On Memorial Day 2012, standing in front of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., President Barack Obama gave a speech announcing the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War. The entire speech is far too long to repeat here, but let me give you a few key passages:

“One of the most painful chapters in our history was Vietnam—most particularly how we treated our troops who served there. You were often blamed for a war you didn’t start, when you should have been commended for serving your country with valor. You were sometimes blamed for the misdeeds of the few, when the honorable service of the many should have been praised. You came home and sometimes were denigrated, when you should have been celebrated. It was a national shame, a disgrace that should have never happened.

“And so a central part of this 50th anniversary will be to tell your story as it should have been told all along. It’s another chance to set
Introduction

Pentagon Lies Vs. Harder Truths About the War

One hundred generations ago the Greek dramatist Aeschylus said it best: “In times of war, truth is the first casualty.” The American War in Viet Nam is no exception. Lies layered onto lies from the supposed attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin to the scuttling flights of choppers off the rooftops of Saigon. Years and years of lies.

And now the Pentagon is concocting the ultimate lie—its own fabrication of history woven to convince us and our children that our immoral military adventure in Southeast Asia was a noble undertaking. As many of the authors in this publication point out so eloquently, this Pentagon glorification is not only undeserved but also dangerously deceptive. The little lies that gather together to form the Big Lie are put together by design. The intent is to justify not only this war but also dangerously deceptive. The little lies that gather together to form the Big Lie are put together by design. The intent is to justify not only this war but also dangerously deceptive. The little lies that gather together to form the Big Lie are put together by design. The intent is to justify not only this war but also dangerously deceptive. The little lies that gather together to form the Big Lie are put together by design. The intent is to justify not only this war but also dangerously deceptive. The little lies that gather together to form the Big Lie are put together by design. The intent is to justify not only this war but also dangerously deceptive. The little lies that gather together to form the Big Lie are put together by design. The intent is to justify not only this war but also dangerously deceptive. The little lies that gather together to form the Big Lie are put together by design.

The Department of Defense has set out to mislead our youth and the public about the American War in Viet Nam and to offer a patriotic framework for that moral debacle. Presidents invariably want to cast past wars in favorable terms in order to launch into new wars of their own making, and President Obama has been no exception—as Bill Ehrhart points out, the commander-in-chief wants us all to breathe a sigh of relief and accept our military aggression into Viet Nam as a noble undertaking that all of us should be proud of and willing to see repeated.

A DIFFERENT WAR

Sorry about that. Many of us who fought in that war and many of us who fought against it remember a different war: one of unbridled aggression, one of soul-sinks-in-depravity, one so deeply ingrained into our psyches that 50 years later we wake in cold sweat. It was not a battle fought for freedom and democracy and not one that we are proud of.

And, lest we forget, let us remind ourselves that this war, which was supposed to turn boys into men, was not fought in a playground sandbox. It was fought in a country of people, human beings like all of us, who mostly wanted to live in peace, who were truly mystified by our intentions, who saw their bodies, families, land, and villages torn apart for no good reason.

We U.S. soldiers who were sent to fight, and those in our own country who chose to fight against this military madness, and those Southeast Asian people who were on the receiving end of the American Empire’s war have something in common. We have all been scarred. And we have honor among us, army men and women who … pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans.” It is what the President and the Department of Defense don’t say that’s significant.

Rather than conducting an honest evaluation to learn from the U.S. intervention in Viet Nam, the DoD is promoting an ex post facto justification of the war without acknowledging the terrible destruction and damage done to the Vietnamese people and land. Neither does the campaign confront the lasting impact of this conflict on U.S. soldiers and their families—from loss of life and physical disabilities and illnesses to the transmission of birth defects caused by Agent Orange to their progeny. The government does not mention the millions of Vietnamese, including women and children, who were captured, tortured, displaced, and killed. There is no representation of the heroic U.S. soldiers who resisted the war, nor any real acknowledgment of domestic protest. And the project does not pay tribute to the voices and postwar reconciliation activities of many antiwar veterans. For more information, visit vietnambounddisclosure.org.

This publication was produced by the staff of Peace in Our Times, the quarterly newspaper of Veterans For Peace. Bundles of 80 are $35, and individual subscriptions are $15/year. To donate, subscribe, or order bundles, go online to peaceinourtimes.org or send a check to Veterans For Peace, 1404 North Broadway, St. Louis, MO 63102.

Editorial staff: Tarak Kauff, managing editor; Ellen Davidson, Mike Ferner, Becky Luening, Ken Mayers, Doug Rawlings.

Website coordinator: Fred Nagel

Veterans For Peace and the Vietnam Full Disclosure Project

Veterans For Peace, founded in 1985, is a global organization of military veterans and allies collectively building a culture of peace by using our experiences and lifting our voices. We inform the public of the true causes of war and the enormous costs of wars, with an obligation to heal the wounds of war. Our network of over 140 chapters worldwide works to educate the public, advocate dismantling the war economy, provide services to assist veterans and victims of war, and most significant, end all wars.

The Full Disclosure campaign is a Veterans For Peace effort to speak truth to power and keep alive the antiwar perspective on the American War in Viet Nam. It is a clear alternative to the Department of Defense’s efforts to sanitize and mythologize the U.S. role in the war, legitimizing the continuation of further unnecessary and destructive wars. President Obama announced a plan, starting in 2012, for a 13-year commemoration funded at $65 million: “As we observe the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War … we pay tribute to the more than 3 million servicemen and women who … pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans.” It is what the President and the Department of Defense don’t say that’s significant.

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Remembering the Lessons of Vietnam

Rejecting the Pentagon’s Revisionist History

Editors’ note: This article was written about events in 2015 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. We feel that the truths brought out in the article, not just in the bad-journalist-dumb-public explanation for the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War and Viet Cong (North says that the Pentagon has ‘failed to take note of the critically important Pentagon Omissions

An important read might be Jon Weiner’s April 15, 2015, piece ‘The Nation, or the Battlefield of Memory,’ He reports that after meeting with Hayden and members of a group called the Vietnam Peace Commemoration Committee, the Pentagon dropped its plans to develop educational materials for schools offering its revised history of the war in favor of a plan to honor Vietnam War veterans. There was plenty to scrap in the Pentagon’s plans (the Pentagon of President Obama and former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel), including:

- its timeline and fact sheets, which failed to take note of the critically important 1971 Senate testimony of then-head of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), now the Secretary of State, John Kerry;
- its count of 58,253 American deaths, but no mention of the three to four million Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians estimated to have been killed in the war;
- its failure to call My Lai a ‘massacre,’ as it most certainly was;
- the military’s use of Agent Orange with its effects on Vietnam and U.S. veterans; and
- the social effects of the war on veterans themselves.

Wiener suggests that rather than celebrate the 50th anniversary of the start of the war or the 40th anniversary of the end of the war by thanking Vietnam veterans, an apology is in order. He writes that the Pentagon might do better by saying to Vietnam veterans, ‘We’re sorry you were sent to fight in an unjust and futile war; we’re sorry you were lied to; we’re sorry you were lied to; we’re sorry you were lied to; we’re sorry your comrades, and years of your own lives, and that you suffered the after effects for many more years; we’re sorry the VA has done such a terrible job of taking care of you. On the other hand, we might say ‘thank you’ to the people who worked to end the war—and ask them to tell us about their experiences.’

THE WORK CONTINUES

Maybe that needs to be extended to the groups that are working today to bring America’s longest-ever military adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan to a close. As Kerry did with the VVAW in the 1970s, there are organizations today that involve active-duty and recently returned veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in trying to end America’s continuing wars, even if U.S. presence is increasingly through proxy armies or high-tech military means rather than American “boots on the ground.” One is Iraq Veterans Against the War, not well known in many circles, but with some high-profile advisory board members, including Daniel Ellsberg, Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies, and Anthony Arnove, who co-edited with the late Howard Zinn a primary source companion book to Zinn’s People’s History of the United States. Another is Veterans For Peace, whose advisory board members include Andrew Bacevich, the brilliant military historian at Boston University; Chris Hedges, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for The New York Times, now writing for Truthdig; Bill Fletcher, the former president of the TransAfrica Forum, Ralph Nader; Jeremy Schaill, author of Blackwater: The Rise of the World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Army and a founding editor of the Intercept with Glenn Greenwald; filmmaker Oliver Stone; philosopher and Union Theological Seminary Professor Cornell West; and again, Bennis and Ellsberg.

GET THE WORD OUT

These legitimate and important organizations, led by active-duty military and recent veterans, should be better known, but the problem may be ours, in the media. North cites the famous comment by Mark Twain: “If you don’t read the newspapers, you are uninformed. If you do read the newspapers, you are misinformed.” In the media of the nonprofit sector, we have to do better with coverage of the nonprofits whose programs of research, advocacy, and direct action are aimed at trying to avoid prolonged repetitions of the often forgotten mistakes of the Vietnam War.

This article was originally published at NonProfitQuarterly.org.

Rick Cohen joined Nonprofit Quarterly in 2006, after almost eight years as the executive director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. Before that, he played various roles as a community worker and advisor to others doing community work. He has also worked in government. Cohen pursued investigative and analytical articles, advocated increased philanthropic giving and access for disenfranchised constituencies, and promoted increased philanthropic and nonprofit accountability.
‘Monkeywrenching’ the War Machine

By Mike Fenoer

An overview of America’s war in Viet Nam can be complete without mentioning the G.I. resistance movement that mobilized thousands of active-duty service members in opposition to that conflict. A standard account of G.I. resistance first printed in the Armed Forces Journal, June 1971, is “The Collapse of the Armed Forces,” by USMC Col. Robert D. Heinl Jr. He states, “The morale, discipline and battleworthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.” More of this history can be found in Vietnam War Bibliography: Morale, Discipline and Military Justice, by Edwin E. Moise and also in David Cortright’s classic, Soldiers In Revolt.

