Vietnam Generation

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Contents

Vietnam Generation has just entered its third volume-year with the anthology *Swords into Ploughshares: Home Front Literature*, edited by Sandra Gurvis. We have almost two hundred individual subscribers. More than 100 college and university libraries subscribe. We sold over 300 copies of our *Kent and Jackson State: 1970-1990* issue at the commemoration ceremonies and the conference at Kent State this year. Several professors have used issues of *Vietnam Generation* as course textbooks—a trend I hope will continue. Thanks to Dan Duffy, the new editor, our Newsletter will be appearing regularly and can once again serve as a vehicle for expressing the opinions and meeting the needs of our readers.

This week I sent out a 4,000 piece promotional mailing to libraries, veterans' centers, university professors and other individuals who have demonstrated an interest in Vietnam Generation-related subjects. Marketing campaigns like this are expensive, but I felt it imperative to increase our subscription base. We need at least 600 subscribers to keep us viable. With 600 subscribers we could easily meet our printing costs, continue to reach out to new subscribers, and venture into new territory (such as putting our electronic bibliography on-line, publishing new books and reprints, and paying our writers honoraria). My thanks go out to all of you who have renewed your subscriptions, given friends and colleagues gift subscriptions, and dug into your own pockets to contribute to *Vietnam Generation*. We couldn't make it without you.

I have recently invested in several new pieces of equipment: a scanner and a fax-modem. You may now send faxes to the following number: (301) 593-9789. In just a few days I will be hooked up to the PeaceNet electronic bulletin board and will be able to send and receive electronic mail from those of you who can access BitNet from your universities.

I hope that you were as pleased with Bill Ehrhart's book, *Just for Laughs*, as Bill and I were. Though the four-color format is too expensive for us to use every issue, I think that it makes a nice change. I would like to publish more books, both new works and older books that have fallen out of print. There are many government publications—such as the Winter Soldier testimony, and the Agent Orange Hearings—which are no longer available through the Government Printing Office, but which are in the public domain and thus are available for reprinting. I am considering devoting one issue of *Vietnam*

Generation each year to the printing or reprinting of the work of an individual author. Let me know what you think.

—**Kali Tal**

In This Issue:

It's exciting times for those of us who think, read, write, and remember about the U.S. and Vietnam, and look ahead. Consequences of 1945-1973 are unfolding in the paper every day, and the circle of research and teaching is growing wider each semester. Sadly, hints at the end of 1990 that the U.S. might start to deal with Vietnam the Southeast Asian country, have been swamped, since the new war started, by President Bush and everyone else talking about Vietnam, the U.S. nightmare.

In this issue: Reconciliation talks with Hanoi have advanced—go subscribe to John McAuliff's ***Indochina Interchange***, reviewed on this page. A second wave of writing about war literature is maturing, as shown in Phil Jason's upcoming anthology of critical essays, ***Fourteen Landing Zones*** see announcement on page 4. Opportunities for study are opening in Hanoi—see article on page 6. NVA veterans are touring the country—see article on Nguyen Noc Hung, page 5. The Persian Gulf is bringing to the fore commanders who learned what they know on the ground in Vietnam, especially including H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the U.S. forces there and leading character in Vietnam classic ***Friendly Fire*** - see notice of upcoming profile by C.D.B. Bryan in the ***New Republic***, page 5. Veteran authors are continuing to explore their past in the present—see Ernest Spencer's story, **"Frenchie,"** on page 15, and Gerald Kumpf's poems on page 16. Researchers are marshalling facts to emphasize the important thesis that Vietnam art is not just about getting your heart broken on patrol—see David Willson, **"REMF Novel Roundup"** on page 11, Cindy Fuchs on recent films on page 9, and David DeRose on **Drama**, page 8. For those of you who are at a loss for an attitude towards the new world order, Alan Farrell provides general comment on page 7.

So there's a lot going on, and **VGN** is committed to covering it all. The newsletter depends on reader participation. Please let us know what you're up to. We are eager for contributions. Just write with intelligence about things you know and care about, with the respect for the humanity and the true convictions of those who disagree with you, that everyone should learn from thinking about a war. - **VGN**

Another Newsletter: *LZ Friendly*

LZ Friendly (LZF), the newsletter of the Bay Area Chapter 400 of the Vietnam Veterans of America, is of value to any reader interested in the war. The editor, Dennis Fritzinger, is imaginative and energetic, and clearly draws on an active veterans' community. Among articles like "Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting," birth and death announcements, the invitation to the Christmas party and the annual spaghetti fund raiser, there are items of national literary and historical interest. One of them, "Frenchy", by Ernest Spencer, author of ***Welcome to Vietnam, Macho Man***, is reprinted in this issue of **VGN** , from Vol 3: Number 7 of **LZF**. This touching memoir is followed in **LZF** 3:8 by the reprint of a letter from Spencer to the eulogized Marine of the title. In the same issue as "Frenchy" is Paul Ohmari's screamingly funny account of "The All Vietnamese Chinese Mercenary Basketball Tournament", a Special Forces boondoggle in Cholon in 1968. Of course, even the most local items are terrifically interesting, for example the coverage of support groups for HIV-positive veterans. Regular features include poetry from an Australian member, Peter Moore, a lively questionnaire called **"So You Remember Vietnam!!!,"** a capsule biography of some national interest, **"Viet Vet of the Month,"** and detailed reportage of the Agent Orange issue, **"Orange Juice."** The editor keeps a close eye on Washington, D.C., reporting on veteran's issues, and spots other national items of Vietnam interest. **LZF 3:8** reprints a news item about the "Wife of Last Vietnam-Era POW Dead of Suicide", and reviews a new book, ***Grizzly Years: In Search of the American Wilderness*** by Doug Peacock, Henry Holt Publishers, 288 pages, $22.95. These are both very good calls. The dead woman had recently renounced her role in the POW/MIA movement, but the VFW still took the occasion of her death to call for continued struggle on the issue. Douglas Peacock, writing about grizzly bears, might have escaped notice as a Vietnam author. Peacock served with the Special Forces, and was the model for the Vietnam vet environmental terrorist Hayduke in Edward Abbey's celebrated novel, ***The Monkeywrench Gang***. The newsletter is edited for dues-paying members of VVA, and respects sacred cows like Agent Orange and POW/MIA, but the slant is overwhelmingly intelligent, open-minded, and public-spirited. Issues are 10 to 15 attractive 8 1/2 by 11" pages. The subscription cost is not given. Address all correspondence to: Dennis Fritzinger, Editor, **Landing Zone Friendly**, 350 Barrows Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.

You Should Subscribe to *IndoChina Interchange*

In March 1990, the U.S.-Indochina Reconciliation Project started publishing ***IndoChina Interchange: News about Aid to and Exchanges with Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam***. There have been two issues since then, in May and November, so they are almost on a regularly quarterly basis.

IndoChina Interchange is of substantial research interest, crammed with both durable useful information and timely news reporting from the international relations community. The May, 1990 issue gives the names and titles of the chief Vietnam's government and Communist Party. The November, 1990 issue gives the names and titles of "State Department Personnel on Indochina Issues." There are regular **"Indochina Resource"** listings, **"Organizational Briefs,"** detailed information on travel and hotel facilities for Westerners in IndoChina, and altogether about 30 pithy items of interest in every issue. A principal value is access to undergraduate, graduate, and faculty development educational exchanges with Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Any business or development agency, and every large library, should consider this valuable service.

Subscriptions are $10 for an individual, $25 for an organization, and $40 for corporate use. Send name and address to Indochina Interchange, 5808 Greene Street, Philadelphia, PA 19144. Deadline for news items for the next issue is January 15 - sorry, you missed it. John McAuliff is the editor, Martha Walsh is Managing Editor, and Jo Duke is Production Manager. The phone is 215-848-2880, FAX is 215-848-4200.

Educators' Delegation to Indochina Postponed

The U.S.-Indochina Reconciliation Project has postponed its tenth educators' delegation until late June 1991. The two week Vietnam trip will include meetings with professional counterparts and government officials in Hanoi, Hue, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City and other locations. Additional weeks are offered for Cambodia and Laos. Participants have an opportunity to lecture on their field of study and discuss future institutional relationships. Most professors come from the humanities and social sciences. The Vietnamese have expressed interest in having economists and also natural scientists. Total cost, including international travel, ranges from $3000 to $4000 depending on single or double occupancy and number of countries. Contact USIRP office at 5808 Greene St. Philadelphia, PA 19144, 215-848-4200, FAX 215-848-2880 for brochure and application. Deadline April 1.

Get Your Work Catalogued

Any person wishing to have his or her PCA Vietnam Area paper professionally catalogued and thereby added to one of the largest collections of Vietnam War literature existing in the USA should submit one copy of the paper to

John S. Baky
Bibliographer
Special Collections
Connelly Library
La Salle University
Philadelphia, PA 19141

Once the paper is catalogued by La Salle's professional cataloguers, it will become a permanent item record in one of the largest international databases in the world - OCLC. That means that the submitted paper will be made available to the world's scholarly communities via individual citations and Inter-Library loan systems. Along with the submission of the paper the author should include any special use restrictions that she wishes to impose (e.g. written permission to quote, cannot be sent on Inter-library requests, no use restrictions, etc.); in the absence of such special instructions La Salle will impose the automatic restriction that no quotations may be made without the expressed written permission of the author. All papers from any year of the PCA Vietnam Area annual conference are eligible for submission. Since the cost of the cataloging is considerable and will be absorbed by the Connelly Library the actual processing will begin - by necessity - only when I have received a total of at least 20 individual papers (I have so far received 5.) For classification purposes the submitted papers will become part of the Collection entitled IMAGINATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE VIETNAM WAR. This is a priceless opportunity for one's conference paper to receive international exposure at no cost to the author.

Vietnam Tapes from the Trauma Conference

Kathy Carruth, from the Department of English at Yale University, is interested in the consequences of trauma upon the personality, and the expression or description of these effects in books and movies. She attended the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, October 28-31, 1990, in New Orleans, Louisiana. She passed on to us ordering information for tapes from this conference. They are available from Sound Solution, PO Box 566074, Dallas, TX 75356, 214-258-6144. Add $3.50 for postage and handling, or $9.00 for foreign delivery. Vietnam-related titles from Kathy's list are:

STSS-020 Policy and Clinical Considerations Regarding Services for Traumatized Incarcerated Populations $8.00

STSS-105 PTSD In Severely Disabled Vietnam Veterans $8.00

STSS-127 The Suicide of a Vietnam Veteran: A Case in Review $8.00

STSS-006 Native American Healing for PTSD: Recent Findings and Techniques $16.00 (two tapes)

STSS-077 Service Delivery to Veterans: Abstract #s 77, 95, 98 $8.00

STSS-096 Program Evaluation of Specialized Treatment for Combat-related PTSD $8.00

STSS-141A International Perspective of the POW Experience: Australia, France, Algeria and the U.S.A. $8.00

A request for further information from Sound Solution produced the following catalogue items from previous years. From 1989, San Francisco, CA:

STSS-001 The Unforgotten Warrior Project: Inpatient and Outpatient Treatment of Veterans, 5 tapes, $40.00

STSS-070 Workshop: Key Findings of the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study - Part 1, 2 tapes, $16.00

STSS-078 Panel: Therapy with Families of Veterans, $8.00

STSS-102 Discussion Group: The Vietnam Veteran Meets the Mid-Life Transition, $8.00

STSS-109 Panel: Key Findings from the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study - Part 2, 2 tapes, $16.00

STSS-115 Panel: Plight of the Homeless Veterans Today - What Is & Is Not Being Done? $8.00

STSS-125 Panel: Psycho-Social and Spiritual Needs of Southeast Asian Refugee Children in U.S. $8.00

STSS-128 Panel: PTSD and Other Psychiatric Disorders Co-Morbidity in Combat Veterans

STSS-136 Discussion Group: Breaking the Silence: Treatment of Atrocity-Related PTSDed Vietnam Veteran $8.00

STSS-145 Panel: Post Traumatic Stress & Outcome Research with Veterans $8.00

From 1988, Dallas, TX

STSS-05 The Unforgotten Warrior Project: Annual Update on Current Research and Treatment of Vietnam Veterans with PTSD, 4 tapes, $32.00

STSS-17 PTSD: Differences Between Theater and Non-Theater Veterans of the Vietnam Era: Service, Race and Symptom Implications, $8.00

STSS-24 PTSD Among Canadian Vietnam veterans, $8.00

STSS-52 Active Military Issues Regarding PTSD, $8.00

STSS-66 Preliminary Survey Findings of the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Survey, $8.00

STSS-72 Preliminary Findings of the Clinical Subsample of the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study, $8.00

STSS-81 Spiritual Alienation in Vietnam Veterans with PTSD, $8.00

I have just picked out the tapes mentioning Vietnam Veterans, Southeast Asian refugees, prisoners, and Native Americans. There are many other tapes on PTSD.

Indiana VVA Looking for Poets, Artists

The Indiana VVA States Council is seeking artists and poets who would like to contribute their works to be included in a book titled Vietnam Verses. Proceeds from the book sales will be used to help finance the Indiana Korean-Vietnam Veterans Memorial and services to Vietnam-era veterans.

Persons wishing to contribute material-sketches, artwork, poetry, quotes, or short thoughts - should mail them to George Kirts, 2820 N. 650 W., West Lafayette, IN 47906. To have material returned, include a self-addressed package/envelope with return postage affixed. All contributions will be considered for publication, and contributors will be notified of the publication date and given first priority in purchasing copies of the book.— **service ad reprinted from LZ Friendly**

Book Forthcoming by PCA/Vietnam Critics

Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature

Edited by Philip K. Jason, appearing in March, 1990, $32.50 cloth, $13.95 paper, from University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa 52242.

