warden or a guard." At Eglin, there were, in addition to lawyers, mayors, physicians, at least two college professors, and a handful of protestant ministers.

While I came out of medium-security meaner and very angry, my psychological back was intact. But as Vonnegut (1979: 126) declares, "Everybody gets his back

broken when he goes to prison for the first time. It mends after a while, but never quite the way it was before." As with the inmate described by Vonnegut, it would be Eglin, my second prison stop, where my back broke. The weight of the "man" became too much to carry. And as Vonnegut noted about us broken men, we "will never walk or feel quite the same again." As Sykes (1958, 2007) has noted, pain is what imprisonment is all about. The one unifying principle across every security level of incarceration is the pain of imprisonment. It is this pain that provides the energy for the "society of captives" as a system of action.

After two months, my prison supervisory team moved me to the law library, rumor was that it was based on inmate requests for a more educated clerk. I quickly recruited a lawyer-turned-smuggler to fill another open position in the law library. The influence of inmates on who's hired where is what has been labeled "informal control." The former member-of-the-bar pilot and I generated self-help descriptions of how to use the law library in different ways and set up the guide sheets as handouts in an unused magazine stand. In other words, I got moved from that job in less than two months for providing "too much legal help" to inmates. The director of education said

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Janette and David.

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that I was lucky to get off so easy. He said he knew of my having received three apples for writing a writ for another inmate. Snitching, while considered anathema to some inmates, is the rule among a comparatively large subset of the inmate population.

I was placed in a wood-working class "where a body was needed," but more and more I helped education department staff with computer problems and performed extra typing for the education department. I struggled to be an invaluable inmate employee. One night I stayed up all night (except for returning to my bunk for counts) retyping prison regulations onto paper of a slightly different shade of green paper, so that lack of color consistency would not mar the next day's FBOP inspection. No one on the staff had noticed until too late that part of the paper that I'd been furnished to type the originals was a slightly different shade than the rest of the paper. Each "favor" you do for prison staff gets you a little more personal autonomy or a greater portion of your own subjection to supervise. It's sort of like taking federal grants except on a smaller scale.

Once when I was working quietly in the corner of a room with other inmates and staff passing through, I overheard a discussion of legalized abortion between a staff member and one of the tax-resister inmates. The inmate was against choice, the correctional officer "for." When a supervisor came in, the "debating" inmate appropriately pealed. The correctional officer complained to her supervisor, "I hate it when the inmates try to draw me into political discussions." The supervisor responded, "I just ignore them. I don't like to acknowledge that an inmate's in the room with me unless I've called him into my office." When he noticed me quietly looking down at the new computerized grading program that I was setting up for him, the supervisor said, "Take Curry. I forget he's even in the room. He's like a piece of furniture." The furniture stayed quiet. The furniture was happy ... eating crap ultimately always made me hungry for more in those days at Eglin.

Prelude To Prison

While I share much with other

Convict Criminologists, there are some unique features in my case. Among them was my status as a tenured associate professor when I was arrested. Most of the group members were convicts that upon their release from prison went to graduate school to complete PhDs and then became professors. I was a professor that became a convict, and then upon release from prison, a professor again. Bernadette Olson Jessie is a second Convict Criminologist that was a professor that went to federal prison, and then upon release returned to academia. Today, she is a tenured associate Professor at Indiana University Southeast. Like all the members of the Convict Group, we are criminologists,

Another feature of my incarceration was that I had carefully avoided criminal activity all of my life and was wrongfully convicted on false testimony. Not unlike many of my brothers and sisters in Convict Criminology, I grew up very poor. I was born into a second-generation coal-mining family in McDowell County, West Virginia. After the mines shut down, my father, a miner, was marginally employed, often working two jobs at a time, in Virginia and Mississippi. I helped support my family from age eight on. I was admitted to a community college without a high school diploma. My family lived in the projects in Pascagoula. My mother was always sickly. When I was a teenager, she had what used to be called a "nervous breakdown." Eventually she was hospitalized in the state hospital for the indigent in Meridian, Mississippi, where she received shock treatments.

Some academics assume that all the Convict Criminologists were just "middle class minor drug offenders" that did short sentences. Stephen Richards (2003) grew up in an orphanage. It doesn't get much poorer than that. In my case, the attribution may be appropriate, despite my childhood, I was just settling into an unfamiliar middle class identity as a professor when I was subjected to a minor drug conviction. In comparison, many of the Convict Criminologists come from underclass and working class backgrounds, some did 10 or more years in prison, for a wide array of criminal offenses, not just drugs, and today enjoy the relatively easy life of middle class academics.



Vietnam

Army ROTC offered me my ticket for finishing my undergraduate degree at Southern Mississippi. I was a cadet battalion officer and received the Hattiesburg, Mississippi American Legion award for military excellence by a senior cadet. As a second lieutenant in Armor Officer Basic, I was selected for Laotian language school and training as a special agent in counterintelligence. In Vietnam, I always lived disguised as a civilian well outside military bases in the sprawling slums of that country. My first primary responsibility was human target identification as operations officer of a counterintelligence team indirectly assigned to John Paul Vann's headquarters in the mountainous II Corps. I attained the rank of Captain though I never got to wear my bars. In II Corps, I often slept with a loaded 38 under my pillow. During my last four months in country, I was assigned as a team leader in the Special Operations Battalion of the 525 Military Intelligence Group. There I added subject interviewer or interrogator to my job responsibilities.

Returning to the states, out of my mind with PTSD, I enrolled in graduate school first at Ole Miss and then getting a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Chicago. In Mississippi, I served as state coordinator of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In 1976, I took an assistant professor appointment at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, and soon became a regular as an expert witness for the local NAACP affiliate law firm and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Becoming A Convict

My wrongful conviction by an

Alabama jury was based on the false testimony of an undercover agent. He was Special Agent Grady Gibson, Alabama Bureau of Investigation. In fact Gibson had asked to be pulled out of his deep cover role, when I confronted him about my suspicions that he was an undercover agent. Gibson had seduced my co-defendant Tom Ashby into purchasing small amounts of cocaine to be used by Gibson in order to treat his headaches supposedly caused by a head wound during his service as a Marine in Vietnam. When I met Gibson, he was our service organization's state "traveler." He had arranged meetings with the governor to develop improved state-level benefits for veterans. I believed Gibson's story, because it was easier. I have enough troubled clients at the vet center, so I did want to add Gibson to my client list or hear the details of his supposed injury.

Gibson took the stand, in the two-week trial, and presented a fantasy of wild partying Vietnam veterans motivated by their own hedonism rather than assisting their less prosperous veteran brothers and sisters. He painted me as a regular supplier of cocaine for other veterans. A young friend who had provided the cocaine that Gibson obtained through me was allowed to plead guilty to one count of distribution and given probation. With his lawyer's acquiescence, the novice drug supplier took the stand testifying that Gibson used more cocaine than anyone whom he'd ever observed using the drug. Tom Ashby and I also took the stand and honestly answered all questions about our involvement in our alleged crimes. Of three counts of distribution, the jury found me not guilty of two. The jury found Tom

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guilty of one count of distribution, both of us guilty of conspiracy to distribute, and me guilty of one count of using a communication device (a telephone) to facilitate a felony. I had given Agent Gibson, at his request, directions to find a restaurant where he was supposed to join the supplier and me for lunch. In my case, the amount of cocaine was 6.2 grams. For Tom, I think it was an even smaller amount. Judge Brevard Hand who before the trial had said he wanted to dismiss the jury and find us guilty on all counts, sentenced Tom to 15 and 15 (30 years), and me to 15, 15, and 4 (34 years), all counts to run consecutively. The sentences were obviously political punishment for being vets against the war.

Even when I was told that Judge Hand had sentenced us to "A" sentences and that he could re-sentence us at some point in the future, I didn't feel any sense of relief or hope. Sometime that summer after the bus ride when I'd agreed to change my home of record to Chicago, Judge Hand re-sentenced me to five years, six years special probation, and six years regular probation to run consecutively, of course. Until my appeals were exhausted, I was assigned to the custody of Professor James Coleman at the University of Chicago and the Chicago Federal Probation office. After exhausting my appeals and serving fourteen months, I was released on the basis of the sentencing guidelines for 6.2 grams of cocaine.

Re-Entry

As most of you know, it's a tricky little game that we play as ex-cons with many painful twists and pitfalls. In autumn 1983, I saw an interim lecturer job at Illinois-Chicago Circle campus. The Department Chair was John Johnstone, a former student of James Coleman. I made an appointment and Johnstone interviewed me. He said that he considered himself fortunate to have an applicant to teach intro sociology courses with my credentials. The job was mine if I wanted it. Breaking into a sweat, I spelled out my legal status. He looked very uncomfortable as we shook hands, and Johnstone said that he might have some

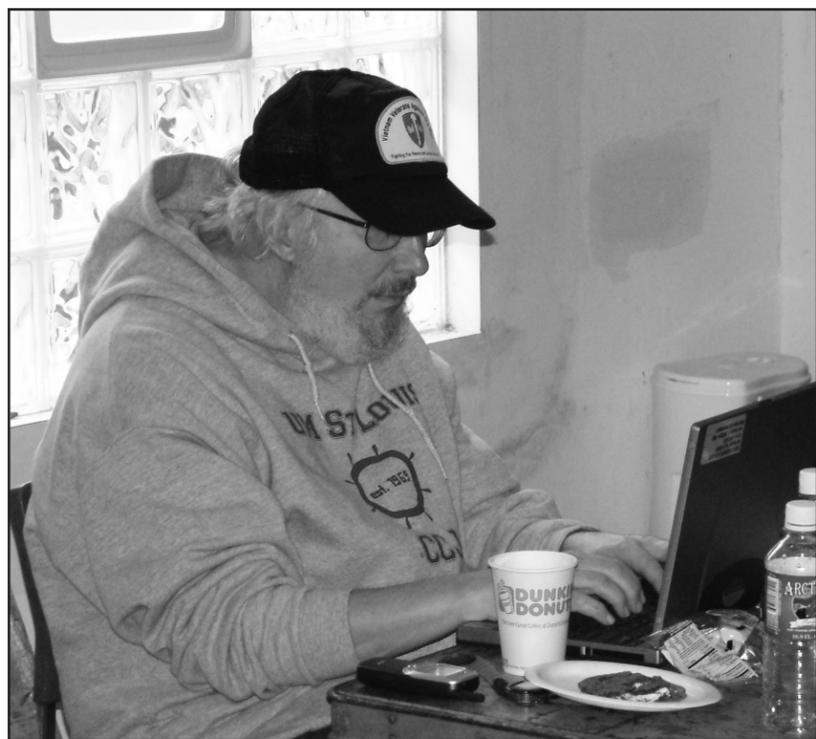
difficulties getting me approved. I left with unease, but flushed with the joy of getting back to the classroom. When I got back from to the office, there was a message to call Jim Coleman. Coleman said that he'd received a call from a very upset Johnstone, who wanted me to withdraw my application. As soon as the call and withdrawal were finished I wept.