These works and the sources they cite recount a history not widely known: that the resistance to the American War in Vietnam that involved mutiny, desertion, and even the killing of superior officers also included dramatic incidents of sabotage. The full depth and breadth of monkey-wrenching the war machine, however, will never be known because so much of it took place on quiet, desperate nights, carried out by frustrated and angry men and women of conscience.

Here is one large-scale act of sabotage cited by Heinl:

“… three soldiers from Ft. Carson, Colorado … were recently indicted by a federal grand jury for dynamiting the telephone exchange, power plant, and water works of another Army installation, Camp McCoy, Wis., on 26 July 1970.”

One other spectacular sabotage for which a perpetrator has never been found happened on the carrier USS Ranger in 1972, when someone dropped some 6-inch bolts and a crowbar into the main reduction gear that transferred power from the engines to the propeller. To replace the gear assembly, some 10 steel decks had to be cut, the new gears lowered in place by crane and the decks re-welded in place. This kept the Ranger out of action for nearly six months during the height of the air war against Viet Nam.

“Collateral damage” from the Ranger incident happened on the docked USS Hancock, home-ported at the Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco Bay, and docked right next to the Ranger.

On my first day aboard, a fellow corpsman gave me a tour. Walking on the hanger deck where the A-6 and F-8 fighters were tied down, I noticed that between every pair of jets stood a Marine at parade rest, holding an M-1 rifle.

When I asked my friend what the Marines were doing, he replied, “Guarding the planes.” But I wasn’t prepared for his answer when I asked from whom? “Us,” he said, smiling, explaining that sailors had taken to throwing handfuls of nuts and bolts into the plane’s air intakes which destroyed the engines when started.

Not long after that, when I started thinking about ways of keeping the ship from going back to Viet Nam I asked another swabbie how to get down to the reduction gear. “Forget it,” he said, “they’ve posted Marine guards on that.”

By the time the Hancock’s dry-dock maintenance was done and we put out for sea trials, I was more familiar with the ship and had found a couple kindred spirits in the medical division. Unfortunately for the G.I. resistance movement, none of us was mechanically inclined and our late-night missions were limited to throwing everything over the side that wasn’t under watch or welded to a deck.

That didn’t stop us from using our limited medical authority to its fullest extent, however, and more than one division on the ship was reduced to a skeleton crew after we finished issuing “rack passes” at morning sick calls. That, and helpfully documenting any and every physical and mental diagnosis we could for sailors who wanted out, distributing antiwar literature and pamphlets on how to become a conscientious objector were the small ways we did what we considered our true patriotic duty.

In the wildly popular (with the grunts) “FTA” show that toured military bases around the world during the period of greatest G.I. resistance, Jane Fonda did a skit with another troupe member, in which she played the First Lady, Pat Nixon.

Pat was looking out a White House window, telling Dick a large group of antiwar soldiers was approaching their front lawn.

“Well, we’ll just have to send out the 5th Marines, then, Pat.”

“We can’t Richard,” Pat replied, “It IS the 5th Marines!”

When you’re running an empire, you always want to know exactly who is guarding the guards.

Mike Fernoer served as a Navy corpsman during the Viet Nam War and was discharged as a conscientious objector. He is a former president of Veterans For Peace and author of Inside the Red Zone: A Veteran For Peace Reports from Iraq.
Working at the Intersection of G.I. Rights and Civil Rights

By Barbara Dudley

In 1971, just a month after graduating from law school, I and four other National Lawyers Guild members went to Southeast Asia with the guild’s newly created Military Law Project to serve as civilian defense counsel for G.I.s who were facing courts martial for resisting the war. The military was reluctant to hold trials on bases in Asia, but military law allowed service members to have civilian defense counsel if any were available. We decided to make ourselves available.

Most of my cases were in courts on U.S. bases in the Philippines at Subic Bay Naval Base and Clark Air Force Base. But in November 1971, I went to Vietnam for a few months to defend 13 black G.I.s against charges of “mutiny.” These men had been part of a unit at a fire base near the demilitarized zone between north and south Vietnam. They had requested permission to go to Cam Ranh Bay, a large American base nearby, to attend a memorial service organized by the Black Panthers for some black children killed in a church bombing in Los Angeles. Permission had been denied, and they had been ordered out on patrol.

Racial tension permeated the American ground troops in Vietnam. The Black Panther Party was giving a voice to a growing radicalism among blacks. Black Panthers were brutally gunned down in their homes by police in Los Angeles and Chicago. Tanks and SWAT teams were becoming commonplace in U.S. cities. This tension was interwoven with the growing resistance to the war in Vietnam. In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a speech that riveted the nation but which is largely ignored today as King’s legacy is sanitized and de-politicized.

“In the ghettos of the North over the last three years … as I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men I have told them that Molotov cock-tails were the best weapons they had against their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But they asked—and rightly so—what about Vietnam? They asked if our own nation wasn’t using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. … I knew that I could never again raise my voice against home, was I able to keep all but one of the defendants out of jail, but all of the others received less than honorable discharges. No one was ever prosecuted for throwing the grenades. It was not only black G.I.s who were re-understood or wholeheartedly supported the undeclared war where they had been asked to risk their lives and where some 58,000 of their buddies would die.

Those months in Vietnam had a profound impact on me, in matters both in-
Spring 1969: I am an Air Force Combat Security Police First Lieutenant, trained at Ft. Campbell, Ky., acting night security commander at Binh Thuy airbase in the Mekong Delta. Perhaps because I have been studiously examining daily intelligence reports, the Vietnamese base commander asks me to assist in assessing air strikes by newly U.S.-trained South Vietnamese pilots. He thinks that several of them might be Viet Cong with intent to sabotage missions or fly to Cambodia. Newly elected President Nixon has begun ordering “Vietnamization,” creating pressure to produce elevated body counts. Bombing villages in “free-fire” zones is a sure way to accomplish that. I am surprised that I have been asked to perform a “safe” daytime duty outside the scope of my assignment by an officer not in my chain of command. 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In the Mouth of the Beast

War’s Truth Is in the Details

By Mike Ferner

It was pitch black, so I started feeling my way up the mountain with my hands leading me toward the sound of the moans. I found one Marine entangled in a bush and asked him if he was hit. He weakly said, “all over Doc.”

“It was too dark to see where he was bleeding, so I began feeling his head and face. There was a thick clamp just below his left eye, so I tied a battle dressing over it, then tore his shirt open and found six sucking chest wounds. Air gurgled out of each of the holes when he took a breath. I put Vaseline gauze bandages over each hole to keep his breath from escaping. Next, I found a deep laceration on his right wrist, but it wasn’t bleeding. He was in deep shock and his circulatory system had shut down.

“Carrying him down the hill in the dark with my platoon sergeant, we finally reached a jeep that would take him to a helicopter landing zone to be medivac’d to a field hospital. Just as the driver started heading down the mountain, the Marine stopped breathing, but when I started mouth-to-mouth, I felt a mist of warm blood spraying into my face.

“I realized then that the thick clamp I felt on his cheek earlier was actually his left eyeball. His throat was so clogged with blood that the air was blowing out his eye socket instead of reaching his lungs.

“I had to do a tracheotomy on him ... and fast. I yelled at the driver to stop, found my scalpel and cut a small, deep slit in his throat just under his Adam’s apple. I took a ballpoint pen out of my back-pack, took it apart, and inserted the hollow cartridge through the slit in his throat and began blowing air into his lungs. It worked.

His lungs filled with air and the Vaseline gauze bandages held.

“Then his heart stopped. Again, I yelled for the driver to stop. My sergeant took over the breathing while I started closed cardiac massage. We came to the helicopter landing-pad, lifted him out of the jeep and continued checking him, the doctor looked up and said he’d been dead for two hours.

“We weren’t taught to diagnose death in hospital corps school"

Thus, at 19, was Mark Foreman introduced to war. The son of a master plumber dad and a fulltime mom in Ames, Iowa, Mark graduated in 1966, “with lousy grades.” He dreamed of going to art school, but couldn’t afford college. So as a healthy 18-year-old he automatically fell into a demographic with many other young men—available cannon fodder. Before the year was out, he enlisted.

He chose the Navy hospital corps to keep out of the Vietnam regulars. The NVA wel-

come the Marines with a furious, 10-minute burst of machine gun and rifle fire, filling the air with thousands of red tracers. “The roar of that many machine guns was unbelievable. I thought my brain was going to explode.”

Then, as if on cue, the firing stopped. Mark and a fellow corpsman, Harry Bowman, heard the gut-wrenching screams from the wounded and climbed out from cover to bring them in.

Mark found one Marine sitting against a boulder whose “arms and legs were flailing as if he was being swarmed by bees,” he recalled.

“Something white was covering his face. As I got closer I could see it was a large portion of his brain. He’d been shot through the top of the head, splitting his skull wide open. Training never showed me anything like this. I crawled next to him and wrapped my legs around his torso while I tied two battle-dressings over the top of his head. But when I let go, he ripped the bandages off. I knew he couldn’t live much longer, but I called out for help. A Marine crawled over and I asked him to hold his arms while I replaced the bandages.”

For most of an hour, Mark worked on that Marine, listening to the wounded howling all around him. “The screaming was unbelievable ... it was overwhelming.”

“I felt like I was in a black tunnel … I had just experienced a young guy with his brains hanging over his face — it’s hard to admit what happened next. I became paralyzed. My whole body was buzzing. I couldn’t move ... lost my hearing ... went blank into some kind of shock. I remember being conscious but my hearing went dead.”

