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Vietnam : the American combatants

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VIETNAM:
THE AMERICAN COMBATANTS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements of the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Mark Allen Hendricks

December 2000

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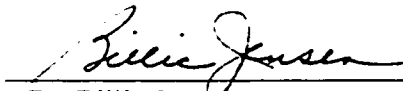
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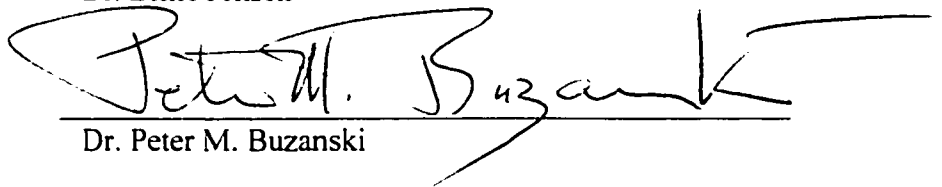
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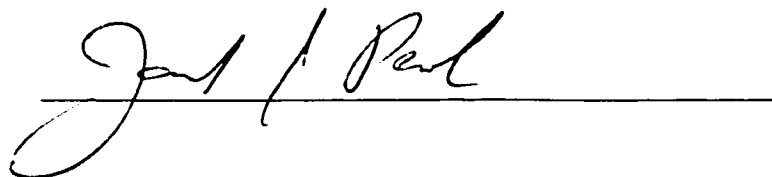


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ABSTRACT

VIETNAM: The American Combatants

by Mark Allen Hendricks

The 1954 Geneva Peace Accords enabled the United States to place American military advisers in South Vietnam. Thus began the official United States involvement in the struggle between North and South Vietnam. This innocuous beginning of involvement developed into full American military support for South Vietnam that continued until 1975, and resulted in the deaths of nearly sixty thousand American soldiers.

The United States involvement in Vietnam and the reaction against it had a profound effect on a whole generation of Americans. This thesis is a comparative study of the similarities of the experiences of two groups of American men: Those who went to Vietnam to fight the war; and those who refused to serve in the military, instead choosing to protest against the war.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

We must realize that whenever any country falls under the domination of communism, the strength of the Free World and of America is by that amount weakened. . . America cannot exist as an island of freedom in a surrounding sea of communism.¹

These ominous words, spoken by President Eisenhower in 1957, helped to seal the fate of an entire generation in the United States. America was increasing its efforts to stop communism, and the term “domino effect” had become a reality for a majority of Americans.² The battle lines were drawn, not only in the United States, but in a country half a world away. Young American men were being drafted to fight a war in a place many had never heard of before: Vietnam.

Millions of American men served their country during the Vietnam War, fifty-eight thousand of them lost their lives. Still others received serious injuries, to both mind and body. For some, those injuries have yet to heal. Millions more of America’s men stayed home, choosing instead to protest the war. Each group, the warriors and the

¹Quoted in. Anthony James Joes. The War For South Vietnam 1954-1975 (New York: Praeger, 1989). 105.

²The domino theory asserted that if one country fell to communism the country next to it would in turn succumb to communism, continuing on until only the United States was left to stand alone against communism. It has become popular in some circles to ridicule former U.S. leaders who believed the validity of this theory. It is important to note however, that for a good many world leaders the domino theory was a self-evident fact of life. Ibid., 106.

created these two seemingly opposite groups, those who fought in the war and those who fought against it. encountered many of the same experiences. Time has helped dull the pain of these experiences; however, the scars that remain, for many, are still tender.

A provision of the 1954 Geneva Peace Accords, permitted the United States to place 685 military advisers in South Vietnam. President Eisenhower, though, secretly sent several thousand.³ Under John F. Kennedy's administration the number increased to sixteen thousand, with some of them taking part in combat.⁴ Once the decision to send American fighting men to Vietnam was made, these numbers in hindsight, would pale in comparison. For example, the first American combat troops were sent to Vietnam by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965; at that time the number of United States troops in Vietnam numbered approximately 200,000. The end of 1966 saw another 200,000 men sent.⁵ Thus began a deadly and horrible war, that dragged the United States through more than a decade of turmoil.

The number of young men maimed or killed during their service in Vietnam increased, and with this increase came an uneasiness that swept across America. A growing number of Americans had come to believe that the arguments for United States' military involvement in Vietnam were ambiguous, and more importantly, not worth the loss of American lives. The war's front swept across America, as somewhere a family

³Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States (New York: Harper Perennial, 1980), 465.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 467

received news of a loved one's death at the rate of one every half hour.⁶

The Vietnam War had a devastating effect, not only on its veterans, but also on those who decided to protest the war rather than fight it. The Vietnam veteran and the war protester share some remarkable similarities. While it is obvious that nothing can compare to the horror of war, the similarity of the experiences that these two, seemingly opposite groups had in common, is worth exploring.