In 1986, just after work release, I was offered a post-doctoral fellowship from the government of the Netherlands to study the econometrics of health care. Judge Brevard Hand was notified, and he intervened to keep me in Chicago and under "necessary" supervision.

According to Oscar Wilde, "Society ... shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay, or one on whom they have inflicted an irreparable, an irremediable wrong." I had actually thought that criminologists with our knowledge of how the system works would be less likely to have such a tendency to shun ex-convicts. After too many years of hiding who I was from all but my departmental colleagues and reinforced by stiff drink, I ventured to bring up my past with another criminologist at the bar during American Society of Criminology (ASC) meetings. I didn't know the gravity of my faux pas, until years later when I met Neal Shover, professor at the University of Tennessee, after he spoke at my department. He let me know that he considered me a stupid drunk by my very inappropriate sharing of my inmate past with him a "stranger." Shover is stranger than I would have expected. If you're a Convict Criminologist, please hide your shame from him should you meet him. Shover also expressed his belief that Vietnam veterans who mention their service are all phonies. Evoked into participation in an unpopular war and unjustly imprisoned in an unpopular institution, I know I can never attain Shover's demanding standards.

Presidential Pardon

Unlike most Convict Criminologists, I had defense committees. In fact, I had an Alabama and a Chicago David Curry Defense Committee. The defense commit-



tee in Mobile was made up of my close friends and their relatives, all upstanding members of the community. In my lifetime of social incarnations, at no time could I have been un-impressed by the Chicago committee members: four distinguished University of Chicago professors, a decorated Vietnam veteran leader of VVAW, a Spanish Civil War veteran, a widely known female labor activist, and a progressive psychologist. Since so much work can be involved in defense committees, I was glad the committees assembled themselves. I don't think that I had the moral strength to ask someone to serve on a defense committee. It would have been similar to bumming my own bail money. Though a prominent Chicago firm produced my writ of cert to the Supreme Court "pro bono," the bill for "expenses other than attorney labor" was \$10,000. Owing all those people is still hard for me to handle.

Another event that makes me somewhat different from the other Convict Criminologists is that I received a Presidential Pardon in 2000. Amazingly, Special Agent Gibson helped me by morphing from lying drug user to convicted murderer in 1999. With Gibson serving life without parole, I applied for a Presidential Pardon. The pardon process, as usually practiced, rather than as done directly by the President, is tedious, frustrating, and slow with extended Department of Justice gathering and analysis of information. When the Pardon Attorney Roger Adams told me that my pardon recommendation was going to the president's office, where it would remain until some president chose to sign it, I told him that I was concerned about

the effect of publicity on my eight-year-old daughter. Adams promised to do his best within the rules of press notification. He did, I was pardoned just before Thanksgiving with the other two turkeys. The turkeys stole most of the spotlight except for the *Mobile Press Register*, which made sure my university was made aware of the shame of my pardon.

Convict Criminology

In 2003, a colleague from another department approached me about a press story on the new group Convict Criminology. His son was in prison he shyly admitted. I quickly justified my colleague's confidence by sharing my own criminal justice system experience. I communicated with Stephen Richards who added me to the email shares from group members. At the next ASC meeting, I attended a convict criminology meeting. Steve greeted me at the door. I got to meet the greatest of our number, John Irwin. And I heard a great presentation by Daniel Murphy. When asked how I felt at that first meeting, I've answered that it was like a sinner finding church. So far, my participation in the group and associated personal healing have been far more rewarding than I ever could have imagined.



G. DAVID CURRY WAS A PROFESSOR EMERITUS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS AND LONG-TIME MEMBER OF VVAW.

From Vietnam to Alabama: Special Agents

DAVID CURRY

This first appeared in the Spring/Summer 1999 issue of The Veteran.

August 1971 marked a crucial month in what would become the longest war in US history. The Nixon doctrine of Vietnamization was replacing the failed Kennedy-Johnson doctrine of "winning hearts and minds." For the American people, the war seemed to have dragged on interminably or been forgotten. That past spring, anti-war demonstrators including Vietnam Veterans Against the War had brought the nation's capital to a halt, more than once. In the coming fall, mutinying GI's would just as frequently bring parts of the war to a halt. Attica had happened. George Jackson was killed allegedly attempting to escape from prison. It was a month in my life when I would be personally involved in one of the many personal confrontations between individuals that would ultimately connect into the Vietnam experience.

The confrontation was between a freshly promoted captain in one of the "cush" jobs in the war and a private with one of the worst assignments in a war full of bad assignments.

The private had only a few months before been a civilian. As a community college student, his activities varied as much as his interests. One day, he'd joined a friend in passing out leaflets in support of Black Panthers who were on trial. Most days, though, he just hung out with one or more of his close friends. They drove around a lot, ate fast food, and, being without an identifiable girlfriend, may have dreamed of the possibility or an opportunity. All this, and more, was in the thick FBI file that had arrived on the captain's desk. The report included a thorough background check on the pamphlet. It had been printed on a Progressive Labor Party press. The pamphlet had denounced the US system of justice, capitalism, and imperialism including the war in Vietnam.

Along with surveillance reports and official records checks on the student pamphleteer, the file being read by the captain also included an interview transcript in which the FBI had approached the student with an opportunity to "cooperate fully" with the agency's ongoing investigations of anti-American activities by radical organizations. Offered a chance

to be of service to his country as an undercover informant, the private-to-be politely refused. The report also contained copies of the selective service records facilitating the conscription of the fledgling radical into the US Army. All of these pages were, of course, sanctified with the official stamp "SECRET." A second set of interview transcripts in the file described efforts by military intelligence agents in cooperation with the FBI to recruit the newly made private into undercover service within the military stateside. After all, these agents could effectively make the case that a private with no security clearance might end up in the worst of assignments in Vietnam. The private had continued to quietly refuse to cooperate.

There was little information in the file about what the private without a security clearance had been doing at the fire base just a few miles outside An Khe in Binh Dinh province. But one of the captain's colleagues jokingly speculated it wasn't much more than burning shit and dodging sniper rounds.

The captain and his counter-intelligence unit moved and lived with fabricated civilian identities in the variety of places covered by John Paul Vann's II Corps headquarters command. The team of agents discussed the best way to turn the recalcitrant young private into an asset for the good of the nation. Ultimately, they decided that the former resort city of Nha Trang would be the best location for the interview.

Orders were sent and the unknowing private was ordered to report to the temporary barracks at II Corps headquarters in the compound of the Grand Hotel in Nha Trang. From the compound, the private could see, hear, and smell one of the most beautiful beaches in the South China Sea. A military intelligence clerk, himself wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a civilian identity, greeted the private and made sure he knew how to get to the base PX while he waited, still without information, to see what would happen next.

As the clerk informed the captain and the other agents on the detail, the private must be enjoying himself. For example, he had been able to receive most of his six months of mail and packages from home that had been delayed there at headquarters. The



plan was, of course, to give him a maximum taste of the good life that his stubbornness had forced him to leave behind.

On the third day, it was decided that the two best interviewers from the detachment would surprise the private with the subject interview. They knew he was taking a nap in the empty barracks after lunch. The two agents were able to walk right up to his bunk before they called him to attention.

Swinging down from the top bunk, the private looked amazingly clean-cut for an enlisted grunt in Vietnam. His nineteen-year-old face was bespeckled by acne that the captain was glad had finally started to leave his own twenty-two-year-old face. The captain told the private to be at ease, but there was no way that the private could guess the ranks of these men who quickly flashed badges and credentials and identified themselves as "special agents." Both agents wore neatly pressed civilian clothes, visible holstered thirtysixes, and glaring expressions to match. The captain thought the private was lucky not knowing that the older and larger agent was really an E-6 who routinely boasted how in his former duties as a stateside military policeman he

had already killed two misguided GI's in the line of duty and was always ready to kill a third. The older agent informed the private that the agents had a few questions for him, but, keeping with standard operating procedure, that he had the right to refuse to answer any of the questions. Still standing by his temporary bunk, the private spoke softly, but clearly. "I will not answer any of your questions, sir." Taken aback, the captain said, "In that case, that will be all, private." And without any show of emotion, the special agents walked out of the barracks. Within an hour, the clerk in the Hawaiian shirt returned to get the private on his way back to his fire base by nightfall.

In the fall of 1972, the fire base where the private was assigned was one of the several locations where GI's refused to go on patrols. It was a base where officers and NCOs were fragged. Before the end of the fall of 1972, the new policy that US troops would no longer go on routine patrols was invoked.

I don't know what part that "radical" private may have played in those actions, because

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Memories of Dave

BILL SHUNAS

I made the following remarks (approximately) at a memorial for Dave Curry at Quenchers in Chicago in July.

Like many of you I sometimes associate some people with a certain tune. For Dave that song is the Star Spangled Banner. You see, I used to go to Chicago Cub baseball games with Dave, often with Janet and Ellie, where we would invariably sit in the

bleachers. As is now SOP before a sporting event, they played the national anthem. The first time we went, Dave explained that if they wouldn't let him vote (he was a convicted felon) he wouldn't stand for their anthem. So, while the thousands of people in the park stood, Dave sat, and we sat with him as the salute played.

Now I don't know what your opinion of the politics of the Star Spangled Banner are, but as a

piece of music it sucks. It drags on for what - three and a half minutes or more. And in Wrigley Field the flag is on the scoreboard which is behind where we would sit. And that meant that everyone would be looking our way as we sat, thousands and thousands and thousands of pairs of eyes looking at us. And I swear they would drag that anthem on for thirteen and a half minutes. It was most uncomfortable, but Dave was a

man of principle, so we sat every time.