Contents:

*Maria S. Bonn, **A Different World: The Vietnam Veteran Novel Comes Home**

*Jacqueline E. Lawson, **'She's a Pretty Woman... for a Gook': The Misogyny of the Vietnam War**

*Katherine Kinney, **'Humping the Boonies': Sex, Combat and the Female in Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country***

*Lorrie Smith, **Resistance and Revision in Poetry by Vietnam War Veterans**

*Don Ringnalda, **Doing It Wrong is Getting It Right: America's Vietnam War Drama**

John Clark Pratt, **Yossarian's Legacy: *Catch-22* and the Vietnam War**

James R. Aubrey, **Conradian Darkness in John Clark Pratt's The Laotian Fragments

Owen W. Gilman, Jr. **Vietnam and John Winthrop's Vision of Community

*Jacqueline R. Smetak, **The (Hidden) Antiwar Activist in Vietnam War Fiction**

Matthew C. Stewart, **Realism, Verisimilitude, and the Depiction of Vietnam Veterans in *In Country***

Stuart Ching, **'A Hard Story to Tell': The Vietnam War in Joan Didion's *Democracy***

*Mark A. Heberle, **Darkness in the East: The Vietnam Novels of Takeshi Kaiko**

*Cornelius A. Cronin, **Line of Departure: The Atrocity in Vietnam War Literature**

*Kali Tal, **Speaking the Language of Pain: Vietnam War Literature in the Context of a Literature of Trauma**

From the promotional literature: "During the Vietnam War, an LZ or landing zone was the area designated for helicopter set-downs to insert troops near suspected enemy forces. Each zone marked a stage of approach toward a defined objective - from these clearings, trails were discovered (or created) and followed cautiously to uncertain destinations.

It is in this spirit of the LZ that the fourteen diverse and powerful works in ***Fourteen Landing Zones*** begin to answer the question of how we will filter the writings of the Vietnam War. What will survive the process of critical acclaim and societal affirmation - and why? Jason's incisive introduction provides an overview of the burgeoning body of Vietnam War literature and its peculiar life in the literary and academic marketplace. This strong, often emotional volume will be of particular importance to all those interested in the literature of the Vietnam War, contemporary literature, and contemporary U.S. culture and history."

VGN—It is of interest that almost all of the essays in ***Fourteen Landing Zones*** first appeared as speeches given at the Vietnam Area of the Popular Culture Association annual meetings in 1989 and 1990. I have starred the titles that appear in the PCA catalogues from those years, and double-starred the titles whose authors are associated with the Vietnam Area although the paper in question was not necessarily given at PCA. William J. Searle, former chair of the Vietnam Area, provided a blurb for the anthology, saying it is "a significant contribution to the study of the literature of the Vietnam War... Phil Jason's collection not only continues the critical dialogue but, in some cases, will also change the direction of the discussion." This is exactly right. The essays given in ***Fourteen Landing Zones*** reflect a growing desire among critics to move up from a tight focus on war stories, to place what we call "Vietnam" in larger cultural contexts.

Saigon, the Orange Herbicide

I was told by a gentleman farmer at a New Year's Day party that he uses an herbicide named **Saigon** and that it is orange. Before I spend ten dollars on the phone with the chemical industry tracking this down, does anyone have further information? **—VGN**

Call for Essays for Secondary Biblography

Phil Jason has contracted with Salem Press to provide a book-length annotated bibliography of selected secondary sources on Vietnam War literature. His deadline is February 1992, and the book will come out in the fall of that same year. Any researcher wishing to make sure that Jason doesn't miss his or her books or articles should send in off-prints or photocopies (or at least full bibliographical references). Jason would particularly welcome notice of items due to be published in 1991. Send materials or information to Prof. Philip K. Jason, Department of English, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD 21402.

Phil is an outstanding editor for this job. His forthcoming anthology of essays, ***Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature***, is a major step in bringing work of researchers associated with the Vietnam Area of the Popular Culture Association to a wider audience. We should all pitch in to help make his next book uniquely valuable, both by bringing our own work to his attention and by pointing out valuable studies that he might not find by standard searches. Do the right thing and send him offprints if you can - if twenty people each save Phil 15 minutes of running around, that's five more hours for the book. Time is quality in a reference book, and we're all going to be using this one. - **VGN**

GI Resistance Lecture

From Skip Delano at Columbia University

I'm a graduate student working on my dissertation in History at Columbia University. Based on research for my dissertation, I have developed a lecture and slide show, "Mutiny: GI Resistance Within the Military during the Vietnam War." The presentation is designed for use with courses about the history of the Vietnam War, the antiwar movement and the 1960s.

I present a historical overview and analysis of the GI antiwar movement while showing over 100 slide images which illustrate and describe the subject. The slide images are from GI newspapers and other sources from the period. I also discuss my own experience as an active-duty GI who returned from Vietnam in 1969 and became the founding editor of the antiwar GI newspaper "Left Face" at Fort McClellan, AL.

The presentation normally takes half an hour, with another half hour for discussion. However, I can modify both the content and length depending on the course and time constraints. For example, in response to the US government's war in the Middle East, I've added new materials on resistance developing in the US Armed forces today.

During the fall semester, I presented programs at Harvard, George Mason University, Dartmouth, and Smith College. I am available for presentations anywhere in the country. The fee is negotiable. Call or write for more information. Skip Delano, 548 Riverside Drive, 2C, NY, NY 10027, 212-749-0169.

Forthcoming C.D.B. Bryan article on General Schwarzkopf

Keep an eye on the ***New Republic***. They have commissioned C.D.B. Bryan, author of Vietnam War classic ***Friendly Fire*** (1976), to revisit his old subject, H. Norman Schwarzkopf. ***Friendly Fire*** is of course the story of how an Iowan couple were embittered by callous treatment at the hands of the U.S. government after their son was killed by friendly artillery fire in Vietnam. In that book, Bryan shows young Colonel Schwarzkopf, who was Sgt. Michael Mullen's battalion commander, agonizing over a situation where his government could not candidly ask his people to accept the cost of war. ***New Republic*** editor Hendrik Hertzberg knew Bryan when Hertzberg worked at the ***New Yorker***, where the articles that became ***Friendly Fire*** first appeared. When Schwarzkopf surfaced as commander of the U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf, Hertzberg asked Bryan to follow up on his old contact. It will be of great interest to see Schwarzkopf's present activities reported with the depth of perspective and judgement that Bryan can bring. By the way, the front page of the ***New York Times*** of Sunday 2-3-91 reports that "If early reports borne out, it will mean that all American ground combat deaths to date have been caused by American and not enemy action." - **VGN**

NVA Veteran Speaks at Yale

From the poster copy: "Healing the Wounds: The Unfinished War - Understanding U.S./Vietnam relations. A reconciliation tour with Nguyen Ngoc Hung, North Vietnamese veteran and teacher travelling in the U.S. to promote reconciliation. Tuesday, November 27, 1990, 4:00 PM Dwight Hall Common Room, Yale University. Sponsored by Dwight Hall (Yale's social action umbrella group), the University Chaplain's Office, Magee Fellowhip, Greater New Haven Peace Council, Asia Resource Center, and the National Network of Indochina Activists."

About fourteen people attended, including several Vietnamese-American students. All were well-behaved. I asked the student in charge who arranged it all, and was given the card of a Merle E. Ratner "Co-coordinator, National Network of Indochina Activists, Chairperson, Committee in Solidarity with Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Laos, PO Box 303, Prince Station, New York, NY, 10012-0006, Tel. 212-420-1586, FAX 212-529-2891". Whoever Merle is, she doesn't return phone calls. I tried to reach her for a statement about the tour and about her organization in general, but never got past her machine. Could someone please lean on her to get in touch?

Nguyen Noc Hung is an impressive man, very in touch with his anger and equally insistent that anger is not a good basis for international relations. Apparently he was featured in a Morley Safer/CBS documentary set in Hanoi, where he is now a professor of English at the University, and his eloquence

led to the present speaking tour of the U.S. Mr. Hung was born in Hanoi. While a student he was evacuated from that city to the countryside to escape the bombings in 1965. His brother entered the armed forces at that time, but Mr. Hung was told to remain in school. His government felt that there should be some trained men and women left after the war. However, after Tet the government was forced to call up everyone, so he was drafted in 1969. He fought in the South, and then against U.S. troops in Laos in 1971. He became a teacher as result of an afternoon's discussion of that possibility with a friend, a fellow soldier. The man was killed later that day, so Mr. Hung became a teacher in memory of his friend. Asked about reform in Vietnam, Hung said the recent experience of China points out that change must be political as well as economic. On the other hand, he said that Vietnam is more inclined to watch and learn from the present experience of Eastern Europe than to quickly imitate the recent changes there. He said that USSR was like the point man on a patrol - everyone behind is very curious to see what happens to him. Asked by one of the Vietnamese students about the war museums of U.S. atrocities in Vietnam, he stated firmly that it is important for the young to know what the price of freedom can be. Asked about the the POW-MIA issue, he answered quietly, but with passion, that this was an issue that cannot be really resolved but must be dealt with. He said that the U.S. citizens he meets who most understand the difficulty of the MIA issue are veterans. Mr. Hung says that veterans understand why some U.S. bodies will never be found, because they know what they themselves did with some Vietnamese bodies: they dropped them from helicopters, they cut them into pieces, they buried them in deep pits. Mr. Hung said that his comrades did some of the same things with U.S. bodies. The only people who really know where the last of the U.S. MIAs may be are local villagers, who will harbor their strong feeling against the U.S. for a long time, and aren't about to open up to investigators from the U.S. or even their own government. Mr. Hung went on to point out that hundreds of thousands of his countrymen, maybe a million, are still MIA, compared to a few thousand U.S. soldiers. Mr. Hung mentioned that his own brother is MIA. He insisted that the issue cannot be resolved, but must be put into the past. One does not expect to hear this kind of plain talk from a Communist on a peace mission. The cold war must really be over. We hope that Mr. Hung's honest good sense on his speaking tour helped achieve some progress towards U.S.-Vietnamese reconciliation. Perhaps some of the U.S. students soon to go to Hanoi will be lucky enough to study with this remarkable teacher. - **VGN**

Breaking Ranks

Breaking Ranks, by Melissa Everett, New Society Publishers, New Society Educational Foundation, PO Box 582, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-0582, 800-333-3093, 1990, 265 pp, reading list, resources, $12.95 paper, cloth $34.95.

We spotted this in a catalogue, but have not yet seen the book. Winner of the "1990 Olive Branch Award" for Best Book. It is not clear who awards this prize. An account of the careers of men who have left the military-industrial complex for to work for peace. It is not yet clear whether there are any Vietnam vets in it.

Council on International Educational Exchange Faculty Development Seminar in Vietnam, 4-16 January 1991

By Keith Taylor, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University

Twenty-eight American professors from colleges and universities throughout the United States and two professors from German universities gathered in Bangkok on the evening of 4 January, 1991. The next day was spent preparing (obtaining visas and having an orientation session) to enter for a series of seminars with Vietnamese colleagues under the topic "Understanding Vietnam's Historical Perspectives." On 6 January, the group flew into Ho Chi Minh City. For the next six days, the seminars were held with an equal number of professors from the University of Ho Chi Minh City. Topics covered were traditional history, ethnology (ethno-linguistic origins, religion and social structure), culture (literature, folklore, music and the performing arts), education, modern history, and international relations. Vietnamese professors gave brief presentations on the seminar topics and most of the time was spent in questions, answers, and general discussion. The seminars filled half of each day. Field trips or free time were scheduled for the rest of the time. There were visits to the Anthropological Museum, the pre-1975 presidential palace, the Cu Chi tunnels, a war cemetery (not scheduled; requested by American participants), a village, and a center for children's activities. In the free time available, non-Vietnamese participants joined with Vietnamese colleagues with similar interests for discussion, individualized field trips, and general sight-seeing. Evenings were free except for two banquets. There was also a session with retired Major General Tran Van Tra, Commander-in-Chief of the Peoples Liberation Armed Forces for the Liberation of South Vietnam from 1963 to 1975. The group flew to Hanoi on 13 January. Two seminars scheduled during the following two days with professors from the University of Hanoi covered institutional reform and economic reform. There was also a field trip to Co Loa, an ancient citadel outside Hanoi, and a visit to the Institute of World Economy. On the 16th, the group flew back to Bangkok and dispersed to their homes.

This seminar was arranged by CIEE with the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training and the two universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. CIEE is planning a second seminar in June 1991 and in the future expects to schedule two such seminars per year. While there have been many individual academic exchanges and a few international conferences or programs of a scholarly or political nature involving Americans travelling to Vietnam, this was the first group of its size to go to Vietnam from the West with an academic agenda only. It was accompanied by a specialist in Vietnamese studies from an American university and by an administrative director.

All indications suggest that the seminar was a success. No major problems were encountered. The participants, who represented a broad spectrum of experience and opinion, were enthusiastic. Although most were Americans, the presence of two Germans was important as a reminder that this was an "international" program, not an "American" program. In is important for American academics to have a chance to experience Vietnam as academics, not as political activists, not as guilt-ridden veterans, not as tourists. Access to Vietnamese academics was what made this program unique and successful. This "faculty development seminar" program, and the planned CIEE undergraduate student exchange to begin September 1991 at the University of Hanoi are concrete steps to raise the American experience of Vietnam above the level of preoccupation with war, to move beyond the shadows of the past, to build practical momentum for a normal, healthy, Vietnamese-American relationship in the future.

FEATURES

WHAT WAR? *My* WAR

By Alan Farrell, Hampden-Syndey College

My business is language. It's not History. Or Politics. Or Psychology. My opinion about these things is no better than the opinion of the guy who bags your groceries at the supermarket. I have thought, perhaps, that my opinion about War might have some validity. Yet, what I recall about Vietnam and the Aftermath (which I insist on capitalizing, too) has mostly to do with language.

My parents in small town America often spoke of things "before the War" and how they were "after the War." They meant, of course, the Second World War. In the Fifties, my little friends' brothers, who had been "in Korea", all came back "from Korea," though I cannot remember hearing anyone talk about things "before Korea"; no one seemed to think conditions had changed much "after Korea", either.

I have, either from ingrained habit or from misplaced vanity spoken of my grad school days "before the War" or my job nights in the Seven-Eleven "after the War," and actually had people assume I was talking about World War II! I have not got the right, evidently — nor do my brothers and sisters who shared what we seem doomed to call the Experience (I have even heard "Experiment" and "Adventure": the "American adventure in Southeast Asia": the "American Experiment in Viet Nam") — to use those sanctified formulas, reserved for the Other Wars.