Veterans as well as protesters suffered from their experiences during the Vietnam War. Both groups experienced extreme conditions, and the intense pressure of battle, leaving some suffering the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Individuals from both groups faced painful separations from their families. Both groups were subjected to feelings of doubt and periods of frustration, often questioning the results of their actions. Several have expressed feelings of guilt, finding themselves alienated and alone as a result of their actions.

⁶Michale Maclear. The Ten Thousand Day War Vietnam: 1945-1975 (New York: St. Martins Press, 1981), 26.

Chapter 2 Background

A Short History of Vietnam

In 111 BC, the Chinese moved into the northern regions of what is now known as Vietnam, a small narrow country off the Southeastern coast of China, with a land mass of approximately 127,300 square miles. Once there, the Chinese established the Kingdom of Namviet. In the tenth century A.D. the Kingdom was overthrown, and replaced by the Li Dynasty. The Li Dynasty extended its control the full length of modern day Vietnam. This extension of control did not go unopposed. The Mongol Armies swept in from China to resist the expansion, while further opposition was brought to bear from the inhabitants of the South.¹

Outsiders began to make their way to Vietnam in the fifteenth century. Initially, Dutch, British and Portuguese traders traveled to Vietnam to trade, but later stayed seeking economic and political gain. In the 1800s, the French gained control of all of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. France used these three, known collectively as Indochina, to enrich itself until the outbreak of World War II.

The people of Vietnam are a diverse group that includes the Chinese, Cambodians, Thais and Vietnamese. Despite their diversity these groups all agreed on at least one

¹ Jane Elizabeth Errington and B.J.C Meckercher, eds., The Vietnam War As History, (New York: Praeger, 1990), 19.

important issue: They wanted Vietnam to be an independent nation. Prior to World War II, several groups had agitated for the independence of Vietnam. One group, the Viet Nam Doc Cap Dong Minh, (The Vietnam League For Independence), more commonly known as the Viet Minh, rose above the rest. When France fell to Germany during World War II, the Viet Minh leader, Ho Chi Minh, recognized it as an opportunity that he could exploit in his pursuit of independence for Vietnam. Ho gained positive attention from the United States as a result of his resistance to Japanese invaders. This recognition began the United States involvement with Vietnam.

Although American leadership disliked the communist led Viet Minh, it could not overlook the efforts made by the communists to resist Japan. The United States and Japan had been fighting each other in China, and both countries realized that control of neighboring Vietnam would provide the opportunity for one side to outflank the other in China. Vietnamese resistance to Japan was critical to the United States. As a result, and in an effort to help the Viet Minh as well as the allied cause, the United States, in exchange for intelligence reports about the Japanese, provided Ho Chi Minh money and arms to fight the Japanese.

When World War II came to an end, Ho Chi Minh established his government in Hanoi, and quickly moved to seize power and declare Vietnam independent. Initially, Ho controlled only the northern one-third of the country. The rest of the country was held by various nationalist groups formed along religious lines. Ho worked to bring the various southern groups together under what he called the Committee of the South. Ho Chi

Minh, at the request of Emperor Ab Dai, formed a provincial government on August 29, 1945.²

The end of the war brought Ho the realization that his political beliefs would be a problem for his “allies.” When the allied powers met at Yalta in 1945, the United States, while opposed to the thought of colonial expansion, was more opposed to the idea of an entire country being led by a communist. Indochina, it was determined, would be returned to the French. Ho sent eight letters to President Truman between October 1945 and February 1946. In the letters Ho reminded Truman of the self-determination promises of the Atlantic Charter. In addition, Ho appealed to Truman on a humanitarian level. He detailed the starvation policy the French had instituted in Vietnam. According to Ho, the French had seized the rice crop and stored it until it was rotten and unusable as food. Ho claimed the policy had resulted in the starvation deaths of over two million Vietnamese.³ Ho’s letters to Truman went unanswered, and in October of 1946, the French bombed Haiphong, and began an eight year war between France and Vietnam that would bring nearly as much death and destruction to the French, as the American and Vietnam War would later bring to the Americans.

The decision to turn Vietnam over to the French, while turning a deaf ear to Ho Chi Minh, began a downward spiral of United States involvement. This involvement

² Stanley Karnow, Vietnam A History, (New York Penguin Books, 1983), 689.