The next thing he could remember was about eight or nine hours later. Mark “came to,” his senses started coming alive again. I could hear moaning now instead of screaming. But I knew everyone had to be on hair trigger and if I started crawling around I’d get shot by one of my own guys or the NVA. So I just crawled between the roots of a big tree with Harry, We didn’t talk. We just fell asleep.”

“I woke up just as dawn was giving form to the trees. The night was driving me crazy. I thought I couldn’t live any longer, but I called out for help. A Marine crawled over and I asked him to hold his arms while I replaced the bandages.”

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I won’t kill anybody while I’m over here, I’m going to save as many lives as I can.”

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I won’t kill anybody while I’m over here, I’m going to save as many lives as I can.

“Even if they were going to kill me, I didn’t want to kill them because I knew it would destroy me,” he said, adding, “I was a conscientious objector without knowing it.”

Mark turned and saw Harry lying on his back on top of a big rock, 30 feet away.

“His arms and legs were hanging motionless. I crawled to him, grabbing his wrist to feel for a pulse. He was dead. I saw the bullet hole that went straight through his heart. I felt no emotion. The world had become insane and Harry was lucky to be done with it.”

Harry had been trying to reach a Marine whose left arm was blown off. Mark knew he would bleed out fast without a tourniquet so he reassured him, “You’re gonna be all right, I’m coming.”

“I’m OK doc, but I’m bleeding bad ... you gotta stop continued on page 16 ...
Lessons Learned

… continued from page 1

I confronted civilians out to denigrate and abuse me. No one called me ‘baby killer’ or spat on me. When I later became active in the antiwar movement, I never once saw or heard any antiwar demonstrator blame the soldiers for the war, let alone act out verbally or physically toward soldiers or veterans.

As Vietnam War veteran Jerry Lembcke documents in his book, The Spitting Image, the myth of the spat-upon veteran is exactly that: a myth. There is not a single documented contemporary account of such behavior. All of these stories begin to emerge only after 1975, after the end of the war, when many veterans began to claim, “This happened to me back then.” But memory is, at best, unreliable, and psychology readily demonstrates that people can convince themselves of things that never actually happened to them. For the most part, veterans came home to silence, returning not to grand victory parades and tickertape as their fathers had done after World War II, but one at a time to hometowns and cities that had hardly been touched by the events that had changed these veterans’ lives forever. It was isolating and lonely and without closure. But that is not the same as being vilified and abused and blamed.

But powerful people saw in the veterans’ pain and festering unhappiness an opportunity. It was an opportunity that Republican candidate for president Ronald Reagan seized upon in a campaign speech in September 1980, when he said, “It is time we recognize that ours was, in truth, a noble cause.” In the post-Vietnam War, post-Watergate era, both trust in the U.S. government and belief in the justice of American military might as an instrument of foreign policy were badly shaken. Morale and discipline in the armed forces, as documented by Colonel Robert J. Heinl Jr., in “The Collapse of the Armed Forces,” were at an all-time low, and very few young Americans were eager to serve in a discredited military. When the U.S. attempt to rescue American hostages being held in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran by Iranian revolutionaries ended in humiliating disaster, the U.S. foreign policy elite became determined to restore the luster of American arms and the legitimacy of U.S. military intervention.

This is the context in which Reagan gave his “noble cause” speech, and he was elected in a landslide victory by the millions of Americans who did not want to believe what they had witnessed and lived through during the Vietnam War: the world’s most powerful nation pounding into rubble an agrarian people who plowed their fields with water buffalo and wanted nothing more than to be left alone—a war of aggression foisted upon the Vietnamese by arrogant men who thought they could bend the world into whatever shape they desired.

The “national shame, the disgrace,” was the war itself, not the way returning veterans were treated. But this was a reality that few Americans, including many veterans of the war, could bring themselves to come to terms with. Haven’t Americans always been on the side of right and justice? Doesn’t the United States only fight wars as a last resort and only when forced to do so by aggressor nations led by evil leaders? How could a nation built upon “Give me liberty or give me death,” “all men are created equal,” and “of the people, by the people, for the people” have ended up waging a shameful, disgraceful war against a people who had done us no harm and had no reason to?

So when Reagan declared that “ours
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much-abused victim.

The first of the Welcome Home parades took place in New York City on May 7, 1985. I watched part of it on television, and later wrote this poem:

PARADE

Ten years after the last rooftop chopper out of Saigon.

Ten, fifteen, twenty years too late for kids not twenty years old and dead in ricefields; brain-dead, soul-dead, half-dead in wheelchairs. Even the unmarked forever Absent Without Leave.

You'd think that any self-respecting vet would give the middle finger to the folks who thought of it ten years and more too late—yet there they were: the sad survivors, balding, overweight and full of beer, weeping, grateful for their hour come round at last.

I saw one man in camouflage utilities; a boy, his son, dressed like dad; both proudly marching.

How many wounded generations, touched with fire, have offered up their children to the gods of fire? Even now, new flames are burning, and the gods of fire call for more, and the new recruits keep coming.

What fire will burn that small boy marching with his father? What parade will heal his father’s wounds?

I found it all pathetic and sad, but apparently many of my fellow veterans were more than happy to accept these accolades, however belated and cynical.

For while this transformation of the veteran from unwitting perpetrator to American hero was taking place, U.S. policymakers were slowly but surely reasserting U.S. military intervention as a legitimate and necessary instrument of foreign policy. Reagan’s intervention in Lebanon ended in disaster when hundreds of American Marines died in a suicide bombing, but Reagan was smart enough to cut his losses, and quickly displaced that setback with his successful invasion of the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada, claiming falsely that the Cubans were building an airfield for Russian bombers and that the lives of U.S. medical school students were in jeopardy. This ridiculously lopsided affair was hailed in the halls of power and touted to the American people as a great victory, even though our “enemy” had a military force with the size and firepower of the Providence, R.I., police department, and our military was so unprepared that soldiers had to use tourist maps of the island and call the Pentagon on a pay telephone to ask for naval support.

By the time George H. W. Bush invaded Panama in 1989, few Americans questioned what Bush and Washington had named “Operation Just Cause.” And when Bush committed over 500,000 U.S. military personnel to put the Emir of Kuwait back on his gold-plated toilet, most Americans didn’t bother to ask why the U.S. ambassador to Iraq had said to Saddam Hussein in August 1990 that the U.S. had “no opinion in your Arab-Arab disputes.” Or if Saddam’s claims were true that the Kuwaitis were slant drilling and stealing Iraqi oil. Or why the United States had supported and protected Saddam all through the 1980s if he was such a tyrant. Operation Desert Storm might more accurately be called Operation Desert Storm, so lopsided was this brief little war, but it was celebrated with a massive victory parade in Washington, D.C., and demonstrated for all the world to see that U.S. military might was once again a force to be reckoned with. As Bush triumphantly declared, “By God, we won.” The Vietnam-War-take two and all.

Sadly enough, as the second Gulf War, our endless war in Afghanistan, and our interventions in Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, and elsewhere make clear, Bush seems to have been right.

This rehabilitation of U.S. military legitimacy has, in fact, depended upon re-creating the image of military service and the American citizen-serviceman (and now woman, too). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, as detailed by Heinl and in such powerful documentaries as Sir! No, Sir!, the junior ranks of the U.S. military were in something close to full revolt against those who were ordering them to fight and die in a war that could no longer be explained as anything other than hopelessly wrongheaded and perhaps even criminally insane. What Americans saw on television in the late 1960s and early 1970s was not returning veterans being spat upon and denigrated, but thousands of veterans in the streets protesting the war they had fought, challenging the falsehoods foisted upon them and the American people, even hurling their medals onto the steps of the U.S. Congress.

The draft, by this time, had been thoroughly discredited as grossly unfair, and, within the military leadership itself, a large portion of the blame for the breakdown of the military was attributed to the draft and the number of young men who were in the military and sent to Vietnam against their will.

The solution to this problem—the lesson learned, if you will, by the military and the foreign policy establishment—was to get rid of the draft and replace it with an all-volunteer army. It took a decade and a half to build a new, more loyal and unquestioning military, but in conjunction with other efforts such as the rehabilitation of the Vietnam veteran as noble hero and the recasting of the Vietnam War as noble cause, the effort succeeded. The United States now has a relatively small military made up of a high percentage of careerists whose loyalty is to the armed service, whose ethos is defined by their unit identity and sense of comradeship, and who have minimal contact with the civilian society on whose behalf they are supposedly serving. Moreover, a high percentage of these soldiers are drawn from the lower economic strata, those groups not include the cost of school lunch. While some of our boys do receive scholarship aid, the majority of their families range from financially well off to fabulously wealthy, and even our scholarship kids, by virtue of graduating from my school, have gained a distinct advantage in life.

I teach the children of the powerful and the influential, people with clout: captains of industry, political leaders, prominent citizens. And in my 14 years at this school, not one of my students—now numbering in the hundreds after so many years—has chosen to forego college and enlist in the U.S. military instead. Except for a very few who enter one of the service academies each year and eventually serve as officers, not one student I have taught here will ever serve a day in uniform, let alone be required to serve against his will, because he has no better options available to him.

Why should the parents of the boys I teach care what the U.S. government is doing in the world in our names and with our tax dollars? They and their children will never have to pay the blood price, which is now borne by less than one percent of the American people—mostly the people of my students will never meet or know or care about. Indeed, not a few of these parents and alumni benefit financially, directly or indirectly, from the system as it now operates. 

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Toward the end of the American War in Vietnam, policymakers discovered that most Americans didn’t really care about the death and destruction of others so long as it was not American kids who were doing the dying.
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do you think their wealth comes from?