So now, when I sit down in front of the TV to watch the Cubs or the Bulls, the Star Spangled Banner will start. And, if Ellie doesn't hit the mute button the tune will play, and I'll remember Dave.



BILL SHUNAS IS A VIETNAM VETERAN, AUTHOR AND VVAW MEMBER IN THE CHICAGO CHAPTER.

Remembering Our Brother Dave Curry

ORLANDO TIZON

When I arrived in Chicago in the early 1990s, some of the first people I got to know were Barry Romo and Bill Branson. They invited me to a VVAW cook out. It was during one of those cook outs that I first met Dave at Barry's old apartment.

We immediately got to talking. I pulled him to a corner of the house and invited him to join me with his beer and hotdog. I was especially excited when he said that he was a sociologist teaching in St. Louis. I was surprised to see a sociologist among a group of

vets from all sorts of backgrounds and experiences, all related to the Vietnam war. But not a sociologist in this crowd! I told myself. But there he was.

I told him that I was planning to enroll in graduate school in Chicago and take up sociology. He

very kindly asked me why I wanted to do this and I told him I wanted to go back to teaching. He gave me a few tips about graduate school in the US and about teaching.

During the few times that we managed to meet while I was living in Chicago, I got to know Dave a little better and at more depth. Knowing that he was in criminology I questioned him aggressively about his opinions on juveniles detained, especially Blacks and Latinos. He talked for an hour about young people he had met in detention and criticized the US prison system. Dave was not a typical academic hiding in the narrow offices of academe; he was down to earth and involved in grassroots movements for change.

He was an inspiration for me to go on and become a sociologist.



ORLANDO TIZON IS A PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY IN WASHINGTON, DC AND LONG-TIME FRIEND OF VVAW.



From Vietnam to Alabama

continued from previous page

I was elsewhere. With his simple courage, the young private had sapped away a little more of my rapidly fading enthusiasm for the war. Within a week, I wrote a letter resigning from active duty. I received a response from the Assistant Secretary of the Army accepting my resignation contingent on my completing my tour in Vietnam. The II Corps headquarters military intelligence detachment "stood down" in the next months, and I was transferred to the Special Operations Battalion in Saigon to finish my tour. On the day that I was released from active duty, I found a phone number and called Vietnam Veterans Against

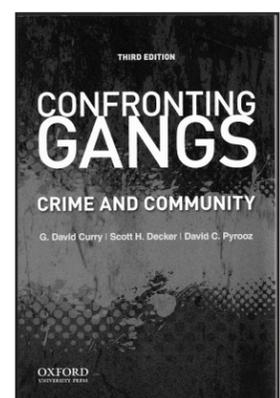
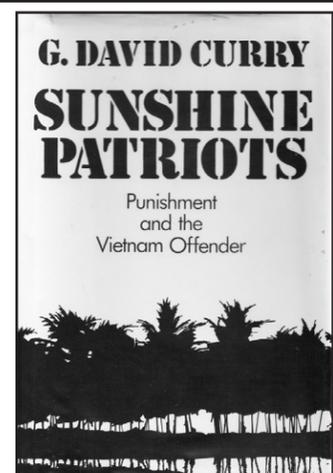
the War from the San Francisco airport.

Almost ten years later, my being a captain in counterintelligence was on the other side of several years of anti-war and civil rights activism. I was being targeted by one of the first major investigations of radical vets in Alabama under the Reagan administration. I met my lawyer at a coffee shop in Mobile, Alabama, across the street from another coffee shop where my scheduled interview with special agents representing the FBI, the Alabama Bureau of Investigation, the DEA, and the Veterans Administration was to take place. Even having my

friend and lawyer by my side, my fear at facing those stern agents of the state was considerable. It made me wonder how much more courage it had taken for a nineteen-year-old private standing alone, facing a return to six more months of potential harm, to face such men. But in my case, at least, that private had taught me how to answer the first question that I was asked.



DAVID CURRY WAS A STAFF MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF VVAW, AN ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, AND AUTHOR OF "SUNSHINE PATRIOTS: PUNISHMENT AND THE VIETNAM OFFENDER" AND CO-AUTHOR OF "CONFRONTING GANGS: CRIME AND COMMUNITY."



A Letter Home: Thoughts of War and Petty Gripes

JOE MILLER

[Complete text written ten days before our daughter Lisa was born and sixteen days before I got the actual news. It reflects my developing attitudes about the Navy and the war and how much I was willing to share with the home crowd. I had been in the Navy for four and a half years by this time. Thankfully, my folks saved most of my letters from that period. It is important for all of us to remember who we were then and how we became who we are.]

2 November 1965 Subic Bay,
Philippines

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well, here we are in our first port of the cruise, Subic Bay, Philippine Islands. We arrived early yesterday morning and we will be leaving tomorrow.** Since this place is a real "sailor trap," I have not left the ship on liberty. I am now standing by for one of the guys who works for me, in order that he could leave the ship.

I have Linda's photograph on the desk right next to the typewriter, and I wish I could express with words exactly how much I miss her and worry about her, even though I know that you are taking good care of her! These last two weeks at sea since leaving Hawaii have really given me quite a bit of time to sit down and somberly meditate upon our present situation.

What the hell am I doing way out here while my wife may be at this very minute giving birth to our first child? Does that sound as if I might be a bit perturbed at the Navy? Well, let's get into it and dissect the thoughts that have been running through my head recently.

Well, first of all, I am out here because we are fighting a war, yes, I said a war! I know that word has been sort of taboo back home, but that is what they call it out here, where everything is happening!

I don't like the war; sometimes I don't quite understand why we are mixed up in it. I have good reason to believe that most of the people we are fighting are in the same predicament. Does it sound at all plausible to say that those people are defending their homeland from what they have been told is an aggressive nation (US)? Couldn't it be that the propaganda machine over there is so strong as to bring

this "truth" home to the common people, the people who do not get any newspapers except those that their political officers may let them read? I am sorry to say that I am afraid a lot of innocent people are getting shot up and killed on both sides.

It is really quite a problem, and there is no simple answer for it like, getting out, or dropping the big bomb on Hanoi. If we get out, we can then be accused of not honoring our commitments; if we drop the bomb, we will have more enemies in Asia than we have already. Japan still carries quite a scar from the last time we thought a big bomb would solve everybody's problems!

Can we sit down together and talk it out? Would that solve the problem? Who will we sit down with? Could we afford to allow the people in South Vietnam to vote in a new administration? For whom would they cast their ballots? Do you think they might want a change, or could they be really ecstatically happy with the present administration? Would you?

I have come up with quite a few questions; now I must work on the possible answers---being in ignorance of all of the facts, of course! One last question: Is this war really worth it?

I have been doing an awful lot of complaining about the Navy, and I guess that will be the serviceman's perpetual right: Griping! It is the only right we have, in all actuality. It does seem pretty paradoxical that we have to give up all of our main rights and freedoms in order to defend them.

Well, I will continue to complain until Linda and I are together again with our child, and we are able to get started in building a life for ourselves without having to tear myself away from the happiness and joy that is Linda and our first child.

The Navy can't show me anything anymore! The only thing that I would beg them for, the last thing, will be orders back near the area where I will be able to be with Linda and our family. I am completely serious about this; I will be willing to beg them for those orders!

I have already given up my self-respect while in this outfit by becoming a "non-feeling" servant, an unequal in an organization that exists to preserve the equality of

all men! It will be a relief to divest myself of this yoke of servitude, sometimes called a uniform, and join the throngs of men who work eight hours a day and are then able to return home to their wives and children.

I would not have to stand in line to be able to eat my meals; I would not get into the shower and, while all soaped up, find that the Captain shut off the fresh water because we were using too much.

Dad, when was the last time you had to pass inspection in order to leave the house to go to the store? Did Mom ever stop you from getting more dessert, if you wanted it, or another hunk of steak? Did you ever finish a day's work and then find out you could not go home because it was your duty day? Those are a few of the petty things, the petty gripes, that every serviceman has. I don't like it. It's as simple as that.

Thanks for allowing me to get this off my chest. Please pray with me that I get orders soon so I can come home to Linda and "Little Joe" or Lisa! God, please grant me this one petition!

The mail may be a little messed up in the weeks to come,

for we will be at sea the rest of this month. Please be patient if my letters don't get to you as soon as they should. Please write again soon and let me know how everything is with my dear wife and child. I write as if he/she were born already, because I am not sure. Please take care of yourselves and let me hear from you again soon.

Love, Joe

=====
**Our first of six "on line" periods during this cruise---that is, active military operations off the coast of Vietnam, North and South---went from 5 November to 2 December. This information was not in the letter.



JOE MILLER, NATIONAL BOARD MEMBER OF VVAW, SERVED IN THE NAVY FROM 1961-1968. WITH NAVAL SECURITY GROUP, 1961-64; ON BOARD THE USS TICONDEROGA CVA-14, 1964-66; AND, WITH HELICOPTER TRAINING SQUADRON EIGHT, 1966-68.

U. S. S. TICONDEROGA

Long Time Gone

The boy on the bench on the boardwalk just got back from the war. He watches the waves washing the shore, the shore birds pecking at tiny crabs in the sand or diving for fish in the shallow surf. There was sand where he was, but a long walk to the beach, and the pecking birds were snipers, the diving birds IEDs. Now that he's home, and home isn't home, what will he do with himself? Maybe he'll go to college. Or trade school. Maybe he'll re-enlist. He lifts his gaze to the distant horizon where sea meets sky at the edge of the world. He wonders how far he could swim.

—W. D. Ehrhart

The Evil Hours

JACK MALLORY (REVIEWER)

The Evil Hours: a Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
by David Morris

(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015)

"The central image of post-traumatic stress is that of Ishmael at the end of Moby Dick, floating atop Queequeg's coffin, looking out over the vastness of the sea."