³Zinn, 461.

eventually led to a war that was fought not only in the jungles and hamlets of Vietnam, but also in the streets and campuses throughout the United States.

U.S. Involvement in Vietnam

The first American soldier killed in Vietnam died in 1959. The last soldier to pay the ultimate price for his country died in 1975. In the interim years the United States sent over three million Americans to Vietnam. The United States role in Vietnam began slowly, but as her burdens increased, so did the number of dead and wounded U.S. soldiers. The numbers escalated, eventually totaling some three hundred thousand wounded, and nearly sixty thousand killed. Forty-six thousand of those deaths were men killed in action. These numbers do not reflect the thousands of men who came back from the war psychologically damaged from their experiences in Vietnam. Nor does it include the number of men who would later die as a result of health problems brought back from Vietnam. The direct cost in dollars to the United States efforts in Vietnam was over \$141 billion. That number represents roughly seven thousand dollars for each of the area's twenty million inhabitants. This, in an area where the annual income was \$157.00 per year.¹

The United States involvement in Vietnam began in earnest in 1945. In spite of the United States opposition to colonial expansion, the decision was made to back France's domination of Vietnam. The U.S. government provided covert aid to France during that country's struggle to regain control over Vietnam. President Truman's administration

¹ Fred Halstead, *Out Now*(New York: Pathfinder;1991), 710.

offered diplomatic support, recognizing France's authority over not only Vietnam, but Laos and Cambodia as well.

Truman supplied an increasing number of ships and crews to aid in the transportation of French forces to Saigon. Truman also helped to insert nearly sixty-five thousand French troops into the lower half of Vietnam by March 1946.² In addition, the United States allowed the French to keep the lend-lease war material that had been provided during World War II. These materials had been originally intended for use in the event of a Japanese invasion. The French were now free to use them in their struggle with the Vietminh.

The United States also provided a loan of \$160 million to purchase vehicles and industrial equipment for use in Vietnam.³ The United States was not actively fighting a war in Vietnam, but its financial support of the French continued, as the United States poured money into France's war effort in Vietnam. The United States spent \$2.6 billion from 1950 through 1954.⁴ The end for the French in Vietnam came in 1954, when forty thousand Viet Minh attacked at Dienbienphu. The French held out for two months, but in the end were overwhelmed by the Viet Minh. The battle resulted in a complete French surrender, who were forced to accept defeat at the hands of the Viet Minh. Eisenhower took the next step of involvement in 1955. France's defeat, and the result of the

²Errington and McKercher, eds., 54-65.

³Ibid., 64.

⁴Ibid.

subsequent international conference held in Geneva, left the door open for further United States involvement in Vietnam. Under the terms of the Geneva Agreement, it was decided that Vietnam would be divided at the 17th Parallel. Ho Chi Minh would control the North. The South would be controlled by the Emperor Bao Dai, who in 1954, appointed the American backed Ngo Dinh Diem, as his Prime Minister.

The terms of the agreement stipulated that the French would leave troops in Vietnam in order to conduct the civil administration of the southern half of the country, until such time as an internationally supervised re-unification election could be held. The intent of these stipulations was that eventually, the people would have the opportunity to vote for the leader of their own choosing.

In time, the United States became concerned that Ho Chi Minh's popularity would propel him to victory should an election in Vietnam be allowed. A victory by Ho would result in a unified communist Vietnam. It was believed if that were to occur all of Southeast Asia would be vulnerable to communist domination. The fear of communist expansion and France's inability to maintain troop levels in the South, provided an opportunity for Eisenhower to step in and take over the political efforts of establishing an anti-Communist state.⁵ Eisenhower believed the South, with the help of the United States, could be strengthened enough to push back Ho Chi Minh's communist state.⁶ The

⁵In 1955 France had been forced to remove troops from Vietnam and send them to North Africa where Algeria had made a bid for its independence.

⁶Errington, 68.

United States supplied financial aid to the South as well as military advisers, who had been sent ostensibly to assist in the training of the South Vietnamese army.

The nations responsible for the supervision of the re-unification election in Vietnam determined on 11 April 1956, that "as a result of the current conditions in Vietnam no elections can be held. . . ."⁷ Just two months later, on 1 June 1956, then Senator John F. Kennedy, characterized Vietnam as:

(1) The cornerstone of the Free world in Southeast Asia, the keystone in the arch. . . . The fundamental tenets of this nation's foreign policy, in short, depend in considerable measure upon a strong and free Vietnamese nation.

(2) Vietnam represents a proving ground of democracy in Asia. . . the alternative to Communist dictatorship. . . .