When I was a young paratrooper in 1967 (dating, by the bye, appears to remove some of the ambiguity), I stood shivering in many a first formation at oh-dark-thirty waiting for our wizened old First Sergeant to swagger out front of us in his spit-shined boots and starched fatigues. "Hooligans!" he would howl at us, working himself into a lather; "I got a couple of nephews just like you. Pussies! Nylon boots! Plastic guns! I [huge banana thumb poking at his sternum] was in the Big One. Double-you double-you Tu-hoo!" And we believed it. And to shoulders bearing those old Eighty-Second Airborne combat patches we gave way in the mess hall and at the PX, such was our faith in the grandeur of the Old War, the Good War.

When the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate) made its one and only combat jump in Viet Nam (under hostile conditions that were immediately called into question), the Normandy vets sneered and sputtered. "I was in the Five-Oh-Deuce. That was a Real Jump." Pansies! And the World War II and Korea vets were among the first to weary of calls by Viet Nam War veterans for more and better services and support ... and a lousy parade. Crybabies!

Not much solace from our forefathers, alas. And so those of us who came back from That War and couldn't seem to get along with anybody gradually drifted together, held communion under our own tent, went back to the Army Reserve oddly enough, where once a month we could speak freely with one another, safely among comrades, swaddled in the age-old ritual of the most conservative of professions: "Heels together and on line, head and eyes to the front, hips resting evenly, stomach in, chest out, first crease of the thumb mated with the first crease of the forefinger, thumb itself along the seam of the trousers, toes pointed outward at a regulation 45 degree angle..." Numbing — no, not numbing — healing warmth, what a French teacher might call *cuisson*.

That was twenty years ago. And I have floated up — and down — through the ranks (because none of us really ever had any military *career* ambitions) ultimately to preside over my own company of paratroopers. And sure enough! I hear old Viet Nam vets taking long-awaited vengeance on my fresh young sergeants who sport combat Infantry Badges and Combat Jump Stars won in Grenada and Panama. "Do you Grenada guys were those little CIBs cause your war was so short?" "Hey, did you hear some of the guys from Panama are showing signs of Delayed Stress Trauma syndrome? Yeah, only the war was so short that instead of major crimes, they are doing things like jaywalking and yanking those little tags off of pillows and dropping their popcorn boxes under the seats at the Cineplex." "Eight hundred Cubans?" "Construction workers?" "Rock music?" "Wellllllll, in Viet Nam we..." And on and on.

I listen to that. And I have to laugh. I know my men are not malicious. I begin to suspect that my old First Sergeant probably wasn't either. There is an inkling to be got here, seems to me, of something more profound and very comforting: not of the inevitability for each generation of War but of the irrepressibility of human silliness, human pettiness, human fragility. That human beings rebound and recover and retrieve, that they can impress even upon tragic events the stamp of personal vanity, that they can purge painful memory through humor and comradeship had better console us. There doesn't seem to be much else.

I guess perhaps the thing to say is not the "Good War." Not the "Big War." Not the "Great War." Not the "Old War." Not the "Second War" nor the "First War." Just *My* War. Maybe even *my* war. Or my war. Though I am not sure I can ever make that "m" small enough so it will disappear.

DRAMA

The Saigon Miss-Tique

By David J. DeRose, Yale University

Forget about the Persian Gulf. Let's talk about the real crisis that has been facing post-Vietnam America since August — at least according to those in New York theater circles. The debate, filling the pages of Arts and Entertainment Sections up and down both coasts, has been over the casting of the upcoming New York production of the London musical ***Miss Saigon***.

On August 7, 1990, Actor's Equity, the U.S. stage actors' union, denied ***Miss Saigon*** producer Cameron Mackintosh permission to cast a white British actor, Jonathan Pryce, in the leading role of The Engineer, a Eurasian pimp. Pryce had previously won the coveted Olivier Award for his performance of the role in the London production of ***Miss Saigon***. Equity cited policy which denied imported actors the right to take jobs which could be filled by U.S. actors, and announced a commitment to equal opportunity casting which frowned upon the casting of a white man in an Asian role. Without his star actor, Mackintosh immediately cancelled the New York production at a cost of $600 thousand out of his own pocket, $25 million in advance sales (which would have to be returned to ticket-buyers), and 50 jobs for American actors (34 of them non-white roles).

The debate, of course, was raised over whether the principles of equal opportunity and racially conscious casting were worth the lost income to the rest of the cast (especially the 34 non-white actors), to the American producers, and to the New York theatrical community at large.

Three guesses how it all turned out. $25 million in advance sales won the day, and Equity reversed its decision, hiding behind the veil of those 34 non-white actors who deserved to get the work. Right. It would be comforting if I could say that some part of me believed, in spite of the casting of Pryce, that the Asian-American community has been better served by the 34 jobs this show will provide. After all, ***Miss Saigon*** is expected to be a bigger hit that ***Les Miz***, and so those 34 jobs should turn into dozens more. The Broadway cast will turn over, creating new openings, and national touring companies will undoubtedly be formed. It could be a gold rush for under-employed Asian-American actors.

There is one little problem. Just what are these 34 "non-white" roles? Has anybody bothered to glance down the cast list or flip through the score? Apparently not. Here are some samples of the scintillating parts offered to Asian-Americans in ***Miss Saigon***: roughly a dozen Saigon prostitutes (or "bar girls" as they are euphemized in the cast list), four Bangkok go-go girls, about a dozen NVA soldiers, three ARVN officers in a bar (brothel), a handful of other customers in the bar, and four hustlers at go-go clubs in Bangkok. So, take your pick: if you are an Asian-American actor, you can play one of a dozen robotic NVA soldiers (one expects them to break into a goose step), or perhaps you prefer an ARVN "John" in a brothel, or a Bangkok pimp. I am sure the Vietnamese people would be happy to hear that they are being so justly represented in this production. And, I am equally sure that Asian-Americans in general will jump at the chance to see this play and to perform such intellectually stimulating and progressive images of the Far East. Ironically, the only Asian character of any complexity or real dimension is the Engineer, to be played by Jonathan Pryce. He gives grit and humor to an otherwise two-dimensional cast.

Still, if you are Asian, don't complain! Black actors in the London production had it even worse. Or, I should say, they didn't have it at all. According to David Finkle (Village Voice, 8-12-90)), who saw the original London production of ***Miss Saigon***, not one of the American G.I.s portrayed in the who was black. Now that's historical accuracy! It's also racial discrimination, isn't it? You mean to tell me not one black actor in London was qualified to play those roles? In the New York production there will, of course, be black actors. Americans producers are not so stupid as to think they can treat black Americans the way they treat Asian-Americans. American blacks are just a bit too organized and vocal for that kind of shaft. In fact, keeping race-conscious American audiences in mind, the advance publicity which as arrived in the States from the London production has been doctored for all eyes. ***Miss Saigon*** was "recast", according to Finkle, when Americans started to consider it for production in the States. Blacks were added to the cast, and their faces figure prominently in the publicity photos that accompany the U.S. release of the cast album.

By the way, the only NVA soldier with a speaking role (actually, he's part of the NLF, but the production lumps him together with the NVA), is the rather villainous Thuy. He is the least sympathetic Vietnamese character in the play (a real storm trooper), but at least he is one Vietnamese character who is not corrupt: all the other Vietnamese characters seem willing to fuck and/or suck whoever necessary to get an American visa. Tragically, Thuy was played in the London production by a white actor in Asian makeup. (Jonathan Pryce originally played his award-winning role of the Eurasian pimp in Asian make-up as well, but eventually had the good taste to drop it.)

So, this "Western Manhood Meets Eastern Mystique" musical, based on Puccini's Madame Butterfly, written by two Frenchmen and directed by a young Brit with absolutely no American or Asian collaboration must be a pretty amazing piece of work for Americans to fight so hard to bring it to this country, right? Right? I haven't seen ***Miss Saigon***, but I have read the score and listened to the soundtrack. No particular magic there. The reviews and the advance publicity do suggest, however, that ***Miss Saigon*** will be a visual and technical stage spectacle to surpass Les Miz and Cats. One New York critic rightly noted that this isn't a Broadway show, it is an "event." The show is full of technological and scenic wizardry used to breathtaking effect. For instance, the show's creators' have managed to twist the plot around — moving from 1975 to 1978, and flashing-back at just the crucial moment to April of 1975 — so that the second act climaxes with the image of the last helicopter lifting off from the roof of the U.S. embassy in Saigon as crowds of Vietnamese civilians

storm the cyclone and barbed wire fences. According to all the reviews, the lift-off is quite compelling, a real technical tour de force.

It goes without saying that the male romantic lead is on that helicopter and that his newly-found beloved is among the Vietnamese pressed against the fence. The love story is actually pretty conventional and, typical of the operatic/ musical theater form, melodramatic. Chris, an American G.I. stationed at the Saigon embassy falls in love with a Vietnamese bar girl, Kim. (He is her very first customer, so she is still a virgin, don't worry.) They spend a single night together before the fall of Saigon takes him away from her. We do not see his departure. Instead, in an ultimate plot-tease which leaves Chris's motives for leaving veiled, the story jumps the years into the future. We find out that Kim has given birth to Chris' Amerasian child, his "bui-doi." Eventually, having married in the U.S., Chris travels with his wife to Bangkok, where he has learned that Kim is living in exile. In order to secure the future of her child in America, Ki shoots herself, leaving her child in the hands of Chris and his American wife.

As a romantic metaphor for the U.S. presence in Vietnam, the basic story-line rings with some truth: a young and naive American thinks that by intervening on behalf of a young and beautiful Asian girl , he will personally be able to save her from a life of poverty and prostitution. But, not only does he fail miserably, he abandons her after raising her hopes and making her dependent upon him, and so destroys her life. Chris's later lament, "Christ, I'm an American / How could I fail to do good?" pretty much sums up the John Wayne attitudes with which the U.S. entered the war.

But musical theater is not built upon the significance of individual lines. Musical theater is painted in broad, emotional strokes. The social subtleties of Chris' cowboy naivete are lost in the broader "tragedy" of two lovers who are separated by a war, whatever war. The similarities to such "star-crossed" lovers as Romeo and Juliet are far too strong for anybody to look beyond the love story.

The musical theater form simplifies reality, it formalizes it, turns it from flesh into art. In short, it creates of reality an aesthetically pleasing and palatable event. This medium simply cannot succeed in telling any truths about the Vietnam War. And, beyond such offensive generalizations as that all Vietnamese would willingly prostitute themselves in order to get to the U.S., the creators of this show have made little effort to make any political statements about the war. Instead, they have turned Vietnam into a colorful historical backdrop for their love story and a convenient excuse for high-tech marvels lie the helicopter.

I am not sure that the U.S. can afford to see the Vietnam War as a period setting for musical romance, however tragic. The American public's eager acceptance of this musical, the millions of dollars in advance sales (an all-time record), the willingness to have Vietnam transported from a political lesson into an historical backdrop, are all frightening signs of an America that has forgotten the realities of the Vietnam War. (This seems especially true in light of the eagerness with which our government has engaged us in the Persian Gulf.) It all seems part of the great American re-vision of the Vietnam War. I though the whole point of Vietnam War literature and art has been that it could not be canonized, that it did not fit within the pre-fabricated master-narratives either of Western Art or of American Heroism. To reduce any artistic image of Vietnam to such formulas, especially a formula as aesthetically restrictive as opera or musical romantic drama, is to deny everything that this war, and the art that has come out of this war, have presumably taught us about the danger of creating a national self-image out of fabricated myths instead of facts.

The Vietnam War is not ***Madame Butterfly***, nor is it ***Romeo and Juliet***, and the real tragedy here is that Americans are ready to allow themselves to translate their memory of the war into classical romantic images. Forget about the casting controversies: why in hell would we want to produce this show in the United States in the first place?

FILM

"The Horror! The Horror!": Monsters and Atrocities in Vietnam War Movies

By Cynthia Fuchs, George Mason University

At the end of Francis Ford Coppola's ***Apocalypse Now*** (1979), the monstrous Colonel Kurtz (Marlon Brando) is assassinated by Captain Willard (Martin Sheen). The ritual killing is intercut with the slaughter of a water buffalo by Cambodians: as blood flies and drums beat in the darkness, the editing reaches a dreadful crescendo. Kurtz' whispered last words, as in Joseph Conrad's ***Heart of Darkness***, are by now infamous: "The horror! The horror!"

The trope of the United States' national trauma has been replayed in numerous movies about the Vietnam War. Yet a precise definition of this horror remains elusive. Repeatedly, US-made Vietnam War movies dissolve into pop cultural chaos, moral ambiguity, and irreconcilable paradox. As villian Alan Rickman tells hero Bruce Willis in ***Die Hard*** (1988): :"This time John Wayne does not ride off into the sunset with Grace Kelly." The fact that Rickman gets his masculine icons confused (it is, as ex-bartender Willis, tells him, Gary Cooper who rides away at the end of High Noon) is to the point. There is no coherent outline for the atrocities of the war and its continuing effect on this country's collective self-image.

The monsters of Vietnam won't fall into place or go away. Rather, they reappear in movie screen in various guises, in differing states of sublimation or repression. Films as diverse as Steven Miner's ***House*** (1985), James Carmon's ***Aliens*** (1986), Wes Craven's ***Shocker*** (1'989), and Adrian Lyne's ***Jacob's Ladder*** (1990) portray nightmares resurrected from horror films. Writhing, hyperpotent creatures burst from within apparently safe communities, homes, and even television, to consume, dismember, and shred the flesh of their human victims. Designed to titillate and entertain their audiences, these special effect monsters are typically killed off in explosive and cathartic finales. Everyone can go home believing that the good guys won.

What glossy pyrotechnics and happy endings obscure is the larger horror touched on by Kurtz, the horror that even now is being resurrected by Bush's Desert Shield. This horror is based in a notion that unhinges an American self-image traceable through revisionist histories of the Civil War, WWII movies, and Cold War mythology. Suddenly, winning is meaningless. In this light, the Vietnam War itself is an atrocity of massive moral proportions. Or as, Daniel Ellseberg puts it in Peter Davis' documentary, ***Hearts and Minds*** (1975), "We weren't on the wrong side. We were the wrong side."