WTF? I'm reading a book about PTSD and the author is quoting some VA shrink, describing a scene from a book about a goddam whale? Actually, yes and for good reason. David Morris's "The Evil Hours: a Biography of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" contains plenty of medical/neurological information and tons of psychological references. But the author is a journalist, and an ex-Marine infantry officer (yeah, yeah, I know there's no such thing as an ex-Marine) who can actually write. The book is a joy to read about a joyless subject, because he believes that "Stories in the form of literature helps to understand the enigma of survival in a way that no other technology can." Morris incorporates prose and poetry from thousands of years of thought about war and its effects, from Homer to Sassoon, to O'Brien to "make meaning out of chaos," as he puts it.

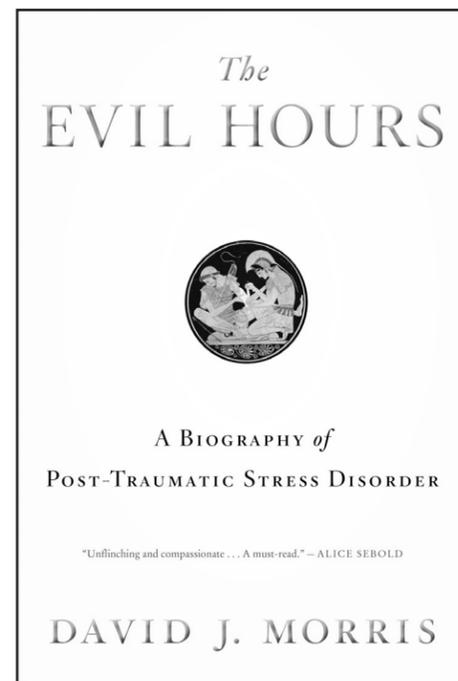
I've been reading about PTSD at least since 1995, when Jonathan Shay published "Achilles in Vietnam" and I had realized that maybe books could teach me something about my experiences, and reactions to those experiences. The book is written "from the inside"; Morris knows through experience about the causes, symptoms, and various treatments for PTSD. Reading it is also an experience "from the inside." If I were to read a book about physics, or math, it would be an experience "from the outside"; if I understood it at all, it would be as an outsider, looking in. Reading "The Evil Hours" is a "Yeah, been there, done that" experience: it provides both objective and subjective understanding of what it means to experience and deal with trauma.

Morris subtitles his book a biography of PTSD. By this he intends to introduce PTSD as a character in its own right; not just a disorder or disease, but as a phenomenon with a life, a history of its own. PTSD has been with

us as long as trauma has been part of human life, which is to say, forever. This was Shay's point in "Achilles in Vietnam," and in his second book, "Odysseus in America." The first half of "The Evil Hours" introduces PTSD: its causes (Morris focuses on combat PTSD, although he also considers its other causes), who suffers from it and why and its history, from ancient Mesopotamia to the present. He is especially detailed in describing the connection between VVAW and the first work on PTSD during and after the Vietnam War.

Throughout the book, the author emphasizes that the causes, symptoms, and effective treatments for PTSD are, if not as varied as the number of people affected, enormously varied. "Trauma is much like cancer in that each individual subspecies has a different impact on the individual," Morris says. Especially for veterans or others who have been in PTSD therapy groups, this comes as no surprise, but at least offers some reassurance for those of us who have overly or covertly compared our trigger events and symptoms like guys in a gym making comparisons. How many times have I heard a new veteran in group say, "I don't really deserve to be here, plenty of guys saw worse than I did," or, "I had it pretty easy over there, I don't know why this bothers me so much."

I was especially interested in Morris's treatment of Moral Injury as a symptom, something I've been concerned with since Shay introduced me to it in 1995. What I would describe as a sense of social and emotional betrayal, a feeling that one has had one's ethical foundation knocked out from underneath by the realities of war, that one's moral surety is gone. Morris says, "There comes a point in every man's life when he sees that the magician's hat is empty, that the government and the church are run by fools, and that virtue is far rarer than he'd been led to believe... the things I had seen in Iraq made it impossible for me to believe in the normal fictions that most people cling to in their daily lives: the lie that the world is safe, the lie that society is just, the lie that governments can be trusted, the lie that bad people are punished." I'm not sure, in fact, that everyone does see that, or that he/she sees it like a veteran does.



Reading that was one of the many been there, done that moments in reading "The Evil Hours."

Another trauma symptom that resonates with me is the description of what anthropologists and he call liminality, "the palpable sense of not belonging, of being 'on the other side of something' after trauma." Referring to the work of an historian of WWI, Morris describes the state of "veterans being trapped in a kind of 'No Man's Land' ... unmade and remade by the war ... belonging neither to the war nor to the society he fought for." Morris quotes a female Iraq war veteran, "I feel like a Martian." Again, been there, done that.

The second half of the book deals with the variety of treatments for PTSD, from psychological/emotional therapy through drugs and alternatives such as yoga. I am often quite skeptical about alternative medicine, but Morris seems to do a fair and thorough job of looking at its possibilities.

The last chapter looks at the possibility that combat trauma can create positive psychological and emotional characteristics. Some researchers have gone so far as to call it Post Traumatic Growth (although no one seems to be willing to refer to it as PTG, but I will). I share a feeling with an old, dear friend of mine who survived an especially aggressive breast cancer: we wouldn't wish our experiences on anyone, but they made us who we are and we wouldn't undo them. Seems like there ought to be some single word that describes that sentiment, but if there is, I'm unaware of it.

I won't go into details about my downsides, you all know them. The usual anxiety, numbing, hyper

startle, substance abuse, etc. But I have a set of priorities that I didn't have before the war, and perhaps wouldn't have had without it. What's important, what's not. What to worry about, when to say f—— it. When I taught high school, I had to avoid eye contact with the other Vietnam vet during faculty meetings. As other faculty and administrators went on about this, that, and the other trivia, Steve and I were tempted to roll our eyes at each other, start to snicker, and have to leave the room. On a less trivial level, I pay attention to current events; I take positions, write letters, vote, get out in the street. And I know enough, now, to get away from current events. I hike, I kayak, I get the f—— away from the squirrels in my head. The war, and recovering from the war, taught me these things.

Morris, of course, says it better than I: "A lot of ridiculous demands and expectations that drive people crazy stateside don't exist in a war ... In a strange way, you are free. The only thing you can lose is your life ... There was a new faith, derived from a simple declarative statement that echoed in moments of pain and crisis: Well, this sucks, but it's better than Ramadi. I also learned how to ignore things that were beyond my control, like death."

Read the damn book. It's better than I can describe it.

But what about Ishmael? Driven to disaster by a mad captain, his whole world suddenly destroyed, sitting on his best friend's coffin alone in the ocean. If that doesn't say something to you about war and PTSD, you're not listening!



JACK MALLORY IS A LONG-TIME
VVAW MEMBER.

Sorry About That

GERALD R. GIOGLIO (REVIEWER)

Sorry About That: A Story from a Soldier's Heart by Dick Denne (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014)

"That one statement – 'Sorry about that' – would, for me, come to embody the entire God-damned lie that was the Vietnam War."
—Dick Denne

So, Jesus walks into a bar with a disciple. The barkeep says, "What you need?" The disciple says, "A glass of red wine." Jesus says, "Just a water, please." Think about it before you read onward, Christian soldiers, and be ready for more of the same when you pick up "Sorry About That" as the jokes, puns and comic relief pop up throughout what is essentially a 20th Century Greek tragedy.

"Sorry About That" is truly a tragic/comedic tale of innocence lost and consciousness raised, of fighting enemies foreign and domestic, of war abroad and betrayal at home. Heartfelt and heartbreaking, Denne's is a powerful, exceptional memoir written in an appealing, relaxed, colloquial style.

"Sorry About That" includes 23 short chapters with an introduction by Stephen J. Weiss. The memoir covers the period 1965-1969 recounting significant events from childhood to the author's discharge from the Army. Most of the action takes place in Vietnam and in the cruel year following his return to The World.

We find Dick Denne, a young, aspiring comedian setting the foundation for a career on-stage when his life, like that of 30 million other young males who came of age in the Vietnam era, was interrupted by the reality of having to deal with military conscription and the war.

Quite willing to take his chances with the draft, Denne sets off to learn his trade in 1965 after graduating from high school. A mentor and WWII vet understood all too well that Denne would soon be drafted and probably sent to the infantry. Recognizing a blossoming talent, he recommended that Denne enlist in the Army and sign up for Special Services, a unit that entertains the troops at bases around the world. The seventeen-year-old Denne thought this was a great idea, all things considered, until it wasn't.

What happened next could

put Denne's picture next to the entry for FUBAR in any decent dictionary of slang or colloquialisms (FYI on the acronym kids, that's: F----Up Beyond Any Repair). Which is certainly what happened to Denne's Entertainment Specialist MOS and ultimately his comedic dreams.

Early on Denne laments, "All I ever wanted was to be a comedian," a plea for understanding that can break your heart. If you're like me, you will recall similar words repeated by oh, so many, other disillusioned draftees and RA enlistees when they realized their hopes for a "preferred" MOS or indeed a future were about to be severely compromised. Dare I suggest that goodly numbers of the approximately 10 million men who ultimately wore a uniform during the Vietnam era felt the same? "Sorry about that?" Indeed.

Meanwhile, at the recruitment office the teenage Denne let it slip that he has been parachuting out of airplanes since he was child. Oops, there it is! Well, you know the drill. He gets his contract for Special Services from the recruiter, but now he has become a signed, sealed and delivered GI, a Government Issue. That is, property to be issued orders and used and abused as required. As such he soon finds himself 11B10 Infantry, and slated, as one memorable Basic Training cadence has it, to live "a life of danger as an Airborne Ranger." At this point in this fast-paced and engaging narrative some may pause and perhaps experience a heightened sense of familiarity if not fear of impending calamity.

Denne tries to deal with being cheated out of his Special Services MOS while in Basic, in AIT and again at Jump School; but of course, he is jerked around with buck passing demands that he work through the chain of command and/or address it at his next duty station. The most egregious manipulation and the worst advice was, "once you get to Vietnam...I guarantee they'll reprocess you. Just show 'em that you signed up for Special Services, and they'll get you in the right place." In a classic case of "the triumph of hope over experience" the eighteen-year-old Denne, trusting that justice will prevail, ships to Vietnam.