(3) Vietnam represents a test of American responsibility and determination in Asia. If we are not the parents of little Vietnam, then we are surely the godparents. . . . If it falls victim to any perils that threaten its existence, our prestige will sink to a new low.

(4) The key position of Vietnam in Southeast Asia. . . makes inevitable the involvement of this nation, security in any new outbreak of trouble.⁸

With patriotic pride at stake, and the fear of communism that permeated American society at the time, statements such as the above by Senator Kennedy helped fan the flames of military involvement in Vietnam.

⁷ John Clark Pratt, ed., Vietnam Voices: Perspectives on the War Years 1941-1982 (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I.

Ho Chi Minh was furious with the news that re-unification elections would not be held. With nowhere else to turn, Ho began fighting. He began slowly, using his underground fighters, the Viet Cong San (Viet Cong). His troops disrupted the Diem government, and then began taking territories in the South.⁹

The United States entered into war with Vietnam. American military leaders were confident in the assumption that with such a great wealth of power and technology at their disposal, they could quickly defeat Ho Chi Minh's troops. Those same American military leaders and president's advisors, however, had little understanding of Vietnamese history, or its culture. The United States failed to understand that Vietnam was a country of warriors who had been resisting aggressive invaders for nearly two thousand years. The United States military forces suffered greatly from a lack of understanding about guerrilla warfare, a tactic at which Ho Chi Minh's troops were quite skilled. This deficiency cost the United States dearly in terms of lives lost during the early stages of the war. The United States, in an effort to offset these inadequacies, flooded Vietnam with troops. When President Eisenhower left office there were 875 military personnel in Vietnam; after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy the number had risen to 16,000. The numbers continued to rise and by the end of 1967, a half-million Americans were in Vietnam, with no end in sight.¹⁰

⁹On October 23 1955, Diem defeated Bao Dai in a referendum, becoming chief of state. On October 26, he proclaimed the Republic of Vietnam with himself as president.

¹⁰James Pinckey Harrison, The Endless War (New York: Free Press, 1982), 6.

In 1959, the first American soldier was killed in Vietnam. By 1963, the United States was spending \$400 million annually and fifty of the twelve thousand military advisers serving there had been killed.¹¹ Frustration grew as American leaders watched in stunned amazement as U.S. equipped and trained South Vietnamese soldiers were unable to stop the flow of Viet Cong guerrillas. By 1964, the Viet Cong had fought to within twenty miles of Saigon, and controlled 74% of Vietnam.

In 1964, after the United States destroyer Maddox was allegedly attacked off the coast of North Vietnam, Congress gave its support to the President, "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States, and to prevent further aggression."¹² President Lyndon Johnson's Gulf of Tonkin resolution, opened the flood gates to a costly and painful war that took a horrific financial and physical toll on both the United States and Vietnam.

In 1965, the United States was spending two million dollars a day in Vietnam. That amount increased to approximately seven million dollars a day by May of 1966. Incredibly, the latter figure was the amount spent only on rifle bullets, artillery, and mortar shells. It does not include the estimated seventy-five bombs that were required for the Air Force to produce just one enemy corpse. With that figure added to the previous total, the United States war machine was spending almost four hundred

¹¹Military advisers, as they were called, were officially barred from engaging in battle. In truth however, 63% of them paid no attention to that rule. Karnow, 27.

¹²Edward F. Dolan, Amnesty: The American Puzzle (New York: Franklin Watts, 1976), 22.

thousand dollars to produce just one dead communist soldier.¹³

The amount of arms brought to bear upon the tiny country of Vietnam is staggering. The American GI carried an M-16 rifle that could fire one hundred rounds of ammunition per minute. In the air, one fearsome airship, the AC47 dubbed "Puff the Magic Dragon" was capable of firing eighteen thousand rounds of ammunition per minute. A football field size area could be covered, one bullet into each square foot, in approximately three seconds. Offshore, United States war ships cruised up and down the coast, holding some seventy thousand men at the height of the war. Destroyers and cruisers launched one hundred thousand, five and eight inch projectiles at onshore targets every month.¹⁴ When the war came to a close, the combined United States air military had dropped over seven and one-half million tons of bombs, and 400,000 tons of napalm on Vietnam, at a cost of \$30 billion, with a loss of 8,000 aircraft.¹⁴

The number of bombs dropped by the United States on Vietnam totaled more than all the bombs dropped by the allies, on all enemy countries, during World War II.¹⁵ One such device, the appropriately named earthquake bomb, was used primarily to provide a clear area for helicopters to land. Each bomb weighed seven tons and was designed to

¹³Joseph Buttinger, Vietnam The Unforgettable Tragedy (New York: Horizon Press, 1977), 93.