Writer-director Oliver Stone has been one of many to tapdance around this apparently unthinkable idea. His ***Platoon*** (1986) and ***Born on the Fourth of July*** (1989) both grapple with the specter of US culpability. ***Platoon*** follows the in-country career of Private Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen), whose voice-over letters to his grandmother reveal Stone's own moral agonizing. Torn between his "two fathers", the evil Barnes (Tom Berenger) and the martyred Elias (Willem Dafoe), Chris witnesses a series of U.S. atrocities. His own squad members gang-rape a young girl, burn down a village, and torture civilians. At film's end, Chris assumes Elias' messianic mantle and assassinates Barnes, then tearfully recounts his "lesson" as he is choppered out of the decimated battleground. "The enemy," he says, "was in us. We fought ourselves."

While earlier mainstream films like Hal Ashby's ***Coming Home*** (1978) or Michael Cimino's unconscionably racist ***The Deer Hunter*** (1979), translate a similar loss of American self-confidence to images of mutilated GI bodies, they still insist that accountability for the war's atrocities can be fixed outside U.S. culture. ***Coming Home*** blames a faceless War, which abuses suicidal career officer Bruce Dern as much paraplegic John Voight. ***The Deer Hunter*** blames the uncomprehending Stateside community and the heinous VC who commit Christopher Walken to death by Russian Roulette. In their overwrought attempts to effect a healing process, these movies stop short of recognizing a more frightening internal monster, relying instead on the visible horrors of the war, the broken bodies and tragic deaths.

Stone's ***Born on the Fourth of July*** also blames a recognizable other for the fate of Ron Kovic (Tom Cruise). His indoctrination into masculine mythology is figured in his Catholic upbringing and his delirious devotion to the high school wrestling team. His body is a temple. The film opens with a nostalgic nod to a time when the myth of US male efficacy seemed intact. "It was a time long ago," Cruise's voice tells us as we watch him play war with his ten year-old buddies. The slow-motion sequence of young Ronnie's make-believe death echoes in the film's brief Vietnam sequence, when a gunshot severs his spine.

Kovic's loss of his sense of manhood serves as a mighty metaphor for the US loss of faith in its government's goals. Given this figure, it is perhaps appropriate that the monster who looms largest in the narrative is Kovic's mother (Caroline Kava). Increasingly hysterical, more and more repressive of his rage, she is at last silenced when Kovic yells "Penis!" in her house. That the mother is ejected from the film at the point when Kovic begins his recovery seals her responsibility for his emasculation within the narrative scheme.

A potentially more subversive note is struck in Stanley Kubrick's ***Full Metal Jacket*** (1987) and Brian de Palma's ill-conceived ***Casualties of War*** (1989), where the enemy is shown to be the cultural and military system that shapes American manhood. In ***Full Metal Jacket***, Private Joker's (Matthew Modine's) voiceover, largely taken from the film's source, Gustav Hasford's brilliant ***The Short-Timers***, reveals the fatal irony of this system's production of monsters. The film's first section at Parris Island traces the training of recruits, from their plunge into buzzcut anonymity to their graduation as "killers." Taught to exist in a "world of shit," where paradox and atrocity are a way of life, the men sleep with their rifles and learn to "fuck" the enemy to death with their weapons.

In Vietnam, Joker maintains a certain ironic distance from the war as a reporter for ***Stars and Stripes*** - he is aware of the incongruity of language and action. When his buddy Cowboy is killed by a sniper, however, Joker embraces "payback", only to be rendered helpless when his gun won't fire. Instead he must be rescued by the most incompetent of his fellows, Rafter Man. That Joker finally shoots the female sniper assures his indoctrination into the Marines' Lusthog Squad: the film ends with him singing "Mickey Mouse: and looking forward to the "Great Fuck Fantasy:" that he imagines as his homecoming. He has become the same monster he has been ridiculing all along.

Casualties undermines the potential trauma of this self-realization from the start, framing its entire plot as a flashback - that well-worn Vietnam movie trope which signals the end of the war even as its image comes onscreen. Add to this the fact that Private Ericksson (Michael J. Fox) is comfortably esconced in viewers' minds as the protoyuppie Alex Keaton of ***Family Ties***, and the war indeed seems the "bad dream" that the film's final scene declares it to be.

What is inadvertently unsettling and noteworthy about this film, however, is the narrative and visual power of Sean Penn as Sergeant Meserve, the leader of Eriksson's Air Cav squad who initiates the kidnapping and gang-rape of a Vietnamese civilian. Spectator of the crime, Eriksson embodies our position. He is victimized for and by what he sees. Threatened by Meserve's taunts that he is VC or worse,a homosexual, Eriksson can't act to stop the atrocity. Rather (after the girl's bloodily aestheticized death), he must take responsibility for what he and we watch. As is usual in De Palam's work, the intent is to cleanse the white male soul.

But it won't wash. For it is the monster that lingers in our memory of the movie. Even when Eriksson's testimony insures the criminal's court martial, and the final celestial chrous and Eriksson 's skyward look pretend that the horror is eradicated, it would seem that Meserve's unheard words to him suggest that the nightmare will not end, because it cannot be voiced or categorized.

A more recent film further undermines the validity of happy endings to screen endings of the war. Lyne's ***Jacob's Ladder*** also begins as the story of a Vietnam veteran suffering from flashbacks. Despite its conclusion, where Jake (Tim Robbins) ascends a staircase to heaven with his long-dead son, this movie utterly undoes itself, revealing in the end that the whole story has been Jake's death-rattle fantasy back in Vietnam.

When we meet Jake he is trapped in New York's subway, where the passing cars carry faceless creatures. Throughout the film Jake's overdetermined lack of self is mirrored in the monsters around him. He cowers from black men with

snakelike penises and alternates between making up a life with his snow-white suburban wife and another with his working class Latina lover. Along with several of his vet buddies, he comes to believe that their platoon was poisoned by a CIA drug experiment in Vietnam.

But the paranoid plot he constructs unravels along with his dream of a life. Contracting a dire fever, Jake is thrown into an ice bath by his lover, where the image of his soft white body underwater suggests his immersion in terrible self-delusion: there is no enemy other than himself. Worse, there is no winning. Repeated sessions with a chiropractor leave him increasingly unmoored. As the doctor snaps his spine in and out of place, Jake loses the body by which he has tried to measure his experience. His life is in fact his death.

The incoherence of ***Jacob's Ladder*** speaks to the Vietnam War's legacy of frustration. Movie versions of this legacy have revealed the horror of trying to recuperate a vision of manhood and meaning that never held together in the first place. ***Apocalypse Now*** enacts US movies' inability to come to terms with "the horror" in the offscreen confusion of its two endings. In the more readily available version (on Paramount's video), Willard kills Kurtz and leaves the Cambodian compound on the boat he came in on. In a second ending, Willard calls in an airstrike that destroys all remnants of Kurtz, including the many natives for whom he had been a god. The screen fades to black from a blaze of apocalyptic fury. Such utter devastation is apparently still too frightening to disseminate widely in visual or other terms: the monsters of Vietnam continue to corrupt this country's illusions of redemption.

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REMF Books

By David A. Willson, Green River Community College

These annotations are not standard, general annotations. If you want those, look the books up in John Newman's ***Vietnam War Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of Imaginative Works About Americans Fighting in Vietnam***.

These comments are from a REMF point of view. I will be telling what sort of view these books give of REMFs and their duties. (In the Marines they were called "pogues").

Fewer than two dozen of the hundreds of Vietnam War novels deal significantly with REMFs. Most of the Vietnam War novels mention REMFs, and most do so negatively. One series of men's adventure novels by Jonathan Cain even uses an alternate term (Saigon Commandos) for its series title. I have left these books out, not because they aren't worthy f study, but because I find them unreadable. There are dozens of them, and they are ostensibly about MPs doing guard duty.

Anderson, Robert A. ***Cooks & Bakers***. New York: Avon Books, 1982.

Cooks & Bakers is basically a Marine grunt book, but one which deserves inclusion on a REMF list, because most of the marines in it are either angling for service in the rear or to get out of the Marines completely. It includes lots of good descriptions of Marine life in the rear, the air conditioning, steaks, etc. The final forty pages of the novel show the reader a provisional platoon (cooks and bakers), actually "a mixture of clerk typists, supply workers, mail clerks, and stranded combat marines" (p 168 fighting house-to-house in Hue dungy the Tet Offensive. They do as well as anyone, even though they are pogues (the marine term for REMFs). I liked the fact that they still weren't Gung Ho.

Barrett, Dean. ***Memoirs of a Bangkok Warrior***. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Publishing Co., 1983.

The narrator and informing intelligence of this novel of the timeless war between rear-echelon enlisted men and lifers is called Pineapple because of his Hawaiian beach-boy origins. Fairly deep into the novel (p. 61), we learn a reason for the novel's sympathy toward the Thai people and towards Asians in general. "And what about you, Pineapple. What are you always so happy about? Is it because you know that if Charlie ever takes over this country they'll take one look at you figure you're one of them?"

The eighteen-month tour of duty (12 September 1967 - 5 January 1969) in Thailand of these finance clerks — [their job was to ensure "that no American in Vietnam was overpaid or underpaid, paid late or paid early, so that both American soldiers and Vietnamese black marketeers would continue to have full confidence in the American financial structure during the war." (p. 198)] — left plenty of time for whoring and drinking, and plotting against the lifers, the eternal enemy of the citizen soldier.

There were an enormous number of words I had to look up. Sure I could guess at their meaning from the context, but because they were often used for comic effect, and also because I fancy myself something of a sesquipedalian, I looked up: theanthropic, abdominous, taurian, supernal, conciliabule, crapulous, ridibund, risorial, eructations, crinite, nocteria, paruria, quadrigamist, typhophile, aggerose, ventripotent, and andromaniacal.

I enjoyed the comments about a visit from the Inspector General because of my familiarity from the inside with that section. I also appreciated the four references to John Wayne, especially the one which mentions ***The Green Berets*** (p. 119).

Certainly ***Memoirs of a Bangkok Warrior*** held my attention. It also explained why my pay was fucked up most of my thirteen-plus months in Vietnam — although the computers the author writes about ("These computers were olive green, huge, wily, menacing, malevolent, ill tempered, disagreeable, and surrounded by a series of trip wires to protect their software, hardware and apertures." p. 115) are explanation enough.

Hawkins, Evelyn. ***Vietnam Nurse.*** New York: Zebra Books, 1984.

Of the several books with the same (or similar) title, Hawkins' is by far the best. She accurately portray Saigon, circa 1966, and the reader learns a lot about the duties of nurses who deal with wounded being brought in from the field.

Too much of the book (for my taste) flashes back to our the adolescent sexual experiences of the our main character, Second Lt. Sybil Watkins. I was also somewhat impatient with

her romance with a Green Beret officer. ***Vietnam Nurse*** wasn't written for me or the type of readership I represent (whatever that is) so I recognize a genre necessity. The war between the lifers and medical officers of short-intended duration in the military is well portrayed and has important plot implications. The rear echelon/fighting outfit controversy is dealt with straight-on (p.140), and I had to wait only to page 30 for the John Wayne reference - "John Wayne types, hey?"

Our allies the ARVN are portrayed as venal, sex-obsessed, and corrupt a portrayal I'm accustomed to. But here it was such an extreme stereotype it bothered me.

Elizabeth Ann Scarborough's ***The Healer's War*** is the only other serious novel of the army nurse experience. Even though it has strong fantasy elements, I suggest reading it first.

Klawitter, John. ***Crazyhead***. New York: Ivy Books, 1990.

Crazyhead doesn't show us "the Vietnam of maimed GIs coughing out their lives for nothing and napalm fried little kids..." (p. 2) ***Crazyhead*** gives us instead a whore with a heart of gold, a U.S. Army major villain who masturbates into a cage of starved white rats, and a tall handsome REMF (only slightly crazy) as our hero. The milieu is the air-conditioned Saigon duty of Army linguists, cryptographers, and computer specialists, circa 1967. All this REMF detail is background for an engrossing plot of dope and murder similar to the film **Off Limits**. Heroin is shipped to the U.S. sewn in the bodies of KIAs.

Klawitter knows 1967 Saigon, and he knows Army REMF duty. His writing is literate and entertaining. He hasn't written the **Catch 22** of the Vietnam War, but he has written a novel which is successful in its own terms. And for a bonus, there's a good solid reference to John Wayne on page 129.

Scarborough, Elizabeth Ann. ***The Healer's War***. New York: Bantam Books, 1989, c 1988.

The Healer's War is as the cover proclaims - "A Fantasy Novel of Vietnam." But there is no better novel of an army nurse's tour of duty. Scarborough bases the "mundane aspects and background" on her own experience as a nurse in Vietnam.

Scarborough deals with triage - the sorting of the wounded into categories of treatability. Evelyn Hawkins (Vietnam Nurse) shows a triage and a sick Vietnamese child, too, but never transcends the category of interesting junk. Scarborough's ***The Healer's War*** is always interesting and never junk. My tendency is to relegate fantasy to the shelf unread, or into the garbage, was not indulged in. I began reading ***The Healer's War*** as a duty, but I continued to read it because of my joy at finding a sympathetic and complex main character, Lt. Kitty McCulley, who respects Vietnamese culture and encounters Vietnamese people who are believable and interesting major characters in the novel.

Lifer martinets are presented to us (again), and John Wayne's name occurs several times. I had expected (stupid, gender-bound me) that John Wayne would not rear his ugly head in a novel by a woman about an army nurse in Vietnam.

I never made it to Da Nang and vicinity, but the milieu she presents rings true - why shouldn't it? She spent a year there and is a respected author of several novels of humorous fantasy. She's currently writing a new novel about prisoners of war, and I'm looking forward to reading it. Elizabeth Ann Scarborough lives near me in Washington State, but I have never met nor have I have managed to get her to answer my letters. Elizabeth Ann Scarborough - please write or call me! I want to invite you to read at the Green River Community College's Fifth Annual Vietnam War Writers Seminar.

Scipione, Paul A. ***Shades of Gray***. Princeton, NJ: Prometheus Press, 1988.

Shades of Grey confirms all of my paranoid suspicions as a draftee into the U.S. Army. The people who were supposed to be in charge of the war in Vietnam were not. Everything was run by interlocking crime syndicates which Scipione calls the Khaki Mafia. Shades of Grey gives us the inside details of how that mafia controlled mess hall food, entertainment in the Army clubs, even the awarding of Bronze stars, R & R, and early outs from the Army. The title refers to the choice the main character, Sgt. Sandy Militello, makes for moral indifference to the organization of greed, corruption, and murder, which he chooses over being a grunt in a line unit.