Ever the comedian, Denne brings props like his rubber

chicken with him to Southeast Asia and then into the field. He reports firing for effect with that chicken, using a keen sense of humor to break the tension before, during and after various missions and engagements. He details a number of difficult and frightening experiences in the jungles of Vietnam and reports seeing action as a grunt and a door-gunner, surviving innumerable fire-fights, air assaults and helicopter crashes. He proudly reports being given a number of medals including the Combat Infantryman Badge. He states that he "proved to be an exemplary soldier" even as his doubts about, and disillusionment with, the war grew.

Denne's "click moment" comes after meeting a Special Forces Major who was fighting with the Montagnards. Called Tiger Man, this committed jungle fighter and former OSS Army Intelligence Service officer had, in Denne's view, essentially become Montagnard. Much older and wiser, he schooled Denne and his mates in the geopolitics of the Southeast Asian conflicts and by the time they parted ways, Denne and some of his buddies were changed men. He reports, "Suddenly, everything they had been told about this war was put into question, their entire foundation shaken by this intriguing man in the black pajamas."

Denne fought on, but his interaction with Tiger Man had forever changed his perspective. He recalled the oath we all took upon induction to protect the Constitution from enemies, foreign and domestic. He came to ponder whether the Vietnamese were really America's enemies and started to wonder if his fight now included trying to end the war by standing up to those domestic forces responsible for the killing of Americans and Southeast Asians.

No radical, and apparently with no GI or civilian support, he simply started questioning and talking about the constitutionality of the war. He also began handing out leaflets trying to get others to do the same. Says Denne, "I went from being a dedicated combat soldier to a conscientious objector, all while wearing my Army uniform and in the service of my country." Like so many who read the pages of VVAW's *The Veteran* he both fought the war and the war



against the war.

Denne used various techniques to make sense of his situation and to help him through his time in Vietnam. He drew, he kept a detailed journal and he wrote letters to his "pooka" an imaginary spirit-guide he named "Harvey." Sadly, a prison guard stole it during one of Denne's post-Vietnam incarcerations. That's a shame for as Denne admits "losing that journal was one of my darkest days...that thing had names, dates and places, not to mention some great yarns." Apparently a lot of important detail that could have been used to enhance this memoir vanished; so, it is our loss too.

Denne's relatively modest expressions of opposition to the war got him in a heap of trouble including trips to the stockade and beatings, some might say torture, at the hands of sadistic military prison guards. With a year left on his enlistment, disillusioned and ravaged by PTSD which he calls "a soldier's heart," Denne repeatedly goes AWOL hoping for a court-martial and no longer caring about being discharged dishonorably.

It's exactly here where you have to pick up the book to see what else happens. Sorry about that, but trust me, you will be shocked and moved, especially with the surprising and unlikely Hollywood denouement. So, be prepared for an ending that might make you hope that this remarkable tale gets picked up by a major publisher, is polished a bit and includes the following words on the back cover, "soon to appear as a major motion picture."



GERALD R. GIOGLIO, OFS IS A VVAW MEMBER AND AUTHOR OF "DAYS OF DECISION: AN ORAL HISTORY OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN THE MILITARY DURING THE VIETNAM WAR."

1965, The Most Revolutionary Year in Music

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

1965, The Most Revolutionary Year in Music by Andrew Grant Jackson

(Thomas Dunne Books, an imprint of St. Martin's Press, 2015)

It was a lazy summer afternoon, too hot and humid for working in the yard, so I settled into the recliner, put on a Beatles CD, and opened a new book. I had stumbled across this book by accident, referred by Amazon's "people who bought this also bought ___" service. I graduated from high school in 1965, and popular music played a huge part in my high school social life, so I was immediately attracted to the concept. The cover art resembles a psychedelic poster, the kind of artwork you don't see any more. I was intrigued. There's no table of contents, but the author starts his work with a calendar of 1965, listing the significant musical and historic events month by month, like appetizers, and then an Introduction that offers a little background about 1964, stressing the pop music and definitive social unrest. The Beatles first appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show on February 9th of that year, exactly 79 days after the assassination of President Kennedy.

"The combined forces of TV, the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement, the Pill, psyc-

delics, and long hair gave people a heightened awareness of the ways they were being repressed and led to a demand for freedom in all spheres of life, from the political to the sexual to the spiritual. Musicians gave voice to those passions with an immediacy unmatched by other artistic forms." Yeah, man! I was immediately drawn into it, recalling those times and passions, and the tunes coming out of the car radio. From the intro you go directly to the Prologue that sets the 1964 music scene, like Dylan riding in a car when he hears "I Want To Hold Your Hand" come across the radio and he gets excited by the chords and harmonies, getting far beyond the bubblegum lyrics to discern that this band was "doing things nobody was doing." Soon after, he bought an electric guitar, then visited the Beatles in a New York hotel, turning them on to smoking pot. Ringo was the first to experiment. The Beatles returned to England and toured with the Kinks and a band called the High Numbers who would become the Who.

The author has researched the history of the music and the regular human beings who made it. From the Beach Boys to Motown, Nashville to Bakersfield, California, and Liverpool to London he rides the waves of the music of 1965 like a championship surfer. The history

is fascinating, the writing totally accessible and enjoyable. This is a book that's fun to read, a collection of behind-the-scenes incidents and memorable on-stage events that will make you turn pages far into the night. It's not gossip; it is a history book, a colorful multi-dimensional examination that is as full of energy as any classic rock 'n roll performance back in '65. It is not a thick book, but it encompasses a dazzling wide-angle view of all the bands, the changing tempos of our generation, and the incredible insights of the poets and songwriters who put so much truth into the tunes that were the background of that eventful moment in history.

The first American combat troops arrived in Vietnam in March of 1965, a day after "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Alabama and a few days before Dylan's "Bringing It All Back Home" was released. Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready" hit number 14 on the charts. In April, Eric Clapton left the Yardbirds. They tried to recruit Jimmy Page, he declined, but suggested Jeff Beck. In May, a new band called the Warlocks played at Magoo's Pizza in San Francisco. They would become the Grateful Dead. The Rolling Stones, relaxing around a hotel pool in Clearwater, Florida, wrote "Satisfaction." Producer Berry Gordy

spent the night with Diana Ross in Paris, but he was impotent. Later, he would father her child, but he didn't tell her he loved her because it wouldn't be good for business. Diana also went out with Smokey Robinson, and Eddie Kendricks of the Temptations. Bob Dylan called Smokey Robinson "the greatest living poet." Marvin Gaye started as the Miracles' session drummer, and played drums on Martha and the Vandellas' "Dancing in the Streets". He really wanted to be a crooner like Sinatra or Nat King Cole, but he was married to Berry Gordy's sister Anna, and Gordy had given them a house, so he went off to work and made the boss a lot of money.

That's just a taste. If you remember 1965, or if you've ever tapped your foot to the music of that time, you've got to read this book.



JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFE MEMBER OF VVAW, AND THE AUTHOR OF "...AND A HARD RAIN FELL: A G.I.'S TRUE STORY OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM" WHICH WILL MARK ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY IN PRINT THIS MAY. JOHN IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON A NEW BOOK WHICH IS INTENDED TO CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION.

A Timless Scene

She sits staring across the room at nothing in particular
the National Geographic open, text down
in her bath-robed lap.
Somewhere outside dogs bark stupidly,
and the last diesel sounds down the tollgate grade
big timber mill-bound.
In her eyes gleams a thoughtful scintilla
for years now gone
deeds done.
For men known
and those loved.
For the one who had married his soul
to hers, now gone.
Settling deeper she shifts in the over-stuffed chair
the familiar yellow magazine sliding
into a crevice formed between thigh and upholstery.
A deep sigh moves through her body
as the first evening chill sweeps down valley slopes
fresh from snowfields melting.
A well-used country hand sweeps a silver touched honey strand
from forehead's freckled side;
slowly she reached for the frame of brass
nearly on the table's oaken top.

a young man
in military combat garb
war etched face
and a scrawling notation
"just before we took the refinery at...
your loving son..."

Her eyes close
and when they open, steady run the tears down
sun-tanned cheeks,
sobbing
deep, hurt, lonely and forever.
a mother's lament.
She turns towards the center of the table
there the folded cloth triangle
a walnut box of medals and ribbons
and that so official looking paper.
Outside the dark envelops the land.
The dogs sounding meaner and nearer.
A full moon rises brilliant
filling the night
with elusive shadows, dissolving dreams
and fading memories.

—Christopher Mehne

Uncle Ollie

BILL BRANSON

Once in a while, on what seemed an annual visit to our grandparents, we would see Uncle Ollie at my maternal grandmother's house. In later years, I suspected that Grandma W. arranged his leave times from the Home to coincide with our visits.

We were young, and so made few distinctions of relative age, but he seemed to be in his 40's to my current mind. Ollie was a smallish,

child like man. He never said a lot, as I recall. But, he did like to hang out and play with us kids. One day, he came downstairs, from what I guess was his room, with his fly open. My sister saw him about the same time as Grandma. Ollie got a good chiding, and was sent back upstairs. Later, as kids will do, I overheard Ma and Grandma talking about him. He was to be sent back to the Home again.

But, you see there was no evil in that man. He just found it more convenient to stay unzipped. My sister was not bothered in any way.

Ollie had been a sailor, somewhere during the Korean War. Something happened to Ollie as was. He became Ollie as is. The VA and Navy knew, because they gave him a disability and allowed him a slot in a soldier's home. Ollie would get leave to come

and see his parents, but he always ended up having to go back to the Home. What was he like before and why was he like that after? Some-when, somewhere, the War killed that man. Well, there is no knowing now. He passed from a heart attack, while we were still in grade school.



BILL BRANSON IS A VVAW BOARD MEMBER AND CHICAGO RESIDENT.



Chicago Peace March, January 20, 1973.

A Moment of Silence in a Forest of White Crosses

The Dead

do not require our silence to be honored
do not require our silence to be remembered.
do not accept our silence as remembrance, as honor.
do not expect our silence to end

the carnage of war
the child starved
the woman raped
the virulence of intolerance
the Earth desecrated.

It is the living who require our silence
in a lifetime of fear and complicity

The Dead

do require our courage to defy the powerful and greedy.
do require our lives be loud, compassionate, courageous.
do require our anger at the continuance of war in their name.
do require our shock at the maiming of the Earth in their name.
do require our outrage to be honored, to be remembered.