¹⁴David W. Levy, The Debate Over Vietnam (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) 55.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

explode just above the ground. They were capable of uprooting trees for three hundred feet in every direction. The resulting shock wave of these monsters destroyed all plant, animal and human life within ten times of that radius. In addition, B-52 bombers flew overhead, relentlessly dropping five hundred to seven hundred and fifty pound bombs.

The resulting damage of these munitions is nearly impossible to comprehend:

Approximately ten million craters, some thirty feet deep and as large as forty-five feet in diameter in South Vietnam alone.¹⁶

The American government eventually had over eight million military personnel involved with the war in Southeast Asia. This figure includes the troops at military bases in Thailand, as well as troops stationed on ships at sea.¹⁷ The cost of the Vietnam War to the United States, as expressed, above is staggering. A total of \$141 billion or approximately seven thousand dollars was spent for each of the roughly twenty million inhabitants of South Vietnam. The war also took its toll in the United States, as images of the death and destruction associated with war were routinely broadcast on the nightly news. The United States was involved in a war in an area of the world that most Americans had never given a second thought to, nor could they have located Vietnam on a map if asked.

It is generally considered a good rule to know your adversary before engaging him in battle. In the war with Vietnam however, this rule was evidently unimportant to those in

¹⁶ Levy, 56.

¹⁷ Halstead, 710.

the military, who were almost as ignorant about Vietnam as the American public. For example, had American officials understood the importance of land and the ancestral graves to the Vietnamese people, they would not have viewed the wholesale creation of a nation of refugees as a method of defeating Communism. The traditional Vietnamese villager spent his whole life bound to the rice land of his ancestors; for him the world was a very small place. The village in Vietnam signified a place where people came together to worship the spirits. In the United States, people live in an interchangeable society where people move freely from one place to another. The Vietnamese however, live in a society of particular people, where each knows the other by his place in the landscape. The people are tied to one another as well as to the land. Their citizenship in a village is personal and nontransferable.¹⁸ This lack of understanding, by the American military leadership, of even the most basic tenets of Vietnamese society put the American soldier at a disadvantage in the war.

The soldier in the field was equally uninformed. Even with his superior firepower, the soldier's lack of understanding of guerrilla warfare was a deficiency that put him at great risk. As stated above, the military attempted to compensate for these inadequacies by flooding Vietnam with American troops. The military would learn, however, that a war of attrition was not one that the American public would support.

¹⁸Andrew J. Rotter, Light At The End Of The Tunnel: A Vietnam War Anthology (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 384.

Chapter 3

HISTORY OF DRAFT EVASION AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN THE UNITED STATES

United States history is filled with examples of those who have refused to fight or support this country's role in war. Such resistance has been noted as early as the colonial period, when the first conscientious objectors refused to fight against the Native American tribes.¹ These early refusals began a tradition of peace through non-violence in this country.

The first recorded instance of resistance to military conscription in America occurred in the province of Maryland in 1658, when Richard Keene refused to be trained as a soldier. The first occurrence of mass resistance took place in an area known as West New Jersey in 1704. The Quakers in the area had originally purchased the deed to the land in 1676. The charter they had written for themselves was one of the first colonial charters that guaranteed freedom of religion and conscience. In 1703, West New Jersey merged with East New Jersey, and an anti-Quaker governor was appointed. The following year, a broad militia act was passed that called for fines and the confiscation of property for those who refused military training. Most juries however, found the act to be anti-Quaker and were sympathetic, refusing to convict those accused of resisting the new act.

¹Stephan M. Kohn, Jailed For Peace (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), 3.

Subsequently, future New Jersey militia laws contained liberal provisions that allowed Quakers to avoid compulsory service.²

Quakers in Virginia refused to fight during the French and Indian War. The resisters were imprisoned for noncompliance with Virginia militia laws. The Virginia governor, frustrated by the resolve displayed by the resisters, had them brought before Colonel George Washington, requesting that they be imprisoned with rations of bread and water until the group agreed to fight. George Washington, moved by the resisters' courage and the strength of their convictions, freed them, allowing them to live with local Quakers until their militia obligations had ended.

In 1767, the Rhode Island legislature passed one of the New World's broadest and earliest conscientious objector exemptions. The legislation made Rhode Island the first American colony to establish religious liberty as a fundamental right. The law exempted from military duty all those, who for reasons of conscience could not train, arm, rally to fight, or kill.³ When the American revolution began, every colony that contained a large pacifist population recognized conscientious objection as valid grounds for exemption from military duty. A full year before the Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress recognized that, "There are some people who from religious principles cannot bear arms in any case," and declared that, "this congress intend no violence on their

²Ibid.. 6.