Toward the end of the American War in Vietnam, policymakers discovered that most Americans didn’t really care about the death and destruction of others, so long as it was not American kids who were doing the dying. The lesson was learned by the Vet- erans Administration, which also admits to a routine killing of men, women, and children. And now we have the modern miracle of drone warfare and Hellfire missiles, enabling us to kill anywhere in the world without having to put U.S. soldiers’ lives in jeopardy or do anything more than, quite literally, lift a finger. Thanks to the lessons of the Vietnam War, the U.S. government has learned how to wage war with mini-

mal domestic political opposition. Is this what Obama meant when he boasted that “the true legacy of Vietnam” is that “we now use American power smarter”?

Obama also bragged, “We honor our military more and take care of our veterans better than ever.” The lesson was learned by the Veterans Administration, which also admits to a routine killing of men, women, and children. And we have the modern miracle of drone warfare and Hellfire missiles, enabling us to kill anywhere in the world without having to put U.S. soldiers’ lives in jeopardy or do anything more than, quite literally, lift a finger. Thanks to the lessons of the Vietnam War, the U.S. government has learned how to wage war with minimal domestic political opposition. Is this what Obama meant when he boasted that “the true legacy of Vietnam” is that “we now use American power smarter”?

A search of the Department of Defense website for references to Martin Luther King Jr. and his landmark 1967 speech, “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Si-

lence,” turns up nothing. A search for Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers turns up nothing. The most powerful anti-

war movement in the history of our nation is all but invisible in the government’s of-

ficial commemoration of the Vietnam War, as if it had never even existed.

The entire website is riddled with such omissions, incident at My Lai shows up on the timeline, but it is not called a massacre; its account of the My Lai story says only one man—Lt. William Calley—was con-

victed of murder, and that he was sen-

tenced to life in prison, but neglects to add that he served just three years under house arrest before being pardoned by President Richard Nixon. Meanwhile, the timeline includes the name of every American who received the Medal of Honor. Each Medal of Honor winner gets a multi-page entry in his speech, “did your job. You served with honor. You made us proud.” The offi-

cial flag of the Commemoration says, “Service, Valor, Sacrifice,” and “A Grate-

ful Nation Thanks and Honors You.”

During my 13 months in Vietnam, I reg-

ularly witnessed and participated in the destruction of civilian homes, the most brutal interrogations of civilians, and the routine killing of men, women, and children, along with their crops and livestock. The people we were supposedly defending in the North were destroying their forests with chemical defoliants, burned their fields with napalm, flattened their villages with 500-pound bombs, and called them gooks, chinks, slopes, dinks, and zipperheads, turning their sons into shoeshine boys and their daughters into whores. Is this what you meant when he said, “You made us proud”? But the new version of the American War in Vietnam does not contain any of these facts. It contains very few facts at all. Consider again the Department of De-

fense’s 50th Anniversary Commemora-

tions. Fiftieth anniversary of what? Appar-

ently, the official version of the war does not begin until 1965 when the Marines first landed at Da Nang. Not when French soldiers returned to Vietnam aboard U.S.-flagged ships in 1945. Not when the United States began to pay the cost of the French War in 1950. Not when the United States plucked Ngo Dinh Diem from a Maryk-noll seminary in New Jersey and installed him as head of a “nation” the U.S. created, hailing him as “the Winston Churchill of Asia.” Not when John Kennedy sent “ad-

visors” and air squadrons to Vietnam. Not when the United States backed a coup against Diem, nor when the U.S. Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution after being deliberately lied to about what had

The ‘national shame, the disgrace,’ was the war itself, not the war returning veterans were treated, but this was a reality that few Americans, including many veterans of the war, could bring themselves to come to terms with.
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20th century, the U.S. government used the Marines in Central America and the Caribbean to create a favorable business climate and collect debts for Big Business, Wall Street, and American bankers. The words of Marine Major General Smedley Butler, two-time Medal of Honor winner, are worth repeating here:

“I spent 33 years and 4 months in the Marine Corps. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism. Thus I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers 1909–12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras ‘right’ for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.”

You won’t find any mention of Butler in most U.S. high school history textbooks. Nor that U.S. financiers stood to lose vast fortunes if Germany had won the First World War. Nor that the Pacific War in World War II was mostly a matter of multiple empires competing for the same geographical territory. Nor that by the mid-1950s the United States had the Soviet Union ringed with nuclear missiles, all of them pointed at Moscow. There is a great deal that escapes mention in American history books. My students are continually amazed by what they have never heard before in their lives. Most Americans have never heard the history of their country, a history that includes much to be proud of, but equally much to be ashamed of. The great American poet Walt Whitman once said, “The real war will never get in the books.” He was referring to the American Civil War, but it pertains equally to just about any and every American war. And as James Loewen makes clear in his book, Lies My Teacher Told Me, real American history will never get in the books, either. At least not in the books that most Americans read and accept as fact.

Thus, most Americans, if they think about the Vietnam War at all these many years later, are content to accept the fallacy that it was a noble cause fought by valorous young men who sacrificed for the greater cause of freedom against an evil communist enemy hell-bent on conquest, and that those same young men were unfairly abused and unappreciated by unpatriotic cowards when they returned home. Meanwhile, the wrong people learned their lessons well. By removing most Americans from any responsibility for or consequences of U.S. foreign policy, by placing the entire blood burden of a small segment of the American population—that segment with the least voice in public affairs—the American military-industrial complex that President Dwight Eisenhower warned against, but did nothing to stop or change, can do whatever it wants to do in the world without fear of domestic political consequences.

The one lesson that no one in power in Washington seems to have learned is that no amount of military might can achieve goals that are incompatible with the beliefs, desires, and cultures of those at the other end of the rifle barrels and Hellfire missiles, and thus unrealistic and unachievable. If the Vietnam War did not drive home that lesson, certainly subsequent U.S. forays into Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, and now Syria should have made that lesson clear. But there really is such a phenomenon as “the arrogance of power.” We are watching it in action on a daily basis.

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Another Vietnam: Pictures from the Other Side

The North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front had hundreds of photographers who documented every facet of the war under the most dangerous conditions. Almost all were self-taught, and worked for the Vietnam News Agency, the National Liberation Front, the North Vietnamese Army or various newspapers. Equipment and supplies were precious. Processing chemicals were mixed in tea saucers with stream water, and exposed film was developed under the stars.

These photographers documented combat, civilian life, troops on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, resistance movements in the Mekong Delta, and the bloody impact of the war on the innocent.

Some were photographing to document history, while others strove to use their cameras as weapons in the propaganda war. Shooting clandestinely in the South, Vo Anh Khanh could never get his photos to Hanoi, but exhibited them in the mangrove swamps of the Mekong Delta to inspire resistance.

Many of these photographs have rarely been seen in Vietnam, let alone in the rest of the world. In the early 1990s, photojournalists Tim Page and Doug Niven started tracking down surviving photographers. One had a dusty bag of never-printed negatives, and another had his stashed under the bathroom sink. Vo Anh Khanh still kept his pristine negatives in a U.S. ammunition case, with a bed of rice as a desiccant.

One hundred eighty of these unseen photos and the stories of the courageous men who made them are collected in the book Another Vietnam: Pictures of the War from the Other Side.
CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT:

1973: A NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT GUERRILLA stands guard in the Mekong Delta. “You could find women like her almost everywhere during the war,” said the photographer. “She was only 24 years old but had been widowed twice. Both her husbands were soldiers. I saw her as the embodiment of the ideal guerrilla woman, who’d made great sacrifices for her country.” Photograph: Le Minh Truong/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

MARCH 1971: LAOTIAN GUERRILLAS CARRY supplies by elephant and foot to NVA troops near Route 9 in southern Laos during South Vietnam’s attempted interdiction of the trail. The invasion, Operation Lam Son 719, was intended to test South Vietnamese Army’s ability as U.S. support was winding down. It proved disastrous, with southern troops fleeing in panic. Photograph: Doan Cong Tinh/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

MAY 1975: ELDERS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH embrace, having lived to see Vietnam reunited and unoccupied by foreign powers. Photograph: Vo Anh Khanh/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

SEPT. 15, 1970: A VICTIM OF U.S. BOMBING, ethnic Cambodian guerrilla Danh Son Huol, is carried to an improvised operating room in a mangrove swamp on the Ca Mau Peninsula. This scene was an actual medical situation, not a publicity setup. The photographer, however, considered the image unexceptional and never printed it. Photograph: Vo Anh Khanh/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books

1974: WOMEN HAUL HEAVY FISHING NETS on the upper branch of the Mekong River, taking over a job usually done exclusively by men. Photograph: Le Minh Truong/Another Vietnam/National Geographic Books
Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides


We lost the war because we didn’t understand that they were poets. That’s true. In 1990, I went back to Vietnam for the first time. There was a literary conference in Hanoi. At one of the lunches, I sat next to this little bitty guy who turned out to be a professor of American literature at Hanoi University—Professor Nguyen Lien. I asked him what he did during the war, and this is the story he told me. He said that his job was to go to Beijing and learn English and then go to Moscow University to read and study American literature. Then he went back to Hanoi and out to the Ho Chi Minh Trail and gave lectures on American literature to the troops traveling south. It was not like a six-week survey, just an after-noon, but he talked to them about Whitman, Jack Lon-don, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald.

A lot of Vietnamese soldiers carried translations of American literature in their packs. Le Minh Khue—a young woman who worked on the Ho Chi Minh Trail disarming unexploded bombs—carried Ernest Hening-
way. Professor Lien asked me this question, “Now what Vietnamese literature did the American military teach to you?” I laughed so hard I almost squirted beer up my nose. I told Professor Lien that I would have been sur-
prised if the U.S. Army had given us classes in Ameri-
can literature.

Larry Heinemann drove an armored personnel carrier in the 25th Infantry Division from 1967 to 1968. In 1987, he won the National Book Award for Paco’s Story, a novel about the lone American survivor of a Vietnam firefight.