The Dead

have no use for our silence

—Gregory Ross

McNamara's Folly

DANIEL C. LAVERY (REVIEWER)

McNamara's Folly: The Use of Low-IQ Troops in the Vietnam War by Hamilton Gregory (Infinity Publishing, 2015)

About 10% of the casualties in the Vietnam War came from low IQ soldiers recruited under Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's plan, called "McNamara's 100,000" that lowered standards by "administrative acceptance." Gregory, Vietnam vet, journalist, and college professor points out "The process was a farce—highly subjective, grossly unfair, and an outrageous abuse of the law." If the examiner thought the candidate possessed street smarts he was inducted even though he scored in the bottom group V who were "truly mentally deficient."

Because so many people avoided the draft, received deferments like Dick Cheney five times while he attended college and grad school, and many uniformed men deserted in unprecedented numbers, the pipeline to Vietnam needed to be filled with warm bodies regardless of the law. Surprisingly, LBJ and McNamara commented that this would enable ghetto minorities, unable to get draft counseling, to learn some skill that would help the war on poverty and come back to a job when the war was over.

The reality of unfit men, unable to tie their shoe laces or tell right foot from left, ended tragically with the highest casualties for them and anyone near them in battle. It contributed to tragedies like the My Lai Massacre where the men were led by a college dropout. Men too fat, too short, with

medical problems, psychiatric disorders, low IQ's, Downs Syndrome, schizophrenics, and even criminals, placed in intense combat training led to deaths unexplained to their concerned families. Gregory knows details from boot camp at Fort Benning. He helped one draftee from the poverty stricken Appalachian Mountains who didn't know his address, left from right, nor how to make his bed. He explores one case after another carefully documented from his research and interviews of how these men were killed, sometimes deliberately by their frustrated leaders, and the men with whom they fought.

One thought a nickel was more valuable than a dime, so his comrades tricked him into stealing his money. They held a blanket party for an extremely heavy soldier they called "Fat Boy" and beat him unconscious in his bunk. He ran away after being hazed mercilessly. Another fat man collapsed so the Captain had the troops run over him breaking his ankle. After they sent him to the hospital and he returned, the Captain ran him in blazing heat for two hours, causing him dizziness with vomit over him and a temperature of 105 when an ambulance arrived. Medics iced him and let him rest until the Captain sent him to special "rehabilitation training," and gave his name tag to a savvy sergeant to take the general knowledge, rifle, and physical training test so he would pass. Luckily, his commander in Vietnam gave him transportation duty realizing his disabilities.

A low-IQ soldier played a deadly joke for two days pulling the pin of a hand grenade and then rolling it toward his mates. Nothing happened since he had disabled it pulling out the detonator cylinder. His mates beat him each time for scaring them finally yelling at him: "Never again, Bozo!" The third day they muttered and kept eating ignoring him as they wouldn't fall for the same lame gag. When he did the same trick, this time he had forgotten to disable it. The grenade exploded killing two soldiers and wounding several others. Rather than send him to the States to try him for manslaughter, they made him perform risks like walking point exposing him to booby-traps, detonating a landmine, or sniper bait.

A commander of a basic training company at Fort Jackson, SC told of a trainee who as a child suffered severe burns to his upper torso and arms. His fingers were fused together so he could not pull a trigger, and could not turn his head because of a burn. The commander said the medical officer who examined him during induction "should have been court martialed." An attorney in Detroit and draft counselor explained the examining process were cattle calls where the goal was to process as many as possible. A Doctor was fired who worked at the Phoenix induction center because he disqualified men with medical problems like gout, diabetes, kidney abnormalities, and heart defects. He said every inductee was looked at as a malingering hippie who they required proof of a defect that the doctor would

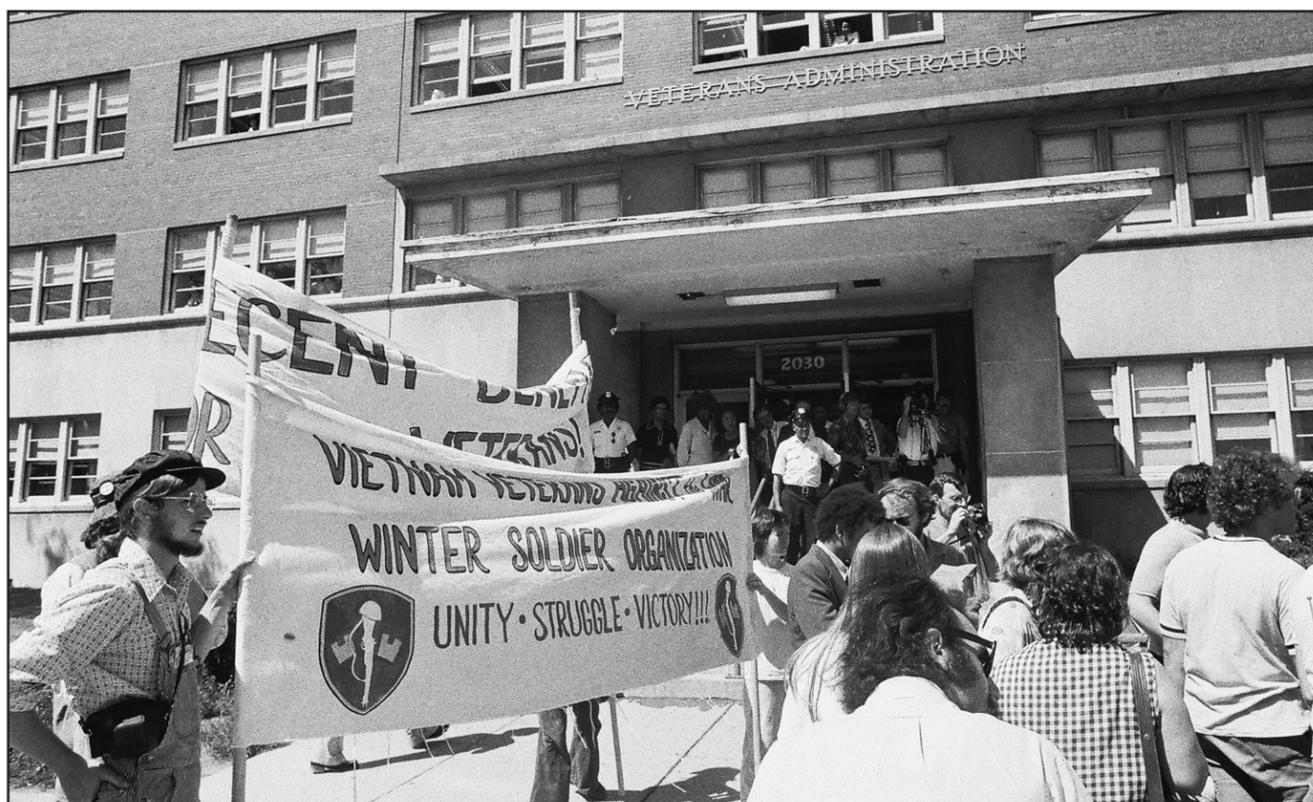
be expected to ignore. "They were drafting anyone who could breathe" said an academic vice president at Worcester State College in Mass., who was drafted in 1966 despite his flat feet and serious back problems. The Chicago center said one man was acceptable whose vision was 20-200 in one eye and completely unable to see without thick glasses.

Many "misfits" were unable to adapt to military life or were disturbingly different from anyone. High school dropouts and slow-witted, they became targets of their superiors' rage and peers' resentment. When time to leave Project 100,000, more than half, 180,000, were separated with discharges "under conditions other than honorable." This created a stigma making it hard to become employed and many were denied benefits like health care, housing assistance, becoming homeless and troubled.

Lt. Colonel Leslie John Shellhase, a WW II vet said regarding McNamara's Folly: "Wars are not won by using marginal manpower as cannon fodder, but rather by risking, and sometimes losing, the flower of a nation's youth."



DANIEL C. LAVERY GRADUATED ANNAPOLIS, NAVIGATED A NAVY JET, AND A SHIP, TURNED PEACE ACTIVIST AND BECAME A CIVIL RIGHTS LAWYER FOR CESAR CHAVEZ'S UFW. HIS MEMOIR, "ALL THE DIFFERENCE", DESCRIBES HIS EXPERIENCES. WWW.DANIELCLAVERY.COM.



Chicago VA Takeover August 19, 1974

Vietnam Syndrome

TERRY RAYCRAFT

In 2014, in a local newspaper, a military officer wrote, "Desert Storm was the high-water point of a two-decade effort to rebuild the military after Vietnam. It worked. The enemy was routed, Kuwait was freed."

Undoubtedly, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was routed. Without further discussion, the popular version is that it worked. At the time, however, many Vietnam Veterans worried that another Vietnam was about to occur. It didn't. One reported reason referenced remnants of the "Vietnam Syndrome" lingering within the Pentagon walls.

What is the Vietnam Syndrome? To understand the concept, one must return to the tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s. The student anti-war protests were growing. The military draft was in full force, while nearly a hundred US soldiers a day would be dying in the peak year of 1968. The US government would hide the My Lai massacre, where 500 defenseless women, children, and old men were slaughtered. After Hamburger Hill, perceptions of "pointless" were creeping into the minds of our soldiers. Vietnam vets returned home to join the students, providing legitimacy to the anti-war efforts. Kent State erupted on the news that Nixon was expanding the war into Cambodia. Four Kent State students lay dead, with 9 wounded, shot from over 60 rounds fired from the rifles of National Guardsmen. The protests ignited to huge proportions. The Pentagon Papers revealed the extent of government misrepresentations. The US was seething.

It ended. Over 58,000 Americans had lost their lives, with over 300,000 wounded. An estimated 4 million Vietnamese had perished.

The students who protested, the vets, many of whom joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and others who opposed the war, in an undeclared proclamation, were just not going to let another Vietnam happen.

That is the Vietnam Syndrome.

Almost thirty years later, Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense during the war (many called it McNamara's War), admitted that it had been a mistake. In his book, "In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of

Vietnam," he listed specific points for our nation to analyze before committing to war, so as to prevent another Vietnam. Like history itself, this would go unheeded.

I finally visited the Vietnam Memorial. As I stared at the multitude of names, I found myself asking, "Why had they died?" I was struggling to find something to salvage, something to make sense of it all. Did they die in vain? An unexpected answer hit me. It was like loud screams from many graves, "LEARN FROM US. DON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN!!!"