³Ibid.. 8.

consciences.”⁴

Following the end of the revolution, there was considerable support for incorporating a conscientious objector exemption into the Bill of Rights. When the newly drafted United States Constitution was debated, four states passed resolutions in favor of an amendment protecting conscientious objectors. The Bill of Rights that James Madison introduced during the First Congress included an exemption from state militia duty for conscientious objectors. The exemption was approved by the House, but was later rejected by the Senate Conference Committee.⁵

Future anti-draft movements were revolutionized by the actions of abolitionists in the early nineteenth century. Prior to the abolitionist movement, all anti-draft movements had been philosophically rooted in a sense of obedience to God, not a disobedience to the laws of war. Conscientious objection, before the emergence of abolition, had been considered a personal and religious undertaking. It had been a personal act of non-cooperation. The absolutists, those who oppose war for any reason, changed that. Their crusade for peace was political and called for collective action, targeting war for active and aggressive political opposition. Non-violent direct action and civil disobedience, replaced the previous policy of personal non-cooperation.

⁴James W. Tollefson, The Strength Not To Fight: An Oral History Of Conscientious Objectors Of The Vietnam War (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), 18.

⁵Kohn, 11.

Many abolitionists viewed war as they did slavery, as a non-compromising evil. Consequently, they dedicated themselves to bringing an end to both. They began a new form of protest that included aggressive political opposition, through non-violent tactics, involving the use of direct action and civil disobedience. The abolitionists/absolutists, actively sought to oppose and frustrate the government's ability to engage in war. In 1838, William Lloyd Garrison developed a document that was adopted by the New England Resistance Society. His Declaration of Sentiments, outlined the basic tenets of a new anti-war program: "We register our testimony not only against all wars...but all preparations for war; against every naval ship, every arsenal, every fortification; against the militia system and a standing army...against all trophies won in battle, all celebrations in honor of military or naval exploits... against every edict of government requiring of its subjects military service."⁶

Garrison believed that individuals had the moral obligation to violate any and all laws that supported the military. His Declaration of Sentiments called for mass civil disobedience to military laws, and for political agitation against war appropriations. Garrison's New England Resistance Society opposed war, employing the same tactics that the abolitionists used against slavery.⁷ During the Civil War both the North and the South adopted conscientious objector exemptions.

⁶Ibid.. 16.

⁷Ibid.. 17.

The first national Draft Act was passed in 1863. While it contained no specific provisions for conscientious objectors, it did provide that individuals could send substitutes in their place, or pay \$300 to the War Department as a means to avoid the draft. The Draft Act of 1864 recognized the conscientious objectors who were already in uniform. The act called for them to be recognized as non-combatants, and assigned to duty in hospitals or to the care of freedmen.

The United States entered World War I on 4 April 1917, and for the first time since the Civil War, a national draft was signed into law. The new draft law, unlike its predecessor, did not allow an individual to send someone else in his place, or pay a fee to avoid military duty. All able-bodied men, including conscientious objectors, were liable for military service. The induction of these men was not regulated by local draft boards. Instead, men were inducted directly into the Army. Upon induction, the individual was allowed to request a conscientious objector exemption from military officials, or resist induction and face a court-martial.⁸ The Selective Service Act of 1917 exempted from combat status those who were members of any recognized religious organization whose existing principles forbade its members to participate in war of any form. Those individuals granted exemptions were still considered military personnel, and as such were required to serve in non-combat roles, such as in the medical corps or the corps of engineers.

⁸A court-martial is a court made up of military or naval personnel convened for the trial of military offenses, or of army or naval personnel.

World War I resisters were the first to combine civil disobedience to war with a personal absolutist refusal to enlist. In an effort to evade the draft of 1917, it was estimated that between 350,000 to over 2 million simply failed to register for the draft.⁹ The military authorities moved quickly and ordered anti-war activists court-martialed. The absolutists bore the greatest brunt of the military's anger. Most were given long prison terms in military prisons, where conditions were deplorable, and mistreatment was common. The military claimed that conscientious objectors were enemies of the state, and as such, any harsh treatment they received was justified.¹⁰

The Draft Act of 1940, provided that individuals opposed to war because of religious training and belief would be reassigned to civilian work of national importance under civilian direction. This, however, did not mean that conscientious objectors were not outcasts throughout World War II. Often they stood alone at a time in American history when much of the nation was convinced that the war was a necessity. During World War II, 34,506,923 men registered for the draft. Of those who registered some 72,354 applied for conscientious objector status. Of the number who applied for conscientious objector status, approximately 25,000 entered the Army into non-combat service, and 11,950 were assigned alternative service in civilian work camps. Another 20,000 potential

⁹Lillian, Schlissel ed., Conscience in America: A Documentary History of Conscientious Objection in America 1757-1967 (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1968), 26.