The novel contains an interesting description of a unit preparing for inspection by the Inspector General, interesting to me because I was part of the I.G. during my tour of duty. One of the characters in he novel is a ghost, SP4 David Stasekiewicz. The story trips back and forth between 1969/70 and the recent past of 1982. Both of these techniques work well, in what is an extremely unusual and engrossing novel which shows how a soldier can be "at a war, but not in it" (p. 210) and that "in the Nam there was no balance and no justice" (p. 201) just like in real life.

And for good measure there are two references to John Wayne in ***The Green Berets***.

This book can be ordered from:

The Prometheus Press, Inc.
301 North Harrison Street
Suite 110
Princeton, NJ 08540

Faherty, Pat ("2391116"). ***The Fastest Truck in Vietnam***. San Francisco, CA: Pull/Push, 1983.

Before the reader gets to the main text, interest is piqued by the cautionary note that "the story's continuity is the kind that was fostered by our rear echelon effort." What does that mean? We are given the notion that ***The Fastest Truck in Vietnam*** is a REMF novel. We will soon find out.

The Fastest Truck in Vietnam is about trucks and the marines who drive them, circa 1969. "It was the catch-all occupation given to most two year enlistees who proved a little too bright to be mindless combat troops or a little too white to be cooks." (p.8) While our marine hero is checking into his rear-echelon Danang-area military assignment, "he was already trying to figure out how he'd explain wartime Marine duty like this in letters to home." (p.15) That's a problem I've been grappling with from the Army REMF point of view for twenty-odd years.

Once I got past the fact that ***The Fastest Truck in Vietnam*** is the worst edited and worst proof-read non-pornographic book I've ever read, it wasn't bad. It has little continuity (we were warned). Its sloppy lack of a linear structure also effectively communicates the war's disorder.

And the characters are little more than stereotypes. But it has a rude vigor which propelled me rapidly through its short length. As a Marine Corps rear-echelon book, it's got Charles Anderson's ***The Other War*** beat all hollow.

I enjoyed the ***Fastest Truck in Vietnam*** and think it should be a candidate for a mass market paperback publication, after massive proof reading and editing. ***The Fastest Truck in Vietnam*** also pleased me by mentioning John Wayne three times. "Unstable individuals who took the Marine role seriously" were referred to as John Wayne cases.

Stamm, Geoffrey. ***Atrocities: Vietnam Poetry***. n.p. : (Hiram Poetry Review Supplement No. 10.) 1989.

Atrocities deals with the usual REMF issues: the poet's non-combat assignments as a clerk, loading boxes of Chieu Hoi leaflets and in visiting hamlets in three-quarter ton trucks with loudspeakers to win the people's hearts and minds as part of his duty with the 7th Psychological Operations Battalion, dope smoking, and the poet's guilt that "there were/ two separate wars in Vietnam —/ One for us rear-echelon types,/ and another meaner one/ For the grunts." (p.9)

Hatred for lifers is dealt with and, this being later in the Vietnam War, fragging had become a method of expressing that hatred. Filling sandbags, getting the clap, shit burning, even a phantom blooper appear in these fine, sensitive poems. "ARVNs" is a good example of Stamm's strength as poet of the Vietnam War.

ARVNS (p. 41)

I often saw the ARVN soldiers
At the airports
As I traveled around
During my tour of duty.
These skinny little men,
In their little green uniforms,
Didn't seem like soldiers,
And they didn't act like soldiers.
Invariably their wives and children
Were with them,
And they looked like civilian commuters,
Rather than soldiers.
I guess when a person's heart
Isn't in what he's doing,
It shows in his whole demeanor.
I'll bet my bottom dollar
That the NVA soldiers
Gave off different vibrations.

This modest chapbook deserves a much wider audience and can be ordered from:

Geoffrey Stamm
4777 Skinner road
Mantua, OH 44255

Steinbeck, John IV. ***In Touch***. New York: Dell, 1970, c. 1969. (nonfiction)

In Touch signaled the beginning of writing career predicted to rival his father, John Steinbeck III, author of ***Grapes of Wrath***. I keep hoping that another book will turn up with John Steinbeck IV's name as author, but it hasn't happened yet.

In Touch is a sensitive, disenchanted book, especially the first part, dealing with his tour of duty in Vietnam, June 1966-June 1967, as a broadcast specialist assigned to the Armed Forces Radio and Television service in Vietnam.

Steinbeck's little book is a prophetic one. As one of the earliest of REMF writers, his accurate prediction that "There is little doubt their (the combatants') story will be told in letters, films, books for many years to come." He goes on to say that ***In Touch*** is composed of memories "from another part of the war, in many ways the strangest part." (p.22)

His tour of duty as a Saigon Warrior overlapped in large part with my own and was different enough from mine to make me believe that every soldier in Vietnam had a tour different from every other. John Steinbeck spent many months stationed very near where I was stationed, but he knew a whole different Vietnam than I knew. He dealt with his guilt about the "pleasure garden" that was his tour of duty by going out "as a volunteer gunner on 'dust off' and evacuation helicopters which flew out by the hundreds every day on impromptu missions." (p.37) He chose to place himself in jeopardy because of what he felt he owed those who were fighting and dying.

One experience he and I did have in common was shit burning detail. His is the best description I have read, and it is a rare piece of Vietnam War literature which doesn't attempt to deal with it. A little bit of his more-than-one-page long delineation will give the flavor of his special touch with sensitive subjects. "I had a short pole with which to stir up the shit in order that all of it might be exposed to the burning fuel, which tended to stay on the top. The upper surface would become crusted over from the heat, like a casserole, but when it was stirred, the bubbling fresh underlayer would invariably put the rest of the flame out." (p. 34)

In Touch should be reprinted along with Steinbeck's occasional l essays. It is a shame that no publishing company has made the work of this Steinbeck available to a new generation of readers.

Vietnam and Science Fiction

By Dan Duffy, VGN

Joe Haldeman went to the war in 1968 as a combat engineer in our Army. He came home before his year was up, when a partner tripped an explosive charge nearby. He regained the use of his leg through therapy. Today he's one of the leading U.S. science fiction authors, writing novels marked by scenes of lives altered by blunders, by people coming to life in strange and painful bodies.

Though he is enjoyed as an inventive and competent professional, with every book worth a look, his reputation rests on ***The Forever War*** (St. Martin's Press, 1974), his first published science fiction novel. ***The Forever War*** won the Hugo and Nebula Awards, which means it's a good book. The Pulitzer is awarded by compromise among a committee, to a

national common denominator. The Nobel is awarded for being an international nice guy. But the Hugo is given by the straight votes of science fiction's fans and the Nebula by the votes of its writers. A book that wins both will likely be in and out of print as long as American is a language.

The enduring strength of the novel is the strangeness and sadness of its principal device, a logical and pathetic effect of light-speed travel. It is the Forever War because the narrator and his comrades blast off from Earth to fight invaders at the edge of the galaxy. Because of relativity, they return after each sortie to an earth where centuries have passed, coming home each time to a new, alien world. By the war's end, 2,000 years and contact with the enemy have changed Earth past recognizable humanity. Further, the veterans are divided from one another in culture, as survivors were often drafted centuries apart. Many come from an epoch of homosexuality, and can't abide the straight old-timers. Finally, the narrator is cut off from his combat partner and lover, who took an earlier ship home and is centuries dead. In a fit of authorial mercy, Haldeman unites the friends and sends all the veterans off to colonize a new planet, but the story that stays in your mind is about soldiers who are frozen forever in their combat years, whose home world has changed forever while they were at the war.

That device will make the book effective when its own time travel takes it to readers to whom Cam Ranh Bay is a beach resort. For us, obviously, it's a Vietnam novel. We think of returning POWs trying to get their minds around women in overalls, of our friends whose most lifelike experience will always be 365 days in 1968. Haldeman provides a stream of these recognitions, in a variety of forms. The funny ones are joke reversals of what we know to have been the case in Vietnam. This war is fought entirely by men and women with advanced degrees. You can't get drafted unless you are in graduate school. Men and women both are drafted, and they are required to sleep with one another, by rotation. In this army, the proper reply to a non-com or an officer is "Fuck you, sir." Marijuana and amphetamines are dispensed in an aboveboard, recognized manner, as soldier's necessities. The recruits are trained to fight in intense, dry cold, another negation that simply brings Vietnam jungles and paddies closer to mind.

Doesn't it sound like a good book? It's as smart and passionate a novel as has come from the war. And you probably haven't heard of it unless you know me or someone else who reads science fiction (SF). That's the reason this column will be a regular feature in **VGN**, covering a beat that is all-important to the study of U.S. books.

The relations of SF to the war work in several ways. Teenagers read SF, and teenagers fought the Vietnam war. U.S. policy in the war and SF share rationalist origins, and even some personnel. SF authors such as Robert Heinlein (***Glory Road***) and Ursula LeGuin (***The Word for the World is Forest***) wrote powerfully about the war while it was going on, while trade novelists of comparable stature were silent. Veterans such as Joe Haldeman have become prominent SF authors. Outstanding trade novelists like veteran Gustave Hasford (***The Short Timers***) came up through the SF talent-development networks. Finally, attitudes from the war pervade the assumptions of the imaginative worlds of subsequent SF, for example, in the counterinsurgency-style combat of the movies ***Alien*** and ***Aliens***, and the tough-guy group therapy of Spider Robinson's Crosstime Saloon stories.

Articles in this space will elaborate these points, as soon as I can find a contributing editor to make it all happen. For now, I want to direct your attention to an article in ***Science Fiction Studies*** #52, Vol 17, Part 3, November 1990: 341-359, ***The Vietnam War as American Science Fiction and Fantasy***, by H. Bruce Franklin, English & American Studies, Rutgers. The article lays out the subject with authority, and backs every point with detail. Franklin has the rare ability to accurately paraphrase literary texts, and the dispositon to spot literature where he finds it. His books include studies of Herman Melville, 19th century U.S. science fiction, Robert Heinlein, and literature from U.S. prisons since the 18th century. Writing about a ghettoized literature, he doesn't slum or gush or whine, but thinks through what seems to him to be important. Here is Franklin's abstract of his article, quoted in full with permission from the author, who holds copyright:

American SF helped engineer and shape America's war in Indochina, which then profoundly reshaped American SF. Indeed, the Vietnam War cannot be fully comprehended unless it is seen in part as a form of American SF and fantasy. Straight out of American pulp, comic book, and movie SF fantasies of techno-wonders and super-heroes that guided the decisions of political and military leaders. A paradigm of American self-images that helped shape the war might be Buck Rogers - as he uses his manly skills and 25th-century technology to lead the good fight against the Mongol hordes - sproting a Green Beret.

Although the decision-makers customary discourse expressed these fantasies in a language of ostensible realism and practicality, comparison with SF about the war unmasks their content. One key policy-maker even published a story in ***Astounding*** which exposes the roots of the dominant ideology. But shortly after the Tet offensive in 1968, there appeared - in the form of rival advertisements opposing and supporting the war - a roster of SF writers who, incarnating fundamental; contradictions between Campbellian and New Wave SF, would participate in the transformation of American SF by and through the war.

Some of the greatest achievement of New Wave SF - such as Kate Wilhelm's "The Village", Norman Spinrad's "The Big Flash", and Ursula LeGuin's ***The Word for the World is Forest*** - use fantasy to expose the men ace of being poseessed by unexamined fantasizing; and more specifically, they employ the conventions of SF to dramatize the treacherous infantile SF being enacted in Vietnam. The extreme forms of alienation engendered by the war were transmuted into SF by a number of Vietnam veterans, including Joe Haldeman, whose ***The Forever War*** caricatures the technophilia in the heart of "Golden Age" galactic combat fiction.

After the Vietnam War, while a Vietnam War sequel has been shooting in Latin America and US culture seethes with militarist fantasies, the war has come home in apocalyptic S-F visions of post-war America. A cogent paradigm for the Vietnam War as American SF and fantasy has shifted to an image (from a 1984 story by Lucius Shepard) of standard-issue drugs designed to turn US soldiers into instant Rambos, capable of wholesale slaughter in El Salvador or murderous frenzies in the US itself. — **H. Bruce Franklin**

MEMOIR

Frenchy

By Ernest Spencer

Hey Frenchy you prick! O.K., you win. We quit. You and the guys got us good. We admit it. Much as Delta guys hate to admit we were had, we do. I knew it had to be you behind it. Had to be, I got you last.

Remember that time I nailed you good with a can of ham fried? We were up in the Ponderosa, early siege in '68. The day before, Fish and seventeen other guys were outside jerking around, grab assing, and got nailed by a 61 mortar round. No K's but that one pop from Charlie and Delta got more than 18 more purple shafts. Typical Delta. Remember Espy screaming he thought his nuts were gone? Bloods did worry about the important things. Espy was o.k., that time. You fuckers used to piss me off sometimes. I told you guys to stay in your bunkers. You pricks wouldn't listen to me. Charlie was not going to upset a Delta social hour. You guys liked grabassing around with each other almost as much as kicking Charlie's ass.

What do see the very next day? After all that screaming, yelling and beating on you pricks I did, who do I see the very next morning sunning himself like a prairie dog outside but you. I crawled back up the trenchline to my bunker got a can of ham and snuck back up on you. I raised up, aimed for your head and let fly with all my might. Hit you flush on your shoulder and you jerked like you were hit. Oh shit, I thought after I saw your look. I went too far this time. God, if looks could kill. I just stared you down and pointed to your bunker entrance. You crawled down in, glaring at me. For the next couple of days, I was really nervous. I though you'd do me.

I had to do you Frenchy, it was my job. Sure I loved you something special. You had married a Hawaii girl. "Hey, my kids are going to look just like you, skipper," you proudly said to me the first time we met. You were like that. That's why the guys from motor T loved you. You were always so open, caring and giving of yourself and your time. Jesus Christ, Frenchy, what a politician you would have made. Not like the slime balls we've had to endure since we got back. You were the type of politician we Nam guys would have picked, if we could. Maybe that's why we don't have any now, Frenchy. All our good ones like you died over there.

Remember how we used to shoot your blooper across the ridge on the west side of 861? You always whipped my ass. We laughed, bullshit, target shot. You were from Maine but promised me you'd settle in Hawaii with me after we got out. We were going to just kick back for awhile in a cool shade and see how many six packs we could do.