When I was 20 years old, in 1968, I served in a communications unit. One of my jobs was to clean rifles. You know, we northern soldiers loved our AK-47s. They fold up really easily and they’re extremely powerful. I cleaned them with genuine devotion and kept them in peak condition. They were always shining. One day while I was cleaning a rifle, my regimental commander walked by. The colonel said, “A beautiful weapon, don’t you think?” I said, “There’s nothing beautiful about it—it’s just an instrument of war and I don’t think there’s anything beautiful about war.” The colonel stared at me. He admired my skill as a poet, so he said, “Okay, but don’t talk that way to anyone else.” I spent my childhood in the countryside where life was very peaceful. When I was a young boy, I never imag-
ined myself a soldier. I just wanted to lead an ordinary life like everybody else. We were poor, of course, but it didn’t trouble us too much. During the time I was serving in the army, my mother’s wish was to return to that poor, peaceful village. When I came back after the war, everything had turned upside down. That peaceful beauty had vanished. War had radically changed the na-	ure of our society. There is a line in one of my poems that goes, “In the end, in every war, whoever won, the people always lost.” Nguyen Duy is one of the most highly regarded Viet-
namese poets of his generation. Distant Road, a selec-
tion of his poems, is offered by Curbstone Press.

Initiall, we set up our hospital close to the place where the borders of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos meet. But it was too far from the front lines, so after about six months we had to move closer. It was the first of many moves during the war. We always sought a location that was in triple-canopy jungle—where there were three layers of leaves. Even in the middle of the day the sun couldn’t shine through. But the Americans launched innumerable chemical spraying operations to defoliate the jungle. As soon as they sprayed nearby, I’d give the order to begin moving the hospital. Even so, we were sometimes spotted by U.S. helicopters or observation planes, and then the B-52s would inevitably attack that very night.

In 1970, I was allowed to return to the North for a med-
c ical—meeting—a two-month trek from the Highlands. One of my former professors invited me to lunch and told me about dioxin. At the time, those of us at the front had no idea what kind of chemicals the Americans were spraying. We just knew that a few days later all of the leaves died. They’d spray over and over from C-123s that came in very low, almost at treetop level. All we could do was cover ourselves with plastic. The professor asked me if I’d ever seen cases of cancer. “Yes, of course,” I said. He asked me for a piece of liver from someone who had died, to test for dioxin. I told him that was impossible. It would take two months to get it back, and even if you had some solution to preserve it in, you couldn’t count on ev-
ery porter to take proper care of it as it moved from post to post. It would almost certainly get lost or damaged.

But he was certainly on the right track. During the war, our soil, water, and food were all highly contaminated with dioxin. In 1973, a Harvard study measured the di-
oxin levels in our food. Fifty parts per trillion is consid-
ered the upper limit for safe food. That study found eight hundred parts per trillion in some places and a mean continued on next page ….
of two hundred. Now the food is much better and the soil is okay in most places except former U.S. air bases. Those places were heavily contaminated from storing the chemicals there, pumping them into the planes, and cleaning them out after spraying operations.

No one knows how many Vietnamese have died from diseases caused by Agent Orange, but according to our studies, one million people still suffer from cancers linked to Agent Orange exposure and there are about one hundred thousand people still alive with birth defects that we believe were caused by dioxin poisoning. We’ve seen many kinds of birth defects. … In one study I did after the war, among veterans who had stayed in North Vietnam, about one percent of their children had birth defects. Among veterans who had been in the South the longest, the figure was about five percent. We have also found much higher rates of cerebral palsy among people exposed to dioxin.

We recognize, however, that our studies are not as strictly scientific as they should be. … But even the anecdotal evidence is striking. Ten years after the war the chief of staff of the army, a three-star general named Cao Vinh Thang, died of liver cancer. During the war he and three other men had to go on a mission through a valley that was very heavily damaged by chemicals. It turned out that two of the other men also died of cancer. The only survivor went to war leaving behind a healthy, intelligent daughter. After the war, his wife gave birth to a deformed daughter with cerebral palsy. She is 27 now, and her mother and father have to take care of her.

Dr. Le Cao Dai conducted research on the medical effects of exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnamese population. His experience went back to the French War. From 1966 to 1974 he directed the largest jungle hospital in the Central Highlands. His staff of 400 routinely cared for more than a thousand patients. The jungle “hospital” consisted of 250 small, half-buried bunkers topped with thatched roofs. Each bunker accommodated four or five patients, and a bomb shelter was dug into the side of every one at a depth of two meters. Bunkers were located at least 30 meters apart to prevent single bombing strike destroying the entire hospital. Dr. Dai passed away in 2002.

Ta Quang Thin

I think everybody, including myself, was sick of the war. We abhorred it. It was not only cruel, it was absurd. Foreigners came to our country from out of the blue and forced us to take up arms. Don’t you think that’s absurd?

I was asleep in the jungle hospital when a male nurse woke me to tell me that Hue’s blood pressure had gone down. Hue was one of our patients recovering from serious wounds and concussions.” He was carried me the whole way back to the hospital. It took us seven months. Of course it was very painful to be carried like that. I took painkillers but they didn’t help much.

When I got home, I think everybody, including myself, was sick of the war. We abhorred it. It was not only cruel, it was absurd. Foreigners came to our country from out of the blue and forced us to take up arms. Don’t you think that’s absurd? We just wanted to be prosperous and live like other people. Of course we had to fight to protect our country, but we were really sick of the war. Deep down we didn’t like it. Casualties were enormous. And not just that—our savings, our houses, our plants and animals, everything was wasted by that war. I have many memories, and not just that—our savings, our houses, our plants and animals, everything was wasted by that war. I have many memories, and not just that—our savings, our houses, our plants and animals, everything was wasted by that war.

Ta Quang Thinh was trained to be a doctor’s aide and perform minor surgery. “Most of the wounds I treated were caused by artillery shells. Bombing also caused many shrapnel wounds and concussions.” He was wounded in Tay Ninh Province in 1967. “I spent a lot of time in that violent place.”

Lâm Van Lích flew a MiG-17 in 1966 during the American War in Viet Nam.

Lâm Van Lích

I was away from home for 29 years. I gave my family a few days’ advance notice that I was coming, but when I entered the house, I saw my older sister and mistook her for my mother. And when my mother came in, she didn’t recognize me.

The war caused a lot of casualties and pain. Just take my family, for instance. When I returned to the South in 1975 I found that many of my own family members had been killed. The pain of those deaths was greater than the sadness I felt for participating in the killing. I was away from home for 29 years. I gave my family a few days’ advance notice that I was coming, but when I entered the house, I saw my older sister and mistook her for my mother. And when my mother came in, she didn’t recognize me. Even after I introduced myself, she kept saying, “Lič! Lič?” She didn’t believe it. I insisted on examining her head. When she finally found a familiar mole, she cried out, “It’s you!” Even though we were fully prepared for the reunion, we cried our hearts out. During the war my mother was arrested many times. All her sons were engaged in revolutionary activities, so the local government frequently took her in for questioning. For the protection of the family she didn’t tell the younger members of the family about me. When I returned in 1975, many of my nieces and nephews didn’t even know I existed.

Lâm Van Lích was raised in Ca Mau, in South Viet Nam. He left home at 15 in 1946 to fight the French. In 1954, he went to the North and was trained as a pilot.

Perspectives

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Mark Foreman

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the bleeding," the Marine answered.

As he crawled around Harry’s body, machine-gun fire hit Mark, knocking him down the hill head over heels.

“I felt like I’d been hit by a cement truck and electrocuted with 50,000 volts of electricity … everything began to move in slow motion. I could see my right leg slowly spinning, as if it was made of soft rubber. That’s when I knew I’d been hit in the leg.”

The bullet hit Mark just to the right of his groin, too high for a tourniquet, shattering his hip before exiting the open, convinced he would bleed to death or be killed by the NVA. “I hoped it would be a good, clean shot. It would be a quick way to get the hell out of this insanity.”

That didn’t happen but what did over the next five days came straight through Alice’s looking glass.

A Marine crawled into the open to pull Mark behind cover. Not a shot was fired. Others crawled out, piled some rocks around Mark and crawled back to cover.

Certain he’d bleed to death, he pressed a battle dressing to his wound anyway. An hour later he had a “moment of ecstasy” when he realized he’d survive if he could just get to a hospital.

That second day of the battle, over half the company was dead or wounded. Survivors started to become unwound. One stood up and walked as if strolling through the park. Others couldn’t move. A medivac chopper hovered above the trees, trying to send down a rope ladder. The NVA shot it down. Another attempt 30 minutes later met with the same results.

Orders came in to blow up enough trees to create a landing zone. For the next five days, engineers, constantly under fire, blew up one huge tree a day.

During that time, a fighter jet flying 300 miles per hour dropped two 500-lb. bombs. The Marines’ captain radioed the pilot, “You stupid, motherfucking idiot … you just killed seven of my men.”

Artillery support came next, keeping the NVA at bay, but by the third day, with food and ammunition running low, five large boxes of supplies had to be dropped by plane. One only fell inside the Marines’ perimeter.

Two days later, 100 Marines made it to the top of the mountain. The NVA had vanished. A medivac chopper descended through the opening in the trees close enough to take on Mark and other wounded. A second medivac helicopter with 36 Marines on it hit a tree branch as it pulled up, flipped over, killing the copilot and severely re-wounding the rest. After six days and five nights of fighting, homelessness and anti-social behavior. Fortunately, Mark was able to turn his horror and pain into compassion and service to others.

He used the G.I. Bill to attend the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts followed by 10 years carving stone, “the best post-Vietnam War therapy I could have had. It allowed me to create what I thought was beautiful, every day for those 10 years.”