¹⁰Kohn, 29.

conscientious objectors did not receive official conscientious objector status. Some in this group were forced to serve in the Army, while others received exemptions because of their jobs. Over six thousand men were imprisoned for violating the Selective Service Act.¹¹

The Selective Service Act of 1948, took aim at defining the terms, religious training and belief, more closely. According to definition, as specified by the above act, an individual must believe in a relation to a supreme being, involving duties superior to those arising from any human relation to the law, excluding beliefs that are political, sociological, philosophical or merely personal. In 1967, the supreme being clause was omitted from the Selective Service Act of 1948.

Despite the cold war hysteria and McCarthyism, draft resistance grew following World War II. For example, during World War II, just 14% of all inductees applied for conscientious objector exemptions, in 1960 the number of exempted objectors had climbed to 18.24%.¹² However, at no other time in United States' history has the anti-war sentiment been greater than during the Vietnam War. It was during those turbulent times that millions of Americans publicly demonstrated against a war that they had come to believe was both immoral and impossible to win.¹³

¹¹Ibid., 46.

¹²Ibid., 71.

¹³Mitchell K. Hall, Because of Their Faith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), ix.

Chapter 4 Growth of the Anti-War Movement During the Vietnam War

Nearly thirty million men came of draft age between 4 August 1964, the date the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution marked the United States' official entry into the Vietnam War, and 18 March 1973, the date the last American troops left Vietnam. In addition to the number of men killed by the enemy, eight thousand died from non-hostile causes and 350 died by their own hands. Approximately 270,000 were wounded, 21,000 disabled, and roughly 5,000 lost one or more limbs.¹ These numbers represent a significant reason individuals in the United States chose to protest the war and avoid the draft, sometimes at a significant cost.

The manner of protest to the Vietnam War varied. Some chose to declare themselves conscientious objectors,² while others burned their draft cards and marched in demonstrations. Demonstrations could turn violent and those who participated risked police beatings and prison sentences. Others chose to leave the country rather than participate in the Vietnam War.

¹ Rotter, 457

² According to Websters Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged encyclopedic edition 1989, conscientious objector is defined as anyone who objects to warfare because he believes that it is wrong to kill.

In order to fully understand the anti-war movement one must look first to 1964, when the Johnson Administration committed itself to the war in Vietnam. It was in 1964, while Johnson was campaigning under the banner, "we will seek no wider war," that United States gunboats offshore of North Vietnam were provoking an attack by the North Vietnamese. It was these attacks that induced the Senate to give Johnson virtually free reign in the coming years to steadily escalate the United States involvement in Vietnam.³ It was under these circumstances that the origin of the anti-war movement can be found.

The anti-war movement did not take off immediately. The movement began slowly, steadily growing in response to increased American involvement in Vietnam. The first campus teach-ins were held in March 1965, just one month after the United States began bombing North Vietnam. During the Fall of 1965, the first coordinated demonstrations began to take place across the country. While the demonstrations were generally peaceful events, and their numbers had begun to swell, they were not representative of the general opinion of the public. While public opinion would later shift somewhat, most Americans were supportive of the way that the government was managing the war in Vietnam. In October of 1965, mass demonstrations were held at the Pentagon, and for the first time, armed troops were sent to disperse the demonstrators. The demonstrations, however, continued to be peaceful assemblies. It was not until after the deaths of Martin Luther

³Grace Sevy ed., The American Experience in Vietnam: A Reader (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 184.

King and Robert F. Kennedy, that protesters began to believe the only way to wake up a complacent American public was to change from peaceful protests to more violent demonstrations.⁴

On 30 January 1968, seventy thousand communist soldiers in Vietnam launched the Tet Offensive. The communists attacked more than one hundred cities in South Vietnam including Saigon, attacking the U.S. Embassy with specially trained commandos. The Tet Offensive stunned the American public, who had been led by General Westmoreland and President Johnson to believe that the communists had been brought under control. With this one major offensive the communists had been able to prove that their fight had not yet been exhausted, nor were they on the edge of defeat, as General Westmoreland had claimed.