We never got the chance. Two days after I got back, June 7, '68, you got it. I'm sorry I didn't go to your wake and funeral, Frenchy, I read your obituary, the open plea from your parents for me to come.

They buried you in Hawaii, my home, but I couldn't go. I was in full blown denial then. What let me hang on over in Nam was the solemn promise I made to myself that I'd forget all the bad shit when I left. I wanted it all to be over with. I thought I needed for it to be over. I know now that it's never over with. It should not be. You guys are worth too much for us to ever forget. I know you understand and that's why we're talking now. I remember being so fucking angry with you at the time. Late into the night I sat up after my wife had gone to bed, with your obituary in my lap. "How dare you," I hissed at your picture on your obituary. "How dare you follow me home this way. Goddam you, Frenchy, I fucking told you to stay down. I fucking told you." If's, don't mean shit, I know. But you know I wish it could have been different. I know Frenchy, we're Marines and that's our destiny. It was your turn and not mine.

What a beauty of a chain jerking you gave me, Dick Grenat and Fish. Chick Kelly went with us from the reunion to the Wall. Remember Chick? It was Kelly when you knew him. I think he might have done the last rites on you and the other guys that day. Hannah and his radioman. Espy and Jack. Plus a ton of WIAs. None of these million dollar wounds either. Delta guys were going out gunshot, period. All up close and personal.

Dick told me about it, the fight. Dick put it to me in simple Delta terms. "It got real hot and heavy, skip. We was rock and rollen with hot lead flyen everywhere. Jets came in and bombed right on top of us." How come Dick's got that southern accent when he's from Indiana? You know Frenchy, when I think about how much gun time you and the Delta guys saw and did and I listen to these World War Two turds talk their bullshit I go crazy.

I was the one who told Dick you had died, eighteen years after the fact. Grenat was with rockets and was right behind your squad when you went down. Charlie hit you first, dead on. You asshole, laughing joking with the guys when they lifted you on the medevac chopper. Chest shot and you're still screwing around. You were macho, Frenchy. That's why Dick and the guys didn't think you died. Somehow, some way, you just suddenly died a couple of days later. Fitz told me about it when I went to see him at Trippler hospital on Oahu, a couple of weeks after the incident. Fitz still has a loft of pain about all you guys going down. I saw him for the first time in 22 years, at the reunion.

The first hint you give was when that guy from Motor T came up to me at the reunion and asked if I knew a Norman Deschaine. Your old, sensitive, skipper, goes, "yeah he's dead." I thought the poor guy was going to faint. Dick latched on to him and filled him in on what had happened that day you got it. This guy drove from Nebraska to Nashville, just on the odd chance he might meet you. He said you were the greatest guy he'd ever met. Remember how motor T was right next to our bunkers? You left a hell of an impression on him, Frenchy.

You know my love of rain as a metaphor and you guys hit us with rain all the way to D.C. It was beautiful. The storm locked the four of us in as we journeyed to you, washing and splashing round us. Tears you shed so that we would not have to. You took most of our tears. You wanted our undivided attention for what you had planned.

What a time we had, me, Fish, Dick and Chick, in Fish's motor home. You know Dick and Fish but what's Chick like? I guess Fish said it best. He was filling the tank during one of

our gas stops. Fish says to me, "Holy shit, can you believe dis guy? I used to go to confession to dis guy and now he's asking me about broads?" God, we laughed and reminisced on that drive up to you. We had no idea we were being set up.

The storms lifted just as we pulled into D.C. Perfect timing. It was 0130 hours. All the turistas were in bed. It was hot, still, and sticky, just like back there. You hit us good Frenchy. Fish has been coming to say hi and be with Jack since the Wall opened. All these years, all this time and you stayed hidden on the same panel. You're right above Espy and Fish missed you. "Look at this," Dick said when he noticed your name. He has looked the pictures of your panel that Fish sent him and only noticed Jack and Espy before. It was like your name bloomed before our eyes as we stood there and all saw you for the first time. Chuck Norris my ass, you're the star, Frenchy.

We went back in the trees afterward and sat L.P. for you guys. We watched the sun come up. Remember the special feeling we used to get when we went on those long patrols out in the jungle around Khe Sanh. How we'd watch the sun come up after going from pitch black, still and mosquitoes to morning with a slight breeze? Just another Delta day. We'd saddle up and go get em again. Fuck John Wayne.

I am really impressed by the show you put on for us, hiding all these years on the Wall like that. Outfuckingstanding! Duck, Fish, and Chick were profoundly moved, too. So I'm calling it quits. You win, Frenchy. Shit bro, I can't top your act. Ever...Skip.

Ernest Spencer is author of *Welcome to Vietnam, Macho Man: Reflections of a Khe Sanh Vet* (Corps Press, 1987; Bantam paperback, 1989), a memoir of outstanding intelligence. "Frenchy" has appeared previously, in *Landing Zone Friendly*, a vets' newsletter reviewed in this issue, and is reprinted here by permission of the author. Spencer has just completed a second book, *Castlerock*, and seeks a publisher.- VGN

! PCA Members !

Be Sure to Fill Out Your Questionairres and Return them to Vietnam Generation along with questions, suggestions and comments

Poetry

Midnight Barrage

Southwest of Danang, R.V.N.
September 1966

Safe I sit
By candle light.

Within my sight,
beneath a rain
of steel and fire,
brave young men lie dying.

Safe I sit
by candle light,
and hear the sounds of crying.

On the Perimeter
Danang, RVN

In early morning mist
down through the hills, through Dogpatch, past
sandbag bunkers,
chain-link fence,
concertina coil,
pungi-staked ditch,
a troop of ARVN pass.

Ninety pound boy-men,
under too-big helmets, flak jackets,
rifles, bandoleers crossed,
grenades — smoke and frag —
sweat by.

Canteens,
magazines,
first-aid kits,
pistols,
clips,
clipped to belts of web made for men,
rock on boyish hips.

Blankets, ponchos, entrenching tools,
bayonets — sheathed,
rain hats, shelter halves
hang from bulging packs
too big for Asian backs.

Sixty pound man-boys,
too young to fight, yet old enough to die,
shuffle the kitchen after.
Hand-hammered napalm-nose-cone pots clank and clunk.
loose-slung over bony shoulders.

Scrawny hens
in latticed bamboo balls bounce
at the end of rhythmic cane poles.
The rest of the larder,
not yet broken to switch and leash,
tug and drag,
wander, lag,
grunt and squeal,
fly, flurry past,
in a cloud of noise
and swatting boys.

Along the perimeter road
they pass —
through inches-deep dust —
north
to Quantri.

Gerald L. Kumpf was born in Nebraska and raised in Wyoming. He served in Southeast Asia between 1965 and 1974 with the United States Marine Corps and the United States Air Force. He retired from the Air Force as a Master Sergeant in 1982. In May, 1991, he will earn a Master of Arts in English Literature from the University of Wyoming at Laramie.

FICTION

FORGIVENESS

By Steve Anderson, Little Rock, AR

At the time they were driving Thompson to 90th Replacement, I was in the village with some of the officers from battalion headquarters. At the orphanage there, the kids put on a special show for us, some kind of pageant. We were under a purple tent inside the courtyard of what was once a mansion. A nun in a funny hat said the pageant was about something that happened a long time ago in Hanoi, when Vietnam was one country. She might have said Hué instead of Hanoi—that was how well I could understand her, especially from where I was standing at the back.

"What's funny about them Vie'namese kids, Sarge?" asked Kacic, the colonel's driver. Kacic had managed to get to the back too. The children, none of them older than four or five—all of them dressed up like dragons, warriors, and god knows what—were marching in circles and singing a song.

But what he really wanted me to say something about was the fact that all the kids weren't pure Vietnamese. Some had white skin and round eyes. Some of them had nappy hair and flat noses. Even from the back of the tent, these differences were plain as day if you were looking for them.

Before I could answer, I heard rounds being fired off. The shots came from far away, but there at the back of the courtyard I was next to a long arched driveway that seemed to collect the sound. I could feel a cracking noise deep inside my ear, even inside my head. One by one, shots were being squeezed off, about a second between each, as if somebody was counting one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two, and so on. I got started late on the count, but I thought the total was twenty, what an M-16 clip held.

"Where'd those shots come from, Kacic?"

"I didn't make out much. I suspect it's some guys down at the quarry," he said without looking my way. He was glued to something in that pageant.

When the show was over, the kids were quick to do what they were told when the nuns led them back inside. The nun who was dressed in white instead of black—the one they called the Mother Superior—came over to talk to the colonel. She was a small, friendly person, and had a round chubby face. She just couldn't stop smiling and jumping around.

"Thank you for coming," or something like that, she said to the colonel. I couldn't understand her any better than the other one.

"Sister," said the colonel, a big, heavy-set person, "the men of the battalion have something for the children." He handed her a check for 100,000 piasters, which might have been worth a little over a hundred dollars on the black market.

"Oh, so much money, Colonel!" she said, without looking at the check. "What should we do with it?"

"Whatever the children need," said the colonel, his face serious. "We want to help the victims of this tragic war." Then he talked on for a few more minutes giving the speech that I'd heard him trying out the night before. Here and there, the Mother Superior chirped in with something.

"We remember always," she got in near the end.

The battalion information specialist, Fox, set on doing his job right, wrote like mad while they talked. A photographer down from Second Field Force was snapping pictures as fast as he could change flash bulbs. I had arranged for a slick magazine from one of the big headquarters to publish a story on what we were doing in the boonies—something about GIs helping out in the local community.

After leaving the Mother Superior, we headed for the jeeps. The photographer, who had driven in by himself, left without a word, happy, I'd guess, to be on his way back to Long Binh. The rest of us didn't get away so easy. Father Nha, who ran the orphanage along with everything else in the village, wanted us to visit with him. So we walked in a group, officers first, to where he led us, which was a shady spot to the rear of the rectory. There were enough chairs there for the colonel, the executive officer, the operations officer, the adjutant, and the father. A Vietnamese girl brought one more chair for the sergeant-major. This extra one, a thin and rickety thing, was made out of teak or something, and didn't look like it belonged outside. The sergeant-major wouldn't settle back in it, but stayed perched on the edge. I stood with the other enlisted men, hoping the Father wouldn't bother about chairs for us. We were as far to the side as we could get without looking like we were trying to get away. But we were close enough to get cokes when the girl passed the bottles around.

The Father had good English, and he sat and talked away about something with the officers and the sergeant-major.

I had been in this shaded yard one other time, some months ago. I was over here with Benson, the shit truck driver, who brought me over to meet the Father for some reason that

I couldn't remember now. Then, too, the Father wanted to sit down and talk, and I heard the story about how he had led a bunch on Catholics from North Vietnam to South Vietnam after the Geneva Accords were signed. They had built this village—the church, the orphanage, everything—on land that had belonged to some Frenchman. The Father had said that without Catholics there would be no South Vietnam today. He had wanted to give me the MPC to buy him a camera from the PX, but I told him I had already bought up what I was allowed. That hadn't seemed to upset him any.

Remembering now what Father Nha told me about the village, I could make more sense out of that pageant. It probably was about something that had happened in Hanoi after all.

Kacic and Fox, meanwhile, were into something.

"They got a good deal, if you ask me," said Kacic. "Them kids live better'n most Vie'namese—did you see any skinny ones?"

I didn't hear what Fox had said before that, and he didn't have a chance to answer Kacic, because the colonel set an empty coke bottle on the ground and stood up. We were leaving.

"We'll try to remember that, Father," the colonel said, putting an end to whatever they'd been talking about. "As always, we thank you for your hospitality."

The Father shook hands with each officer and bowed to each one, too. He did the same for the sergeant major, who almost saluted him. The Father would've given me, Fox and Kacic the same treatment, but we got our backs to him before he could get over to us.

Duty done, we drove back to the battalion compound. Our show had been paid for by the US Army, who wanted us to help the local people with cash and supplies. Besides that check, we'd hauled over to the orphanage a load of plywood, which was worth a whole lot more than the piasters. The colonel didn't say a word about the shots, so that meant that he and the rest of the officers hadn't heard anything.

When I got back to headquarters about an hour later, my end of the building was empty, except for Washington and Torres, who were waiting outside the colonel's door.

"There's Sergeant Toby," I heard Torres say. Washington, a short black man, stepped into the path I needed to get to my desk.

"We gotta see the colonel, and we gotta see him now," said Washington.

"He's not on the compound right now," I said, easing on past him to get behind my desk and into my swivel chair. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"Something you can help me with? They sure shit is."

"Okay, can you tell me about it?"

"Can I tell you about it? I sure shit can."

I didn't want any part of whatever Washington was so worked up about. "Torres, can you tell me what this is about?"

Torres just glanced at Washington.

"I'll tell you what this is about," said Washington. "It's about that fucking Thompson, that's what. He shot off a whole clip right at the village. We wasn't much more'n a mile down the road, there where you turn to go to Bearcat, when he told Torres to pull over. I didn't think nothing about that. But he reached over and grabbed up my rifle. He said, 'You don't mind if I use this do you?' Then he hauls his big ass out of the jeep and just shoots away.

"I said, 'Why you want to do that for?' But he just gives me this big grin like he don't have to talk about it. 'Don't you like them people,' I asked, and he said, 'I want them to have something to remember me by.' After that, we took him on over to that 90th Replacement Battalion and throwed his sorry ass out."

Washington wasn't looking so good by the time he got this much out. His dark brown face was getting lighter, sort of the grey of day-old coffee after milk hits it. It was the face of a worn out man—not a kid, but a man really worried. I noticed now something I had known but hadn't paid any attention to until this minute. Washington was older than any of us clerks, older by years. He was a spec four, and he was way too old for that rank, unless he'd been busted down from sergeant. Yet something that Washington once told me made me know that he hadn't been in the Army any longer than any of us, that he wasn't a lifer.

What was he doing here?

"You all right, Washington?" I came around the desk and put my hand on his shoulder.

He turned his face straight to mine, and I dropped my hand away. "You just tell me what the colonel's gonna do about this? Ain't he the god-damned commanding officer?"

Torres was still on the sidelines. "Torres," I asked, "did you see what went on?"

Torres shrugged his shoulders, but there was nothing relaxed about him. "Yeah, I seen it."

"Why didn't you stop him?" I asked, glancing from one to the other.