That, too, is the Vietnam Syndrome.

Then George H.W. Bush rang the death knell. As a part of the idea that it worked, Bush proclaimed that "...we've kicked the Vietnam Syndrome once and for all...the specter of Vietnam has been buried forever in the desert sands of the Arabian Peninsula." It was 1991. That was the culmination of the new military build-up that was tested and worked. Now the US could move forward. The planning to free Iraq was on the horizon, even before the tragedy of 9/11.

But the Vietnam Syndrome did not die.

Every year, a different group of Vietnam vets journey back to the old war zones of Vietnam. Some have fallen to their knees, crying, asking for forgiveness. Today, there are Vietnam vets who help Vietnamese clear fields of unexploded ordinance, which has killed over 42,000 more civilians. Vets are also assisting with the care of Vietnamese children, 3rd and 4th generation kids, born with terrible birth defects due to Agent Orange.

In the US, Agent Orange affected not only the exposed vets, but also their children and grandchildren. New bills have been introduced in Congress requesting additional funds for medical care.

In 2003, the US invaded Iraq.

Now Vietnam vets are supporting a new group, Iraq Veterans Against the War. Like the Vietnam vets, they have protested, given back their war medals and held their own hearings to try to tell the American people the truth of that war. This has been dubbed the Gulf Wars Syndrome.

Like Vietnam, many of the Gulf War soldiers, over 8,000, went AWOL. But they weren't

evading war. Rather, they had already honorably served one or more tours in Iraq, but were ordered to return. They had become disillusioned, concluding that they were not freeing the Iraqi people, or bringing democracy, or helping them at all. After all, there were no weapons of mass destruction, and there were no Iraqi links to 9/11 or Bin Laden. Troops began to question the mission, which remained unclear after George W. Bush had declared, "Mission Accomplished," early in the war.

The suicide and PTSD rates among both Vietnam and Iraq soldiers have been astronomical. Some have experienced guilt about their actions. An example is Jeff Lucy, an Iraq War veteran, who told his girlfriend that he "was nothing but a murderer." His father found him hanging from a hose in the family's basement. He had become one of the 2,300 Iraq vets who committed suicide by the end of 2011. But Jeff had also displayed the symptoms observed too often by wives, girlfriends, and parents - drinking heavily, sudden outbursts of anger, lack of sleep, crying at night, not attending family holidays such as Christmas, being too quiet, then quarrelsome, in and out of VA treatment centers, on and off medications.

Other wounds will surface, including illnesses from depleted uranium dumped by US munitions upon areas of Iraq. There are already US soldiers found to have radioactive exposure. In Fallujah, reports are citing severe deformities in as high as 50% of Iraqi births and high incidences of cancers in children. This is the Iraq War's Agent Orange, that will haunt the US for a long time.

After the invasion of Iraq, Vietnam vets knew that America was in another Vietnam. As the war unfolded, we could see through claims of success, rhetoric of winning, cover-ups, and lies. The parallels between Iraq and Vietnam were remarkably similar in too many respects. We knew there was no winning.

Our soldiers are excellently trained. They do their job when called. But Americans must decide whether they should be marched into more Vietnams, the unanalyzed wars of choice, the wars created by the powerful military-industrial-political-corporate complex. Eisenhower warned us. There are 4 million dead Vietnamese, mostly civilians, and over 2 million dead Iraqis, almost all civilians. There were trillions of dollars wasted, as well as our honorable, brave US soldiers, of whom over 6,500 died too soon in Iraq and Afghanistan. There are the nearly 100,000 who lie in beds or sit in wheelchairs, as well as those who must deal with the physical and mental wounds for the rest of their lives. There are the wives, the mothers, the children, who suffer as well and whose stories should be told. I will continue to support the Vietnam and Gulf War Syndromes.

Yes, another Vietnam happened. But did anything really work?



TERRY RAYCRAFT WAS A CORPSMAN, 1ST MARINE DIVISION, IN VIETNAM, 1969. HE HAS A MASTER'S IN PUBLIC ADMIN/POLITICAL SCIENCE J.D. ATTORNEY FOR OVER 33 YEARS. LIVES IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA.



McNamara's Folly

JOHN KETWIG (REVIEWER)

McNamara's Folly: The Use of Low-IQ Troops in the Vietnam War by Hamilton Gregory (Infinity Publishing, 2015)

Just when we thought we had heard it all about the war in Vietnam, along comes a new book that shines a spotlight on a little-known but tragic aspect of the war. "McNamara's Folly" by Hamilton Gregory is informative, thoroughly researched, well-written and very readable. It is a terrific book, but caution: the subject matter will make you angry and disgusted, once again, with the government of the United States. The lowering of standards to make mentally handicapped men eligible for the draft was cruel and indefensible. Yes, we were aware of Project 100,000 as a footnote to history, but "McNamara's Folly" tells the whole ugly story factually, and in the most human ways. Author Gregory actually had some first-hand experience with "McNamara's morons," and he has found many others who witnessed the troubling effects of

the Defense Secretary's sad effort to make numbers and fight an unnecessary war by concentrating on charts and graphs.

The young men drafted under the provisions of the project were mostly hampered by low mental capacities which made them very vulnerable in combat situations, but the book points out that they also put their colleagues at increased risk. Gregory explains in detail the pressures the unpopular war put on local draft boards. In order to meet their quotas, Project 100,000 allowed the draft to take men who were previously unfit for service. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara sold his program by making it seem that these less fortunate draftees would get special attention and training in the military that would allow them to return to civilian life better prepared to find employment and contribute to their communities. Sadly, the truth was that the military needed men, cannon fodder, to support the war in Vietnam. The war became more unpopular as it dragged on,

so enlistments were down. At the same time, AWOL (absent without leave) and desertions were at peak levels. Even in basic training, instructors were very cautious about putting a rifle into the hands of these recruits, for fear they would harm their fellow troops. Commanders faced extreme pressures not to dismiss any soldier, so they looked the other way as the handicapped men were passed on to their next duty assignment. In combat in Vietnam, they could be a real hazard, and it was often left to their fellow soldiers to look out for them, and assign them to duties where they would have the least opportunity to do harm. The accounts of combat veterans who looked out for the poor guys drafted under McNamara's program are heartwarming.

McNamara's Folly also makes us aware that the lower standards allowed many convicted lawbreakers and social misfits to enter the service, often instead of going to jail. Of course, some of them took advantage of the opportunity to better themselves, but some simply brought their problems to a new field of operations.

If things weren't tough enough in Vietnam, the assignment of men with known anti-social or sociopathic behavior patterns added great stress to the burdens of the soldiers around them.

Hamilton Gregory has done an outstanding job researching and telling this grim story. "McNamara's Folly" redefines the term, cannon fodder in a most effective manner. As a VVAW member, he has done an outstanding job explaining the madness, cruelty and tragedy of America's military adventure in Vietnam. This book tells exactly why VVAW needed to come into existence, and it adds invaluable insights into the historical folly and tragedy of the Vietnam War. Highly recommended.



JOHN KETWIG IS A LIFE MEMBER OF VVAW, AND THE AUTHOR OF "...AND A HARD RAIN FELL: A G.I.'S TRUE STORY OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM" WHICH WILL MARK ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY IN PRINT THIS MAY. JOHN IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON A NEW BOOK WHICH IS INTENDED TO CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION.

Happy Veteran's Day Sale

we are having a Happy Veteran's Day Sale post offices, schools, government buildings even VA clinics are all closed to celebrate the occasion of carnage known as war

in honor of the 40% of the jailed, homeless and addicted population who are Veterans we are giving you a 40% discount on a new ride upon lawn mower [two in stock].

hurry before your scruples wake up.

come on down to the used conscience sale where we massacre prices on bloodshed and butchery, atrocities cut rate

[on line sales only for drone strikes]

we want to thank our fighting women and men, with a free, yes free, donut and small coffee {proof of service required}

Active Duty, Retired or Veteran, must show their scars: physical, psychological, emotional, moral

so, hurry on down, because tomorrow the price of war goes back to 51% of our tax dollars

(significant discounts always available to the top 1%)

—Gregory Ross



A classroom visit at Brandeis High School in New York. (l-r) Susan Schnall, Joe Hirsch and Brian Matarrese.

A Memory on the 70th Anniversary of the Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

DANIEL C. LAVERY

I am an anti-war Vietnam vet, active member of Vietnam Vets Against War, Annapolis grad, who changed my path as soon as I realized how immoral the Vietnam War had become. As a navigator of a US warship, the USS Oak Hill (LSD-7), I navigated 300 marines to Vietnam where our ship stayed on station for six months supporting the war effort. Immediately after that I navigated our ship to Hong Kong and then Japan where I had spent two years attending an American high school in Yokohama when my father, a WWII hero, was a Captain in the Navy assigned to the Yokosuka Naval base. After visiting the city where I lived, Kamakura, I decided to take a train to Hiroshima where I felt my anti-war sentiments would find a place to ponder what my future might be once my commitment was over in about a year. That impetus I recorded in a memoir I wrote called "All the Difference" that showed how I changed from a pawn in the military to a crusader

for justice as a civil rights lawyer for the poor and powerless. Here is an excerpt of that experience that I want to share for the 70th anniversary of the horrendous bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

I navigated the Oak Hill to Yokosuka, Japan, where I had lived as a teenager. The base PX provided me an opportunity to buy gifts for my friend Yoshio Suzuki's family in Kamakura. His boy enjoyed the baseball glove and girl a doll I had purchased on the base along with a fifth of Jack Daniels for his Dad who still ran a milk factory there. A train swept me off to Hiroshima where I saw a film of the devastation caused by the first atomic bomb ever dropped on human beings at the shrine to the dead. Seeing the effects of that enormous blast on human beings haunted me. The photographs of the victims etched the atrocity against humanity graphically in my brain no matter what the justification. The statistics baffled my mind. By the end of the war,

atomic bombs killed about 140,000 people in Hiroshima and 80,000 in Nagasaki. Most of the casualties were civilians. Many died slowly from radiation sickness so these statistics understate the deaths. At the museum was a reference from an eye witness:

"Towards evening, a light, southerly wind blowing across the city wafted to us an odor suggestive of burning sardines. I wondered what could cause such a smell until somebody, noticing it too, informed me that sanitation teams were cremating the remains of people who had been killed. Looking out, I could discern numerous fires scattered about the city. Previously I had assumed the fires were caused by burning rubble. Towards Nigitsu was an especially large fire where the dead were being burned by hundreds. Suddenly to realize that these fires were funeral pyres made me shudder, and I became a little nauseated. 8 Aug 1945 by Michihiko Hachiya."