He earned degrees in art education and taught Milwaukee public school students for 20 years, until pain from his hip wounds became too severe. He retired in 2005 and will continue drawing 100 percent of his military pay, adjusted for inflation, for the rest of his life.

Mark co-founded the Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative, where he serves as volunteer outreach coordinator. He also serves as treasurer on the Veterans For Peace Board of Directors. Mark’s memoir can be read at peaceinourtimes.org.

Mike Ferner served as a Navy corpsman during the Viet Nam War and was discharged as a conscientious objector. He is a former president of Veterans For Peace and author of Inside the Red Zone: A Veteran For Peace Reports from Iraq.
Agent Orange and the Continuing Viet Nam War

By Bill Fletcher Jr.

During a 2009 visit to Vietnam, I asked a retired colonel in the Vietnam People’s Army about the notorious toxin “Agent Orange.” The colonel, who was also a former leader in a Vietnamese advocacy group for Agent Orange’s victims, spoke fluent English and was a veteran of the war with the United States. I asked him when the Vietnamese first realized the long-term dangers associated with the Agent Orange herbicide used by the United States. His answer was as simple as it was heart-wrenching: “When the children were born,” was his response.

In an effort to defeat the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese Army (the Vietnam People’s Army), the United States concocted the idea that if it destroyed the forests and jungles, there would be nowhere for the guerrillas to hide. They thus unleashed a massive defoliation campaign, the results of which exist with us to this day. Approximately 19 million gallons of chemical herbicides were used during the war, affecting between 2 million and 4.8 million Vietnamese, along with thousands of U.S. military personnel. In addition, Laos and Cambodia were exposed to Agent Orange in the larger Indochina War.

Despite the original public relations associated with the use of Agent Orange aimed at making it appear safe and humane, it was chemical warfare and it is not an exaggeration to suggest that it was genocidal. The cancers promoted by Agent Orange (affecting the Vietnamese colonel I interviewed, as a matter of fact) along with the catastrophic rise in birth defects, have haunted the people not only of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, but also of the United States. Those in the U.S. military involved in the dispersal of Agent Orange and those who were simply exposed to it brought the curse home.

The U.S. government has refused to acknowledge the extent of the devastation wrought by Agent Orange. Ironically, it has also failed to assume responsibility for the totality of the horror as it affected U.S. veterans, too often leaving veterans and their families to fight this demon alone.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee introduced House Resolution 2114, Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2015, “To direct the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide assistance for individuals affected by exposure to Agent Orange, and for other purposes.” In many respects, this bill is about settling some of the accounts associated with the war against Vietnam. The United States reneged on reparations that it promised Vietnam and to this day there remain those in the media and government who wish to whitewash this horrendous war of aggression as if it were some sort of misconstrued moral crusade.

HR 2114 takes us one step toward accepting responsibility for a war crime perpetrated against the Vietnamese that, literally and figuratively, blew back in our faces as if it were some sort of misconstrued moral crusade.

This bill should be understood as a down payment on a much larger bill owed to the peoples of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and to the U.S. veterans sent into hell.

For more information on HR 2114 and Agent Orange, see vn-agentorange.org, the website of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign.

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Bill Fletcher Jr. is a senior scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, the immediate past president of Trans-Africa Forum, and national board member of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign. Follow him on Facebook and at billfletcherjr.com.

Stunted Minds and Crippled Bodies

You may notice that Agent Orange is mentioned in more than one of the articles in this publication. That’s because the deadly killer is woven through the cruel fabric of that war and every generation of living beings that have come since.

About one million Vietnamese, including 100,000 children, are living with the after-effects of Agent Orange, now into a third generation. More than 13 million gallons of the herbicide laced with dioxin were dispersed from 1961 to 1971.

Stunted minds, crippled bodies, a lifetime of pain and social stigma along with impoverishment of families burdened with caring for the stricken are the legacies of a war crime for the ages. Genocide would not be too harsh a term for a strategy that destroyed forests and crops, poisoned water, denied food and shelter to whole regions and goes on killing and crippling generation after generation.

The U.S. government cared no more for its own than it did for the Indochinese in that war, as shown by the decades-long struggle it took for veterans and their families to get recognition and some compensation for the same kinds of disease and deformity that stricken those we targeted. More of the “unintended collateral damage” of war?

For more information about children of U.S. veterans suffering from the multigenerational effects of Agent Orange, contact the Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Alliance, cofounded by Heather Bowser, born with webbed fingers and toes and missing her lower right limb; covvha.net.

—Mike Ferner

The Decade the Rainforest Died

the deer did not stop running
leopards climbed into trees
that could not hide them
the douc langur
and the white cheeked gibbon
cursed at the metal gods
we flew raining on them
as they burned from napalm
elephants choked on the
smoke of gunpowder and poison
their steps a strange rhythm
as they tried to fly
the thunder of bombs
echoed the steps of elephants
tigers exploded
as they stepped onto landmines
in a forest covered with leaves
dead from Agent Orange,
fallen trees and
decomposing bodies of animals
and people
the earthworms were washed away
in monsoons
with soil that could
no longer grab onto roots
the Javan rhinoceros
and the wild water buffalos
that were still alive
wandered aimlessly
and weary with M16s and AK-47s,
we marched quietly and steadily
not knowing
why we were killing each other
—Tue My Chuc
A Nurse’s Turning Point

To All Vietnamese and Americans,

I am the daughter of a U.S. Marine who was killed on the beachhead of Guam July 22, 1944. In 1967, after graduating college, I joined the U.S. Navy Nurse Corps, went to Officers Indocination School in Newport, R.I., and began working at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in California. Oak Knoll had been constructed during WWII to care for the Marines wounded during battles in the Pacific.

I thought that I would become part of the healing process for the wounded; I thought that I would be able to undo the destruction of war and conflict in Southeast Asia. We had an amputee ward at Oak Knoll where the guys had their limbs attached to meat hooks, their raw, open wounds hanging, oozing infections so bad you could smell the sweet, sticky odor when you came into the unit. At night, they would talk with each other through their ongoing nightmares—“be careful, there’s a land mine there; go slowly, there’s a trip wire” as they wandered through the dense jungle—these youngsters, living on horror and fear. I was dedicated to getting them better and able to go out into life, but so many couldn’t—the psychological imprint of what they had seen and done couldn’t be cured by surgery and antibiotics, and the military didn’t believe that war caused psychological pain and damage so severe it would haunt them for life. We were an extraordinary team—physicians, nurses, corpsmen, and corpswomen—working long and difficult hours to heal our patients. I was training corpsmen who would be sent to the front lines, and so I became an instrument of war. I helped the military to function.

Like many others, Vietnam became a turning point in my life. It became personal, and I couldn’t live with myself and continue to be part of this death and destruction—done in my name, by my government. G.I.s and veterans were organizing a march for peace in the San Francisco Bay Area in October 1968. And so I joined them.

The nightly news had stories of small plane and dropped flyers over multiple military installations in the San Francisco Bay Area, announcing “suckers for peace will post posters and flyers announcing the demonstration—on the many barracks and wards. They were all torn down by morning. The nightly news had stories of the U.S. dropping flyers on the Vietnamese, urging them to go to “safe hamlets.”

So, along with a couple of friends, we loaded up a small plane and dropped flyers over multiple military installations in the San Francisco Bay Area, announcing the G.I. and Veterans March for Peace—and thousands showed up on October 12, 1968. We spoke out against U.S. involvement in Vietnam; we demanded, “Bring the boys home.” We spoke about the old men in Washington sending the young to die. And we thought we’d stop the war. We really believed that the American people and the U.S. government would listen to us.

The fact that the war continued, that so many millions of Vietnamese and thousands of American soldiers lost their lives, continues to haunt me and make me question what else we could have done. How could we have stopped this insanity?

As a child, I spent many Sundays visiting my father where he is buried in Chicago. I watched my grandmother drop to her knees and talk to her son: “Look, here is your daughter—see how she’s grown,” and I’d walk away from the grave, embarrassed and confused.

To all who have suffered, to all the family and loved ones who died and had their lives changed from the American War in Vietnam, I am so sorry we couldn’t have done more. We tried—and we’ll continue our struggle for peace and justice in this world in your name.

—Susan S.
or our republic. I hate it that you died for nothing of value.
States. You did not die defending our freedom, our honor, prison, or to leave the country with the prospect of never dying Americans or the millions of dead Vietnamese?

that thought. But I can't escape it. all of the deaths of the Vietnam War were a waste. I hate I was there. I keep coming to the same conclusion: that is ever said about the rightness or wrongness of the Vietnam War—because there is no justification for it and the politicians had for years quit trying to put a positive spin on it.

But in their guilt over the way they treated the returning veterans then and in their zeal to justify continued wars of no meaning in far off lands, the politicians are now trying to spin Vietnam as an honorable event in our past and the troops as heroes.

As I said, Americans have short memories. My fear is, they'll probably start believing this crap. I lost a lot in Vietnam … but you, my Brothers, lost everything.

I still wake up thinking about Vietnam—45 years after I was there. I keep coming to the same conclusion: that all of the deaths of the Vietnam War were a waste. I hate that thought. But I can't escape it.

Is the United States or Vietnam any better or worse off, for having fought that war—other than having lost 58,000 dead Americans or the millions of dead Vietnamese?

In the 1960s our government put us in a position to make a decision to accept induction into the military to fight an unjust, immoral war and to possibly die—or to go to prison, or to leave the country or the prospect of never seeing our homeland nor our families and friends again.

Terry and Allan, you did not die defending the United States. You did not die defending our freedom, our honor, or our republic. I hate it that you died for nothing of value and that your lives were wasted. I weep for you and the others on The Wall. I weep that you weren't given the chance to live.

—Don E.

A Confluence of Memories

“Mourn the dead, but fight like hell for the living,” said Mother Jones.