"It was pretty fast, Sarge," Torres said like he expected the question. "It was over before we could do anything about it."

"Why didn't personnel drive Thompson to 90th?"

"They's all busy," said Washington. "Besides, what's that got to do with anything?"

But it wasn't hard to guess why they drove him in when they had the chance. After dropping off Thompson, they would be free to stop at the massage parlors around Long Binh, or pick up a couple short-time girls. But they must've not had the heart for anything like that after Thompson's stunt. In the time since I heard the shots they couldn't have done much more than drive to 90th and straight back.

"I guess you could sign charges," I said, looking at Washington. "Thompson'll be at 90th for at least a few days before he flies home."

"What'll charges do?"

"Depends on what those shots hit. Depends on what we can prove. Since there were two witnesses, it could lead to a court martial. But you'd have to sign a complaint with the battery CO, not the battalion."

"I don't know about all this 'depends' stuff. Somebody should just smack the shit out of him. That's what I say." He took a breath. "You say I gotta sign something?"

Torres started to open his mouth, then stopped, but I could tell that he was ready to forget the whole thing.

"The Army can't do anything without a complaint," I said.

"Well, damn..."

"Look," I said. "Let me find out if those rounds hit anybody in the village. If they did, then you can think about charges. If not, then no harm done."

"Yeah, well, folks shouldn't be shooting off at the village. That ain't right. Maybe you'll know that some day."

Then Washington walked away, Torres behind him.

Thompson was a personnel clerk, and while I didn't know for sure which one he was, I thought he was the tall lanky one. At least that's what I saw when I imagined somebody standing at the Bearcat intersection shooting at the village. He was the one I had heard talking about being a personnel clerk in a hospital in Japan where GIs got medevacked to. He swore that he had told the IG how some doctors tried to hide an expensive blood machine that they screwed up. They had gotten some real shit on their records, he said, when the truth came out. "Why not?" he had said, when asked why he had done it. "why should they get away with it?"

But whoever Thompson was—and I was pretty sure I was right—I didn't need long to find out about the shots he fired off. I called the infirmary and found that nobody from the village had been brought in. Benson even drove over and asked around for me, but didn't find anybody who knew anything about the shots. So either they fell short into clay fields, or they went right on over an dropped in the forest north of the village. That forest went on for miles and miles, and it was off-limits to the villagers. If Thompson hit anybody in the forest, he was a hero, because anybody in there was considered Viet Cong.

All this was really just double checking, though, because Father Nha would have been the first to know if a villager was hurt, and he hadn't said a word to us. And, really, what did Thompson or any of us know about dropping rounds in on a village over a mile away? It wasn't as easy as it sounded. So Washington and Torres were off the hook, something that Torres sure wanted, and maybe Washington too, if you got right down to it.

By the time I got it all straight, it was late afternoon. The colonel came by long enough to say that he was going to take a nap, and soon after Kacic slipped off to the post canteen where he flirted with the Vietnamese girls who worked there. The jeep was mine, if I wanted it. So for no good reason at all I drove out to the place where they said Thompson had fired the shots.

In less than five minutes, I was at that intersection.

There was nothing there but crumbly asphalt and a clay road not much different from the clay fields that stretched in all directions. Gusts of wind blew trash around, shook the weed patches, and raised some dust. This was what Vietnam looked like to me.

It didn't take long to spot the brass cases—all twenty of them—from Thompson's rounds. They were off to the side of the road, but were easy to find if you were looking for them. Even though brass had a good scrap price, nobody had found these cases, mainly because nobody hung around here. Not even short-time girls did business here.

Looking from where Thompson had stood, I could make out to the north the red tile roofs of homes on the edge of the village. Through the openings at the top of Father Nha's bell tower, which made me think of the eye of a needle, I could see sky. In the opposite direction, at about the same distance, I could see the beginnings of another village—but not our village, not Father Nha's village.

It didn't make sense that these people were from North Vietnam, that they had travelled all that way to get here, and that they hadn't really been here all that long. It didn't make sense that I was here either, but I was. It didn't make sense that Thompson had tried to shoot into the village, but it didn't seem so strange, either.

Maybe it was like going back to the high school you just graduated from and breaking some of the windows. I knew some guys from high school who had done that, and the guy who I figured was Thompson wasn't so much older than a high school kid. I wasn't much older than him. I didn't know what mattered about any of this. It seemed to matter to Washington, but so what? Did it really matter what Thompson did? Did it matter that some of the orphans had round eyes, and that some had flat noses? I should have been someplace enjoying myself, not standing here wondering what mattered.

I picked up the twenty pieces of brass, and as I drove back to the compound, I dropped them at the side of the road, spacing them out so it would be difficult to prove that these shell casings had ever been in the same magazine, or ever had anything to do with each other. Not that anybody was ever going to try.

I didn't know what all this meant, but I was dead certain it would mean something some day. And I knew that whatever it was, it would settle down on us, every one of us, whether we liked it or not, whether we deserved it or not, or whether we even knew it or not. None of us were just going to walk away.

Finally, all of this would get to be a long time ago. But not long enough to forget altogether, because we would remember.

Eventually, most of us would become halfway decent people, either because we grew up, or maybe for some other reason. Thompson would too, probably, but too bad for him if he did. Because then he'd remember firing those shots into the village, and he'd wonder if he had hit anybody. He'd have kids, or even grand-kids, and he'd wonder, maybe, if he had hit somebody else's kid. And there'd be no way that he could find out. I'd be the only person who would know, but I wouldn't have any way to find him and to tell him that nobody knew

TRAVEL

VIETNAMESE WOMEN, METAPHOR AND REALITY: AN IMPRESSION

By Mariam Darce Frenier, Univ, Minnesota, Morris

Anticipating my first trip to Vietnam, I hoped to remain without a definite research topic in order to soak up impressions. However, I am fifty-five, white, middle-class and a faculty member at the University of Minnesota, Morris. I became—realized that I was?—a feminist in 1971. My 1978 Ph.D. was in modern Chinese history and my dissertation topic was

"Chinese Women and the Chinese Communist Party: 1927-1953." Beginning in 1964, I protested against United States involvement in the war in Vietnam.

For the past ten years, I have been adding studies of that war to my teaching offerings. In other words, not exactly a neutral sponge am I. Consequently, once I was in Vietnam, I was intellectually socked by both Vietnam's metaphorical use of Woman and by Vietnamese women themselves. I was surprised even though I had read accounts and studies indicating that Vietnamese women have long had higher status than women in Laos and Cambodia, and women in China, especially since the Sung dynasty.[1]

I was surprised because nothing has been written in English on Vietnam's iconography of Woman. This iconography goes beyond my impressions of public art in other communist countries even though they, too, stress Woman as laborer, nurturer, and supporter of men in peace and war. I conclude my impressions in Vietnam need checking and, here, specifically ask for reader responses to this piece.

I visited Vietnam during June and July 1990 as a member of the ninth group of educators sponsored by the US-Indochina Reconciliation Project. Our purpose was to meet our counterparts in universities in Hanoi, Huê, and Ho Chi Minh City; however, the Vietnamese government placed restrictions upon us and we were unable to meet educators until we visited Ho Chi Minh City, our last stop in Vietnam.

We were fortunate, and I, especially, was lucky, because our group included a Vietnamese-American, Hanh Thi Pham. Hanh not only translated for us, she also invited me to meet her two Saigonese families. (Saigon is now a district within Ho Chi Minh City).

Woman as Metaphor in Vietnam

We began in Hanoi. First visual impact: socialist realism, dominated by Ho Chi Minh and the 100th anniversary of his birth, emphasized workers: always four per billboard, two men and two women.

Second impact: large to huge sculptures of women's revolutionary nurturance appear here, as well as elsewhere in Vietnam, but the most awesome is at the entrance of Bach Mai Hospital. A young, angry woman points her right arm and hand upward, apparently accusing Nixon's 1972 bombing of the Hospital. Near her, over thirty names of the dead are listed; their ages, six to sixty. She holds over her left arm the body of a man, so unlike—but like—a western *pieta*. This sculpture is frequently found at cemeteries filled with war dead; therefore, the man might be a hospital patient, a soldier, or a civilian; the woman, a nurse, a soldier, a wife.

We travelled from Hanoi to Huê. The "spirit" of Huê—our guide told us—is depicted in a huge, blocky statue: stone woman envelopes people (children?) in her stone cloak. Reminiscent again of Christian depictions of Mary, this time of those showing Mary as Goddess, protector of humanity.

In nearby Da Nang, we visited the the Cham Museum. The Cham people developed a high civilization and adopted Hinduism after contact with India. They also developed a strain of rice—Champa—which became central to southern Chinese as well as Vietnamese agriculture. The Cham stood in the way of the southern migration and imperialism of the Vietnamese and were conquered in the 15th century. The Museum, carefully maintained and presented as an object of tourism, contains visual syncretism of Hinduism and Buddhism with indigenous Cham animistic and fertility religions. The latter is best represented by round altars composed of circles of breasts facing outward. The priapic Hindu religion dominates the presentations in the Museum, and the relationship between the two religions is left to viewer speculations. However, the Museum guidebook, *Museum of Cham Sculpture in Da Nang*, states: "The prevailing image is that of a woman, regarded as 'the country's mother'.... It is goddess Uroja (meaning woman's breast in the Cham language...).[2]

The Chams may have echoed, or reworked the prevailing creation tale of Vietnam. We heard a version at Ha Long Bay in northeastern Vietnam. Here, Vietnam was born: Au Co, the dragon mother founder of Vietnam, landed at Ha Long from the heavens. Her thrashings formed the waterways of the bay area. She gave birth to 100 eggs which became 100 children. When she parted from her husband, she took fifty of the children to the mountains and made her oldest son, Van Long, the first King of the Vietnamese. We hear this version again when we are told of the "mother founder," Au Co, at the Women's Museum of Ho Chi Minh City.

Fertility religion and animism gave way to Hinduism and Buddhism among the Chams in what became central Vietnam. Later Buddhism, amalgamated with Confucianism and Taoism, became the dominant religion of northern and then central Vietnam; as the Vietnamese civilization moved further southward, Buddhism—more than Confucianism—moved south too. It was in Hanoi that I first discovered, among the many books offered for sale to Vietnamese readers, *Su Tich Duc Chua Ba*. The female figure in this story also appeared in Saigon as well as in the art of the aunt of my Vietnamese-American friend Hanh Thi Pham. In fact, this figure appeared wherever traditional art appeared in Vietnam. Hanh translated *Su Tich Duc Chua Ba* as *The History of Mother Buddha*.

Mother Buddha's story is as follows: "A young monk" is tested when Buddha sends him to be reborn as "a young woman." Once married, her husband mistakenly believes that she tries to kill him. Repudiated by him, she disguises herself as a monk. Another woman falls in love with "him"; "he" refuses her. This second woman becomes pregnant by a village man but blames her pregnancy on the monk. The monk is flogged and cast out of the pagoda. The mother abandons her child, and the cast-out monk raises the child for three years. Dying, "she" writes her parents and tells them her story. "She" (the monk) is sanctified as Quan Am, a Bodhisatva. Quan Am is the Goddess of Mercy, as she is in China and Japan where she is called Kuan Yin and Kannon respectively. As Vietnamese people tell me about pictures of Quan Am, they refer to her as the mother of Buddha. She is typically pictured tall and foregrounded; the child, designated Buddha, small and dependent on water which flows from her jar.

Hahn's aunt, Pham Thi Ming Ha, a Catholic, also paints and embroiders portraits of the Virgin Mary. The two female figures are not visually merged—Mother Buddha is Asian in Vietnamese dress; Mary is depicted in western-looking copies of European representations. The Virgin Mary dominates Vietnamese Catholicism as she did American Catholicism before Vatican II in 1965.

Brought to Vietnam by French missionaries in the 16th century, Catholicism made a larger impact on this country than on any other Asian country with the exception of the

Philippines. The cathedrals we saw in Hanoi and Saigon were built by the French and in them, depictions of the Madonna show Mary as benefactress to humankind, rather than humble Mother of God.

The ubiquitous representations of nurturing "Mother Buddha" Quan Am and of the Virgin Mary are joined by symbolic representations of woman as nurturer of the nation and the civilization, as well as of its children. Feminists have learned to be cautious when seeing any of these female icons, noting that such depictions do not necessarily translate to high status for women who participate in the religions and societies which use them.

However, in the Womens' Museums in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and other museums of war, revolution, and history, Woman as nurturer is dominated by Woman as warrior. Much as the representation of three soldiers accompanies the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC, most of the representations of Vietnamese soldiers show three: two men, one woman. In addition, sometimes women are portrayed as lone guerrillas, as are men and children.

Photographs assembled in collections like *Vietnam*, published in Moscow by Editorial "Planeta" in 1985, carefully include women as warriors. Comparing *Vietnam* with the Editorial "Planeta's" publication *Laos*, it appears that the Soviets want to emphasize Laotian and Vietnamese women's participation in warfare.

Vietnamese women were apparently crack anti-aircraft shots. Photos of many of these women are displayed in *Vietnam* and in the museums. Women, it is said, were excellent snipers as well—photos of snipers don't appear, presumably because snipers remained well hidden.

In Laos, we are told that Vietnamese women have a higher status compared to Laotian women. Carol Lane, the first American representative of UNDP in Vientiane, believes this is due to the active part women played in wars in Vietnam. This activity goes back to at least 40 AD, and stands as a stark counter-example to some western theories explaining women's subordination.

Briefly stated, a going theory in the west is that the major base of women's subordination was their decreased role in combat as nomadic societies were replaced by agricultural and pastoral societies. In nomadic societies women, like the Celt's Queen Boadicia, led warriors—women and men—into battle. But in most agricultural civilizations—Queen Hatshepsut's Egypt is an exception—and all pastoral societies, men came to outnumber women as military combatants. Subsequent societies, like those of Athens and Rome, assumed that only men could and should be warriors.

Vietnamese popular history begins with the Trung Sisters who defeated a Chinese invasion in 40 AD. Unlike Joan of Arc, but like Boadicia, the Trung sisters led women as well as men soldiers. In addition, their generals consisted of forty-four women—one of whom was their mother. Three years later, the Sisters were defeated by the Chinese and, following custom, suicided. Their generals suicided with them and have become "saints" of the villages in which they were born.