A memorial book at the shrine to the dead contains my statement that as a patriotic American who had grown to love the Japanese people, to see what horror we caused them with the dropping of atomic bombs made a lasting impression of extreme sorrow. I hoped no country would ever use atomic or nuclear weapons in the future. I walked to a carved stone in Hiroshima Peace Park called the Memorial Cenotaph and read the words: "Let all souls here rest in peace, for we shall not repeat the evil."



DANIEL C. LAVERY GRADUATED ANNAPOLIS, NAVIGATED A NAVY JET, AND A SHIP, TURNED PEACE ACTIVIST AND BECAME A CIVIL RIGHTS LAWYER FOR CESAR CHAVEZ'S UFW. HIS MEMOIR, "ALL THE DIFFERENCE", DESCRIBES HIS EXPERIENCES. WEBSITE: WWW.DANIELLAVERY.COM.

From The Light Where Shadows End

continued from page 40

mutations caused by our massive spraying of Agent Orange will not allow for my reconciliation. All I can do is witness and tell, tell as I told the American public when I marched and protested as a member of the Vietnam Veterans Against The War; tell as we told in the Winter Soldier hearings when we admitted to war crimes and atrocities.

So I tell. And though there is no reconciliation for the dead, the bodies I counted and carried on my back these many years are gone, their spirits laid to rest. Perhaps reconciliation is not an end, but a beginning, a healing process that starts with compassion and ends with grace. Perhaps this is how angels are born from ghosts; angels whose wings are made of

blood and bone; angels who live inside our imaginations and guide us by leaving testaments to truth. I believe this book is such a testament, and hope these words are such a light.

May 1, 2015, Trang Bang, Vietnam

With love and gratitude to Hoang Thu Trang, Le Hoang Linh, and the many generous Vietnamese friends who made this book complete.

R. G. CANTALUPO'S (ROSS CANTON) WORK HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN OVER A HUNDRED LITERARY JOURNALS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, CANADA, AND ENGLAND. HIS AWARD-WINNING VIETNAM WAR MEMOIR "THE LIGHT WHERE SHADOWS END" WAS SERIALIZED IN THE LITERARY JOURNAL "WAR, LITERATURE AND THE ARTS." HE WAS AWARDED THREE PURPLE HEARTS AND A BRONZE STAR WITH A COMBAT V DURING HIS TOUR IN 1968-69 WITH THE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION.



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 40 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

From The Light Where Shadows End

R.G. CANTALUPO

For almost fifty years, ghosts haunted me in night's dead land. They lived inside my blood, rose out of my heart's graveyard, and reached up from the earth to clutch my throat in terror dreams. Therapy couldn't save me. Nor drugs. Nor alcohol. Nor living on the edge of darkness. Nor tight-roping on the thread of death.

I was a war criminal. I fired white phosphorous mortars and called in napalm bombs on civilians using weapons banned by the Geneva Convention.

I was a war hero. I saved four men's lives by sacrificing my own. I was awarded a Bronze Star with a Combat V for courage under fire and three purple hearts.

And somewhere between these two irreconcilable battles was the wreckage of my life—drugs, divorces, deadly despairs. For twenty years, I wrote and rewrote my story, never finding a beginning or an end. And, over the years, the ghosts multiplied, becoming a company of bad spirits asking me to join them in their graves. In May, 2015, to survive

my looming suicide, I returned to the field where I died. I do not know what I expected to find there. Surely not my bones, nor the bones of so many friends and enemies I left behind. Surely not the rice paddy where I lay bleeding, nor the blood-stained elephant grass where a medevac whirled me away. I walked along the edge of Highway 1 as thousands of motorbikes rushed by: the new Vietnam, filled with young people, (70% under the age of thirty-five), with bright hopes and aspirations and an awakening belief in a better life. I sat down by the roadside and wiped away silent tears, my face streaked with smoke, dust, and loss. Trang Bang. This is where we ordered villagers to squat down while we "searched and destroyed" their homes. This is where Nick Ut photographed Phan Phuc, the "Napalm Girl", running naked down the highway, the sticky, gasoline flames burning her skin as she ran. This is where Lonny, Baby San, Devil and I lay dying, dying not for God or flag or country, but simply because we were

"the chosen", draftees offered up from poor black, brown, or white families by an upper-middle-class draft board that didn't want to take sons from their own. I stood on the Trang Bang Bridge, gazed down from the railing, and saw my life drift by. Like pages ripped out of *Life* or *Time*, I saw my seventeen-year-old wife's tattered face, Janice, floating past on the rippling surface; I saw my mother's beat expression searching for her son.

Not far away, a film crew from Vietnam TV International recorded my anguish. They came to follow my journey toward reconciliation, and have arranged a meeting with former members of The People's Army, soldiers who lived in Trang Bang and fought against me in 1968-69. We sit at a table outside a government building and shook hands. At first, we were awkward, hesitant, reaching across the table to touch, clasp, and let go. Our handshakes are strong, firm, the kind old soldiers give to compatriots from a distant war, but there is pain as well in our greeting. Gone souls move under

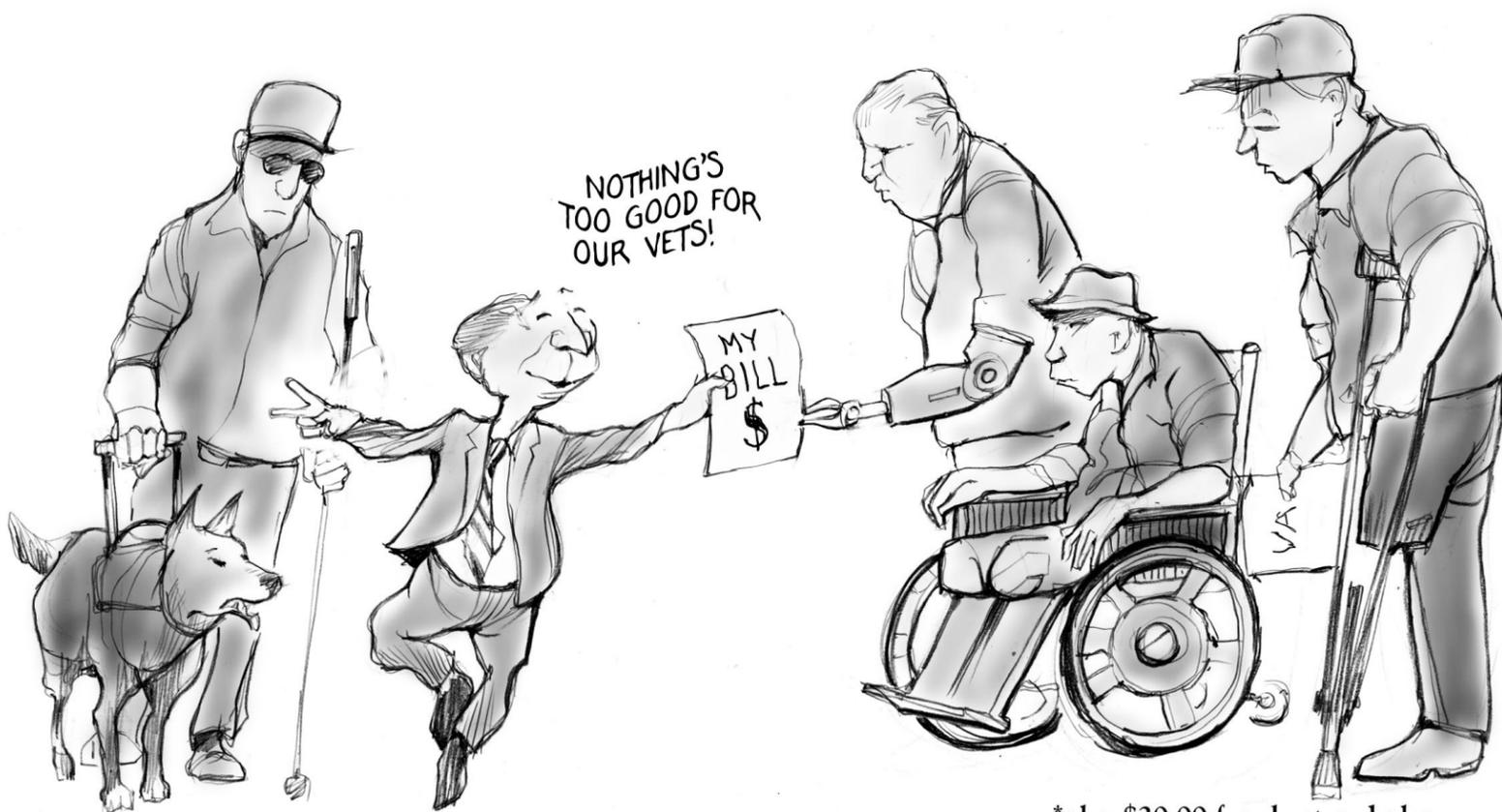
our eyes. We smile, but behind our smiles is heartache, sorrow, battles we didn't want but have to remember, shadows walking along the edges of our mouths. I take out a map, and their fingers draw the lines along the borders of our youth. "This is where your firebase was." "This is where ten to twelve of us hid from you along the riverbank." "This is the tunnel where our platoon slept by day and waited to attack you at night." The television crew films our gestures, translates and captures the nuances of our despair. Soon, there is nothing left to say. We stand, awkwardly embrace, shake hands again, and say goodbye.

I am alone now, my journey done. Tonight, in a Ho Chi Minh City hotel, I will write these final pages.

My reconciliation continues. The legacy of leaving hundreds of thousands of unexploded bombs to kill more children; of fourth generation birth defects and genetic

continued on page 38

George W Bush Charges Wounded Veterans \$100,000 to Give Speech*



DANZIGER NYTS/CWS July 14 2015 (6411)

*plus \$20,00 for chartered plane