My father and my uncle both served in World War II and received their decorations, though neither ever spoke of the war, nor did I ask. As a boy, I played war with my older cousin, who went off to Vietnam.

Our idol was Audie Murphy; we both had his 3rd Infantry Division patch painted on our helmet liners.

So I was primed at a young age, ready to serve my country ‘tis of the

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So I was primed at a young age, ready to serve my country, a willing but unknowing patriot, dedicated to protecting and serving with honor my country ‘tis of the flying red, white, and blue. I had a feeling of pride and glory, thinking I was doing the right thing to stop the spread of communism. The domino-theory prevailed, and I knew so little. … “Be a good citizen … trust your government.”

So, as the sabers rattled and the flags unfurled for the almighty USA, I was one of those young men going off to war. I was 17 and, like so many others coming from low-income families, the military held promise … a hopeful opportunity to gain knowledge, experience for future jobs, and the prospect of the G.I. Bill. High on my list was a chance to step away from the insanity of my family. Sign me up, Uncle Sam!

I was stationed on the USS Duluth LPD 6 (landing platform dock), Amphibious Ready Group Alpha, U.S. Seventh Fleet, off Vietnam South China Sea in May 1967, and departed in November back to Subic Bay. With three companies of Marines, helos, and landing craft assault vehicles, we participated in seven amphibious assault operations. And according to Rear Admiral W.W. Behrens, USN, we “made a major contribution to our ever growing success in the war. … Congratulations on a job well done.”

Well, get your rubber boots on and roll up your pants, for this is more of the BS we continually get from those who spin the truth into propaganda. Let us not forget that “the first casualty when war comes is truth” (U.S. Sen. Hiram Warren Johnson).

I remember the napalm strikes, the Medevac flights out, the 16-hour-a-day workloads, the smells, the heat, the prison-like confinement of being on a ship in close quarters day in and day out, yet there is no one glaring event, rather a confluence of memories that flow down the river, all weaving that tapestry I call Vietnam.

What I remember most are the stories of those I have encountered.

My colleague Ron, a psychologist, full colonel Army Reserve, who died of Agent Orange complications, leaving behind two young boys …

Tommy, served on ship with me, unable to manage, loses his home, living now in a small trailer provided by the church, his wife sobbing to me on the phone that disability benefits continue to be denied, yet our ship is listed on the Agent Orange: Mobile Riverine Force Alphabetized Ships List. …

Russ, after a heavy firefight entering the village, picks up a small infant who dies in his arms, wondering what madness this is. … Now he is a tireless witness for peace, work—continued on next page …
the sorrow of all the stories that I’ve heard … the suffering of humanity. I don’t always feel that sadness but it is there, a low moaning wail of grief that never quiets itself, a manifestation of what we have done to grandmother earth and all our relations, not just the two-legged.

I go to the top of the hill, leave tobacco, and say prayers for my helpers, the spirits of the land. I use the sweet grass to clear my mind, with Chanupa in hand, the sacred prayer pipe; I say my prayers to the great mystery, to grandmother, the four directions. I ask that my mind, body, spirit be strengthened in all ways, to serve, Mitakuye Oyasin, all my relations in a good way. Let it be so.

For all of you who have come down the road or rest in the fields, I will burn some extra sweet grass, sage, cedar and perhaps copal. Gently smell the sweetness, shake your weariness. May you take a breath of sweet mercy. I am Onelay.

---Douglas R.

Haunted Every Day

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 Da Nang, since I saw the jungle at Chu Lai and the classrooms where they now learn. Walking the No Bridge. … I cried a lot of tears with you, Brother.

My service was not yours. I was rarely in harm’s way, sitting at the mouth of the Mekong River Delta. 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 yet it haunts me every day.

I left the Navy after three years, nine months and 11 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, D.C. Every Veterans 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, “so many,” would never hear the call of “G-pa.”

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 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.”

I tried, I still try to let people know you were real, you were young, you had futures, you were “so many” left behind. I worry The Wall is becoming a memorial to the Vietnam War and not you all who are on it. I worry that as we, the people who remember, age out, those able to remember those young people who were now joining you, “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 learn, walked in classrooms where they now walk, 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 would crack and a tear would trail down my cheek.

I tried, I still try to let people know you were real, you were young, you had futures, you were “so many” left behind. I worry The Wall is becoming a memorial to the Vietnam War and not you all who are on it. I worry that as we, the people who remember, age out, those able to rewrite history will 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 war profiteers. If we’re not going to they can not war. So I am praying to you “so many,” please come change the course of this country.
Touch This Sacred Wall

Wherever you are now wandering
I hope you can hear these words
That come from the hearts of those you left behind.
Some of us were soldiers,
Some of us were with you in Vietnam,
And some were not.
The grief, the sorrow, the regret
That we could not end that horrific show
Of napalm, fragmentation grenades, cluster bombs,
Flame throwers,
Daisy Cutters, AK-47s, M16s, Agent Orange,
Booby traps,
In time the war claimed the 58,195 of you
And the millions of Vietnamese killed.
Not to mention those millions wounded
For life and beyond
That stays with us as the carnage continues.
Fueled now as then
As you were killed and wounded then by the lies and
Fueled now as then and
That we are trying, in so many ways, to mark and honor your
Untimely departure and to stone for the suffering, to help
Heal those who lost so much—Americans, Vietnamese
Especially, and people of goodwill around the world who
Labored mightily to stop the madness of that war.

Know that we continue to try, as futile as the endeavor
May seem, to bring America back home and to restore
The soul of our nation. Since you died in 1968, our
government has wandered the globe in search of a false security
Built on military conquest and economic domination,
When Americans have known, deep in our hearts,
That we should be seeking peace.

Today, four decades after the U.S. war in Vietnam
Ended, believe me when I say that we will continue this quest,
To rightly assume responsibility for the devastation
We have left in America’s wake in Vietnam—tons of unexploded bombs,
And the toxic poison of Agent Orange.
We pledge to continue our efforts, though shamefully in
The name of those whose wounds
Could not be healed, and the consequences of that war.
Rest in peace, my friends. Look over us and our frail efforts,
Comfort us with the knowledge that your spirits
Guide us, and help us persevere as we strive to make your
Ultimate sacrifice a loss that was not in vain.

—Tarak K.
...continued from previous page

since you left us. Trust me, though, that some of us have worked to stop them. We work to protect our children and grandchildren, to protect families we will never meet in lands far from here, to use your deaths as a means to say “no more.” We have formed Veterans For Peace, partly in your memory, with the very lofty ambition of abolishing war. We oftentimes work in your name, for you. I’ll admit that many times we feel like we are howling alone in the wilderness, but we will not desist. We owe that to you.

I’ll be back, again and again, to walk alongside you for a short while. I will listen for your voices. I will touch your names and force myself to swing back through these many years and put myself in the place and time where and when we may have met. I promise you that I will take this opportunity to meld our spirits together, know that I grow stronger, in the doing so. And I will use that strength to abolish future wars. To stop the killing of innocents. In your name. That’s the least I owe you. And the most.

Rest in peace.
Your brother,

—Doug R.

If Resurrected from the Realm of the Dead

To Those Whose Names Are Here Memorialized:
You came from small towns and big cities, from different socio-economic backgrounds (though tilted, of course, toward the lower end of the income spectrum), from different ethnic and religious heritages. Some of you enlisted enthusiastically, believing you were saving “the Free World” from a communist menace; many of you, like myself, enlisted in order to “beat the draft”; but undoubtedly the majority of you were conscripted: “Take this rifle, son, or … meet your cellmates for the next few years in this federal penitentiary.” A few of you were women, serving in a medical or perhaps clerical setting. Death, the Great Leveler, has here united you all.

But Death is not the only thing that binds you together. You were all victims of a national sickness, a belief that the United States of America has a God-given mandate to rule the entire globe, to its own economic benefit. You were all victims of a chain of monstrous lies that led to your deployment to a strange land that most Americans didn’t know existed. The first of these was the fiction that I turn to for self appraisal. Did I live a good life? Did I make the right decisions, especially the most difficult one of my young life? Walk The Wall and you see in the polished surface those who died far from home, family and friends staring back through the flat reflection of your external form. Those names summon memories that command us to look at our real selves, the thinking, feeling one of my young life? Walk The Wall and you see in the polished surface those who died far from home, family and friends staring back through the flat reflection of your external form. Those names summon memories that command us to look at our real selves, the thinking, feeling self, and the question of the meaning of a good life. Did I live a good life? Did I do right? Did I make the right decision? Why am I alive and my peers are not? Am I a good man? Am I a coward?

I chose to oppose the war and avoid the draft. I chose to live. I chose to give peace a chance. I became a teacher…. I was ready to go to Canada but a sympathetic doctor helped me avoid service and stay close to my family. Others were much braver than I’ll ever be. I still don’t know if my decision grew from roots of fear or conscience. History tells of a futile effort to preserve a government in the south of Vietnam, atrocities, obscene loss of life, calls to patriotism, a divided country, chemical warfare that still scars people and places, psychological damage, political awakenings and permanent damage to American world leadership. But the war did end. The protest movement sped our withdrawal.

So I return to have those names judge me or help me judge myself and to be reminded of lessons learned. I am no longer naïve. My vision extends beyond the political boundaries that divide us. Calls to patriotic action do not move me. I know that war is not to be entered into lightly. Most of all I know that we must follow our convictions with actions. Did I do enough? Not nearly. But I still have the chance to do some good. There is meaning to our lives because we can make a difference.

—Barry A.

An Unforgiving Mirror

Reflections Fifty Years after the Escalation of the American war in Vietnam

It’s not easy to look into a mirror these days. The years and life have left baggage under my eyes, sculpted lines on my face and left grey ashes in my hair. But I can do it.