Vietnamese women remained active combatants in subsequent wars. Since their country was frequently invaded by the Chinese, the Vietnamese used elements of all the population to resist: men, women, children. Warfare against Japan and France (1941-1954) followed the same ancient pattern. This is reflected in museums and public art where women fight against Chinese, French, and Americans. One of the dominant images of the latter war is a photo of a short, fine-boned Viet Cong using her rifle to march her American captive: hulking, tall, overweight and male.

The visual setting in Vietnamese museums emphasizes Woman as warrior. The culture commemorates the Trung sisters and female religious figures and uses Woman to indicate Vietnam's national will. Joining these are depictions of women workers, quotes from Ho Chi Minh on the importance of women and their contributions, and emphatic stone monuments to women's patriotism, nurturance, and strength.

Reality

> If you go out early and the first thing you
> see is a woman—that's bad.
> If she's ugly it's even worse.
> — Vietnamese saying

Backed by this public art, real women appear almost everywhere—unlike in Saudi Arabia, for example—doing almost everything. This is not new. An 18th century Chinese commentator noticed: "wherever we go, we can see women in activities" in Vietnam.[3] Today, rural women plow behind water buffalo, move water from rice paddy to rice paddy, transplant seedlings, row boats, and fish. In urban areas, women shovel dirt, work construction, sweep streets, beg, lie on grates with their children. In market places, they peddle goods and sell from stalls. In the restaurant business, tailoring, doctoring, and teaching at all levels, women and men intermingle. In embroidery, nursing, clerking, as well as small sales, women predominate. Women work hard; so do men—often back-breaking labor, seemingly interminable hours.

Where women don't appear is in photos of political leaders, and as officials in meetings with our group. We saw them pour tea, but very seldom were they representatives of the University of Ho Chi Minh City, the Social Science Institute, or other governmental groups. In museums, they were shown among photos of heros and soldiers, but seldom in photos of military or political leaders. Men leading; men and women following.

And what did Vietnamese women say? What were the concerns they expressed to us? Hanh translated; as a Vietnamese-American woman she had an "in." But our visit was short and we were Americans—how much did they tell us?

Waitresses immediately asked: are you married? How old are you? This annoyed Hanh but was eventually explained: they needed to know the answer in order to address us properly. Why didn't Hanh know or remember this? Most of them wanted us to be married, especially Hanh who in her mid-thirties is strikingly beautiful by their standards and mine. They assured her: you should stay in Vietnam, many men would want to marry a woman as beautiful as you. They discovered Hanh was divorced from a white American; oh, a Vietnamese man would make a good husband, they assured her. Thus they emphasized marriage by choice, not the parental arrangements of tradition, and a woman's appearance as a selling point.

Vietnamese husbands: A German woman at the West German Embassy in Hanoi told me the story of her maid. The maid was in her mid-thirties, married, and had one child. She

believed herself "too old" because her similarly aged doctor husband, who made less salary than she, took some of his women colleagues out and bought them beer. (She made made the equivalent of $20. per month, he made the equivalent of $10. A beer cost a foreigner 65 to 70 cents and a Vietnamese about 40 cents.) The maid worried that she could no longer interest her husband and that he was straying. Concerns like this were voiced in Ho Chi Minh City by the intellectual women we spoke with there.

In Ho Chi Minh City, we finally got a chance to give talks to our counterparts. Four of us were "on" at the same hour. The subjects of the talks were American students and courses on the U.S. war in Vietnam, American foreign policy in Indochina, American military and strategy, and (my own talk) Women's Studies in the United States. Fifteen women came to hear me, no men: university faculty, museum officials, a historian attached to the Women's Union, a chemist, women who manage the Women's Charity Organization, and so on. Women translated for us.

Asked whether I would be willing to give a "lecture" for interested intellectuals, I had said "sure" back at home. Having been told in Hanoi and Huê that we Americans didn't understand that they, the Vietnamese, needed "basic" help, I gave only a short overview of the American women's movement from 1970 to 1990. Because the Women's Museum in Hanoi had a section devoted to Ho's concerns about battered women, I was alert that this type of domestic violence is publicly acknowledged in Vietnam and specifically talked about policies in Minnesota regarding this type of abuse. Then I pointed out that, "I know so little about Vietnam and your situation that I need you to ask me questions. What do you want to know about American women?"

After speeches from several of the women—peace is more important than war, internationally women should pull together—questions began. Pragmatic, basic questions. They asked: What are the battered women's shelters called? How are they funded? What other practical measures do you implement to help battered wives?

And their curiosity was piqued by my allusion to anti-abortion groups in the United States. How have they become so powerful? How do they obtain funds? Are they basically religious in their orientation? Family planning, including abortion, seemed assumed by these and other Vietnamese women.

Many young mothers and fathers have only one child, and many mothers indicate there will be no more. Many made allusions to the state family planning policy. Rumors: only two children are "allowed," and they must be spaced at least five years apart, and more children than two result in severe demotions—for the father and mother—at work. (In 1988, Murray Hiebert reported the "two children policy" in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.[4]) In Saigon, we did find official word about one of the rumors. Dr. Nguyen Thi Xiem, Vice-Director of the Institute for Mother and Infant Welfare, stated in "Fifteen Years' Birth Control by Contraception," that "there should be an interval of 5 years between the births of [a woman's] children."[5]

Beyond their interest in American anti-abortion groups and battered women, they had even more heartfelt questions concerning dual-career couples. How can a wife who is better educated than her husband, or makes more money than he, maintain family harmony?

A private conversation with an intellectual—the most modern woman Hahn and I met—threw an intriguing light on such marriages. Bright, articulate in English, attractive, mid-thirties, unmarried, she wanted a child. She said she was only attracted to Vietnamese men, not to foreigners, but that she felt the average Vietnamese man is bossy and inconsiderate. We sympathized. Concerned with her biological clock (though she didn't use *The Big Chill* term), she felt she should marry soon. After all, if the marriage didn't work out, she could divorce and then, at least, she'd have a child. Besides, single women—never married, divorced, or widowed—even never-married mothers were more accepted now, she assured us.

The sex ratio is heavily weighted toward women in the age group which fought against the French and the United States. But it seems still to be the assumption that women should marry, and monogamy is now both law and custom. Many women are widows, and those with children work very hard to live. Some have spent all their savings trying to find the bodies of their warrior husbands as the custom of ancestor worship demands; without remains, rituals can't be properly conducted. Evidently, government pensions are small, and the government has no money to spend looking for 300,000 Vietnamese MIAs.

One last perception: in Vietnam, modern women, widows, peasants, and workers vary from shy and retiring to forceful defenders of their rights. But we didn't see any women refuse confrontational involvement, and of course, they were all much better at bargaining over prices than we. At one point, a peasant woman, backed by several of her peers, shouted strongly and at length claiming her rights to passage on a ferry. People gathered, appearing to enjoy this sort of interchange, and the man who argued with her patiently heard her out. However, he won, seemingly on the strength of his official position. She remained angry and unappeased by his decision. Other women were as direct, although I saw none in quite such a situation involving similar differences of position, rank, and perhaps class.

All in all, the public uses of Woman contrasted with the lives of real women. While Vietnamese women worked in many public settings, they seldom led. While warrior women were adulated in public art, the only woman veteran in a group of four Vietnamese veterans was pointedly ignored by her compatriots when she spoke of her feelings about the war with the United States. Wife-beating in Vietnam is a problem. The sexes are presumed to be very different; for example, we were told women are better at learning foreign languages. And relations between the sexes seemed strained. Night clubs ("discos," they are called) were so dark that waiters led us to tables by flashlight: the explanation for the darkness—Vietnamese are uneasy about their sexuality.

The Vietnamese people struck me as intense, hard-working, intelligent, and, in contrast to the Lao in Vientiane, seldom relaxed. In Vietnam, gender tension crackled, it seemed to me. At times, women were angry at economic strains they blamed on exterior forces, at tensions between work and family, and at Vietnamese men. The military participation of Vietnamese women has neither made nor kept them equal to men.

In the future, set against public statements of their importance, Vietnamese women's angry energies may push their society not only economically—women made up sixty percent of the labor force in 1989[6]—but socially. And,

unmentioned by anyone during our visit, the most important driving force for change in these women's lives appears not to be their warrior past but to be their government's family planning policy. Women with one or two children will have the time as well as the energy and economic wherewithal to push their society in new directions and at the most fundamental of levels: parents and children, wives and husbands, or—flouting patriarchy—even as single mothers.

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[1] In particular, see Arlene Eisen Bergman, ed., *Women of Viet Nam* (San Francisco: People's Press) 1975; Richard J. Coughlin, *The Position of Women in Vietnam* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilm) Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, originally published in 1950, 1969; and, Alexander Woodside, "Review of Nguyen Ngoc Huy and others, *The Le Code: Law in Traditional Vietnam—A Comparative Sino-Vietnamese Legal Study with Historical Juridical Analysis and Annotations*, 3 volumes (Athens: Ohio State University Press) 1987, in *The Journal of Asian Studies* (1989 Feb) 48:1: 231-2.

[2] *Museum of Cham Sculpture in Da Nang* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House) 1987: 4.

[3] *Vietnamese Women in the Eighties* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House) 1989: 12.

[4] Murray Hiebert, "Two is enough; Hanoi adopts new policies designed to curb population," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (1988 Dec 8) 1042: 32.

[5] *Mother and Infant Welfare in Vietnam* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House) 1979: 61.

[6] *Vietnamese Women in the Eighties:* 63.

EDITORIAL

VETERANS DAY AT THE WALL

On November 11, 1989, Kali Tal, Dan Duffy, David Willson, Larry Hunter and Cindy Fuchs took a walk together in Washington, D.C. I was in town to take over this newsletter for Kali, who edits the ***Vietnam Generation*** journal. David was there to speak at a conference on the war that Cindy arranged at her university. Larry is Treasurer of the **VG** non-profit corporation, and he provides technical support for the **VG** database and our desktop publishing. David was in Vietnam, the rest of us are about 30.

We made a Veterans Day visit to the Wall. Nobody goes there to get happy, but ours was an especially distressing experience. The apparent majority of those visiting the Memorial that day were sporting cammies and unit badges, POW/MIA buttons, and T-shirts with belligerent messages about the Persian Gulf crisis. There were booths set up on both approaches to the Wall selling the buttons and t-shirts. They were doing a substantial cash business. The toll-free number for ratting to the IRS is 800-829-1040. Kali bought one of the shirts for the archives of the Holocaust Museum, as a present-day example of art meant to encourage racial hatred. The shirt is illustrated with a caricature of Saddam Hussein's head, with exaggerated Semitic features, on the body of a spider. A slogan beneath calls upon the U.S. to crush the insect. Another representative T-shirt underlines a big-nosed Hussein with the motto, "Kick his ass and take his gas." We were further saddened to see the POW/MIA flag actually flying with the Stars and Stripes at the Memorial's flagpole. We assumed that an enthusiast had shinned up with it. We complained to a Park Service Ranger, who told us that the black flag flies there by order of Congress, on Veteran's Day and Memorial Day.

It is my opinion that POW/MIA activists are people antagonized by ill-treatment at the hands of the U.S. government, who are used by members of that government who were themselves embittered by losing the war, as an excuse to deny diplomatic recognition, trade, and international aid to one of the world's poorest countries, Vietnam. I think that the families of the less than three thousand MIAs whose deaths are still not explained deserve help, but I also know that this number is dwarfed by those still missing in France alone from World War II, or from our Civil War, for god's sake, and certainly by the 200,000 to 1,000,000 Vietnamese missing as a result of U.S. efforts in their country. People sporting POW/MIA messages at the Wall are not expressing grief, they're stating a complicated and vicious resentment that I don't want to be bothered with when I go to look at all those dead people's names.

I also don't want to be bothered there with men in military deshabillitude calling for war. Kali, David, Cindy and Larry probably have different reasons for feeling the same way. We were relieved to find two veterans demonstrating for peace on the path leading away from the Wall. There was an unmarked police van behind them. Soon after we approached the demonstrators, one of the five officers standing nearby advised them that they, the police officers, would stay as long as the veterans wished to continue their demonstration, but that the officers would rather move on. Would the two veterans please disband quietly? It was the opinion of the officers that the demonstrators would be savagely beaten if left unprotected, and, indeed, a gentleman in cammies and a beer-gut, leading with his chin, stepped out bravely from the line of 25 old boys in army surplus outfits who were counterdemonstrating for war across the sidewalk, to contribute his view that it was wrong for the peace demonstrators to make a political statement on hallowed ground. He made several provocative remarks, but the peace demonstrator declined to raise his voice or swing on the bully, so he headed back into the crowd demonstrating informally for embargo on Vietnam and war on Iraq, down the slope actually within the precinct of the Wall.

It would be a lot of fun to go back to the Wall next Memorial Day with a group of determined men and women to demonstrate for peace and against the POW/MIA issue. But there are all those dead people on the wall, and their friends and relatives, in civilian dress, walking in quietly to leave flowers or just stand and

stare. They don't want trouble. Why should anyone else? Because many people have had their lives ruined by the war in a dozen complicated ways, and some fix on one issue to be angry about. You see the same thing on the Agent Orange question, where members of a population that was disadvantaged at birth, then subjected to unusual stress in adolescence, and is now riddled with alcoholism, imprisonment, substance abuse, crappy jobs, bad marriages, lousy diet, official neglect, poverty and despair, insist that its health problems come from one herbicide, despite sensitive, reliable tests which show no relation, in most cases, between chemical in the fatty tissue and subsequent disease. You don't need Agent Orange to show that the war broke many soldiers' health and they deserve proper care, and no one needs to read a POW/MIA t-shirt to know that some people aren't coming home. I suppose if I'm calm enough to know that, but angry enough about it to want to slug someone, I should just avoid the Memorial on martial holidays.- **VGN**

Who Wrote It?

If an article is signed, "**VGN**", Dan Duffy, Vietnam Generation Newsletter editor, wrote it. If it is not signed, it is lifted directly from a press release, promotional copy, or from a news article reported elsewhere. The editor also signs comments made within the body of unsigned items. All regular features, articles special to **VGN**, and letters to the editor are by-lined. - **VGN**

What do you think about the

Gulf War?

Which arm did *you* have tied behind your back in Vietnam?

Let us hear about it.