The Vietnam War Memorial is an unforgiving mirror that I turn to for self appraisal. Did I live a good life? Did I make the right decisions, especially the most difficult one of my young life? Walk The Wall and you see in the polished surface those who died far from home, family and friends staring back through the flat reflection of your external form. Those names summon memories that command us to look at our real selves, the thinking, feeling self, and the question of the meaning of a good life. Did I live a good life? Did I do right? Did I make the right decision? Why am I alive and my peers are not? Am I a good man? Am I a coward?

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—Barry A.

Nobody Knew You Better

Dear Charlie,
It’s Memorial Day, 2015, 40 years after your return from Vietnam. Wow! You brought a Vietnamese wife, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, two sisters-in-law, a son, and a daughter. You moved into the house Bernie and Linda vacated for you! We graduated from Chofu High School on Kanto Mura Housing Annex in Tokyo in ’68, and ’69, respectively. You joined the Army in ’69, I joined the Air Force in ’69. We volunteered to be “lifers.” You went to Cam Ranh Bay, I received orders to Da Nang. I was ready to go to Canada but a sympathetic doctor helped me avoid service and stay close to my family. Others were much braver than I’ll ever be. I still don’t know if my decision grew from roots of fear or conscience. History tells of a futile effort to preserve a government in the south of Vietnam, atrocities, obscene loss of life, calls to patriotism, a divided country, chemical warfare that still scars people and places, psychological damage, political awakenings and permanent damage to American world leadership. But the war did end. The protest movement sped our withdrawal.

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—Barry A.
Minh was more than a communist. He was a national—would fall like dominoes to the communists. But Ho Chi
around the world because American leaders feared the
fighting for their independence. Many were women and
can ever be proud of our country again.

you drank yourself to death (2005), though that mission
took decades to accomplish. Tham lived with me on
numerous occasions before he passed in Miami, a year
after you. I was happy to be his uncle, and a source of
support. He had called me from Texas, complaining. I
invited him to live in Miami with me. Before his death at 33,
had finally gotten it together. He moved from my
place to live in a place where he was paying his own rent
for the first time, ha!

Tham inherited alcoholism, diabetes, and being over-
weight. We Irish-Catholic males seem genetically pre-
disposed to this condition, but it killed you and your son.
I am crying now as I type this letter, and I’m so angry at our
government and the war corporations who dominate and
control it.

Nobody knew you better than I, except Mom and
Dad. We grew up in the same room; the next three boys
shared a room. I’m upset you and Tham lived so briefly;
it’s been a decade since you passed. Now your daugh-
ter Mary (named after our mother) suffers from terminal
cancer (related to chemical pollution in Vietnam where
she was born?). She is down as she seeks in life now. I
cry for her, too. I repeat the eulogy from Mummy’s me-
morial ceremony, prior to her internment in Brockton,
Mass., where you were born. At the ceremony you laid
down your fatigue jacket (which I now wear), thanking her
for keeping you warm when you needed help most. I
repeat these words now for you.

Love,

Patrick

“Just like the Wind” from Luciano’s Where there is Life album

Just like the wind, people come and go

Staying a while on the face of the earth

Until tomorrow when it’s time to go...

... we didn’t come here to build brick and stone

And this earth is not a permanent home

We’re only here on a building journey

Today we’re here and tomorrow we may not be.

But do good things and you will find

You can attain a peace of mind.

Just like the wind, people come and go.

Wrong in So Many Ways

To the Americans Who Died in the Vietnam War

Perhaps you thought you were doing the right thing,
fighting in a small distant country for president and
country. It is the way we were all indoctrinated. When
the country calls, you must answer. But the leaders of the
country were dead wrong about fighting in Vietnam,
and this Wall with your names etched on it speaks to the
terrible loss of that savage, unnecessary war. I mourn
your loss. I mourn the loss of possibilities cut off when
you’ve been gone, our country has learned little about
compassion.

America has continued to waste its treasure in fighting
wars around the world, as well as its dignity, its good-
will, its youth and its future. I wish I could give you a
more positive report on what America learned from the
Vietnam War, but most of what it has learned seems in-
tended to make wars easier to prosecute, such as rely-
ing on a poverty-driven volunteer army, ending the draft,
embedding reporters with the troops, and not allowing
photographs of returning coffins.

America has yet to learn that war is not the answer,
that bombs do not make friends and military power does
not bring peace. The military burden is immense. When
all is added, it amounts to over a trillion dollars annu-
ally. Imagine what a difference even a fraction of those
funds would make in fulfilling basic human needs.

I wish you were here to stand up and speak out for
peace and justice, for a better, more peaceful country
and world. We need you.

—David K.

Working for Peace

Dear Vietnam Memorial Wall,

I am writing to you to express my sorrow for the pain
and agony inflicted 50 years ago on the Vietnamese peo-
ple and on the American people by the elected leaders
of the United States.

While you, The Wall, reflect the names of 58,000 U.S.
military who died because of U.S. military action in
Vietnam, you remind me also of those not named on The
Wall—those six million residents of Southeast Asia who
died during these military actions.

I served 29 years in the U.S. Army/Army Reserves
and retired as a colonel. I also was a U.S. diplomat for
16 years and was assigned to U.S. Embassies in Nicipa-
gua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra
Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan and Mongolia. I was on
the small team that reopened the U.S. Embassy in Kabul,

I was a part of the U.S. government for most of my
adult life. However, in 2003, I resigned from the U.S.
diplomatic corps in opposition to another war, the war
on Iraq.

After I resigned, I joined Veterans For Peace to be with
fellow veterans who believe that dialogue and diplomacy
are the keys to conflict resolution instead of war.

I wish I could be at The Wall on May 25 for the Me-
orial Day observances, but instead I will be in North
Korea with a group of 30 international women, including
women and then have several days with them discussing
peace and reconciliation.

After our days in North Korea, we will cross the De-
Militarized Zone (DMZ) by foot, only the third group in
the 70-year history of the DMZ to walk across it. Once
across the DMZ, we will be met by 2,000 South Korean
women and then have several days with them discussing
peace and reconciliation.

You have seen so much here at The Wall—families crying
for their loved ones, buddies crying as they find the names
of their friends, and persons who don’t know anyone whose
name is on The Wall, but who wanted to come to the Viet-
nam Memorial to remind themselves of the folly of war.

We think of other countries as “conflict countries” and
provide programs for these countries.

We never stop to think that our own country is also a
“conflict country” with a traumatized population whose
younger generation knows nothing but war. I strongly
believe that individually and as a country, we need assis-
tance in stopping the propensity of our elected leaders
to decide that war and occupation are the best ways to re-
solve their perceptions of threats to our country.

I will continue to work for peace around our world…
and continue to challenge our own country to end the
threat it poses to our planet in our politicians’ thirst for
war.

Peace ol’ Wall,

—Ann W.
My Gift at My Lai

By Mike Hastie

On the morning of March 16, 1968, U.S. military soldiers entered a quiet hamlet at My Lai, near Quang Ngai, and systematically murdered 504 innocent Vietnamese citizens, of which the vast majority were women and children.

The barbarity of the killing was a relentless frenzy, as everything in sight was destroyed.

The U.S. government made every attempt to lie about the My Lai Massacre, and for the most part succeeded, because only one U.S. soldier was held responsible, and his name was Lt. William Calley.

The rest of the U.S. Military High Command who were mainly responsible were silently escorted away from prosecution.

Like the rest of the Vietnam War, there has never been any accountability by the U.S. government for the unfathomable number of war crimes that were committed on a daily basis throughout the war in Indochina.

Today is March 16, 2016.

Today is the 48th anniversary of the My Lai Massacre.

In late March 1994, I arrived at the My Lai site with three other Vietnam veterans. We were there for about four hours, which was about how long it took U.S. soldiers to murder 504 civilians in 1968.

The four of us traveled by vehicle from Quang Ngai to the massacre site, which took less than 30 minutes. None of us said a word during the entire drive. The most powerful emotion I was feeling was shame.

Being at My Lai was one of the most difficult experiences of my life.

The blatant lie of my core belief system was fully exposed.

In 10 days, on March 26, I will be traveling back to Vietnam with three other close friends, to once again make that drive into My Lai.

It has been 22 years since I was there. I am now a member of Veterans For Peace, a national organization committed to peace and justice.

We are currently involved in bringing full disclosure to the American people about the truth of the Vietnam War. Without our efforts, and the efforts of so many other people, the truth of the Vietnam War will be buried, enabling future U.S. generations to repeat that history.

As George Santayana once wrote: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

In loving memory to those who perished at My Lai—the truth will never be forgotten.

Mike Hastie was an Army medic in Vietnam.

Betrayal by the Money Changers

This is a picture of a Vietnam veteran at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Portland, Oregon.

Moments after he touched the name of a friend who was killed in Vietnam, he broke down.

Not only did he break down for his friend, but he broke down for himself.

The still living carry a burden that is so overwhelming.

It is a trauma that never receives a Purple Heart—never.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade.

The wound is called betrayal.

It is a gunshot wound to the soul.

Day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade.

Drip after drip after drip.

Betrayal is the insidious and pervasive wound that eats away the heart and soul.

The vet eventually drifts away from everything and everybody.

That’s what happened to a Vietnam veteran friend of mine.

He left his home and went to a motel room.

Drip after drip after drip.

They found him the next morning.

He had hung himself in the closet.

Why did he do this?

Because, Betrayal is the gunshot wound to the soul.

Lying is the most powerful weapon in war.

It drained everything from his life.

The bleeding never stopped.

This country never stopped the bleeding.

Drip after drip after drip.

Here rests in emotional silence, an American veteran known but to God.

—Mike Hastie

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U.S. ARMY MEDIC MIKE HASTIE in Vietnam