The Tet offensive has been perceived as a turning point of public opinion about the war in Vietnam, however the public support for the war had actually begun a steady decline approximately two years prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive. The mounting casualties, higher taxes and a war with no end in sight, had undermined the public's confidence in military leaders who were charged with directing the war. The attitude of the American public had begun to shift. While this shift called for an end to the war, it did not signify that the American public was pro-peace. The belief among most Americans was that President Johnson had not prosecuted the war dynamically enough.

⁴*ibid.*, 185.

The attitude among many Americans was that if we were in this war, then we must do what was necessary to win or get out.⁵

Truly, the enemy had paid a terrific price for the Tet offensive. Tens of thousands had been killed and the Vietcong political operation had been badly damaged.⁶ However, the offensive had a dramatic effect on the American public. In addition to being surprised by a “beaten enemy,” other events had transpired during the offensive that helped to substantiate the contentions of those opposed to the war.

Two events in particular raised questions about the morality of the war. The Huntley-Brinkley Report, broadcast by NBC on 2 February 1968, presented twenty million viewing Americans with a look at the harsh realities of the Vietnam War. The report showed General Nguyen Ngoc Loan, Chief of the South Vietnamese Police, pull out his pistol and shoot a captured and bound Vietcong in the head. The event had a sobering effect on many Americans as they realized that America’s allies in Vietnam were brutal men who had become morally indistinguishable from the brutal men who were our enemies.⁷ The second event occurred on 7 February 1968, when a United States major at the village of Ben Tre stated to Peter Arnett of the Associate Press, “That it became necessary to destroy the town in order to save it.” To the opponents of the war the quote summarized the United States military policy in Vietnam. A policy developed

⁵Karnow, 558.

⁶Levy, 144.

⁷Ibid., 145.

by individuals who had become convinced it was necessary to destroy Vietnam in order to save it.⁸

Following the Tet Offensive, General Westmoreland, the commander of U.S. combat forces in Vietnam, requested an additional two hundred thousand men.⁹ His request helped to stimulate the anti-war efforts of protesters. Westmoreland's request also raised doubt in the minds of those who supported the administration's war policy. Most Americans had been under the impression that the military had complete control over the enemy. They questioned how it was possible that an enemy who had been demoralized and beaten, had been able to launch such a major attack on so many cities, as well as the United States Embassy in South Vietnam. Americans questioned why the U.S. Military Commander, who claimed that the Tet Offensive had been a complete defeat for the communists, needed a forty percent increase in manpower. The rapidly expanding numbers of men going to Vietnam, and more importantly, the number of American soldiers killed, increased awareness about the war in the United States. Americans doubted the wisdom of a government that had involved the United States in a war that many had come to view as a civil war.

President Johnson found himself backed into a corner. Under his leadership the

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

United States had become involved in what looked to be an impossible situation. Neither the South Vietnamese government nor their military appeared to be getting strong enough to sustain themselves without American aid. At home, Americans were demanding results. Johnson scrambled for an answer. He was in need of a solution that would not give the impression that America's young men who had died in Vietnam, had done so in vain. Johnson could not accept Hanoi's terms. To do so would appear as though he and the American people were giving up. He was unable to extricate the United States from the war in Vietnam. Likewise, Hanoi was unwilling to accept Johnson's demands, which amounted to nothing less than a complete surrender by Ho Chi Minh.¹⁰ The two countries were miles apart in terms of a peaceful solution. As a result, the war in Vietnam continued, as did protests in America.

The anti-Vietnam War movement was the largest and most effective anti-war movement in American history. However, despite its success in influencing decision makers and ordinary citizens, the movement did not enjoy the support of the majority of American people. This is not intended to imply that Americans had not become disenchanted with the war in Vietnam. While it was true Americans across the country were fed up with the administration of the war, this alone was not enough to change their opinions about the protesters or the anti-war movement. For many Americans, protesters

¹⁰Thomas Powers, The War At Home: Vietnam and The American People (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), 174.

¹¹Melvin Small, Covering Dissent (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 1.

were viewed with scorn seen as unpatriotic at best, communist traitors at worst.¹¹

Mainstream Americans believed the actions of protesters were disloyal to the country, and in some cases treasonous. It was the contention of some that the anti-war protesters hindered the United States war effort and encouraged the enemy.¹² The anti-war movement in the early to mid 1960's was largely made up of college students and faculty members. The majority of Americans, including college students, supported the United States' war effort.¹³

The first major demonstration took place in Washington on 17 April 1965. It was organized by the Students for a Democratic Society. The March on Washington drew approximately 20,000 protesters, roughly twice the number expected. While this number would come to be considered small when compared with future demonstrations, it was still impressive, especially in a city like Washington. The demonstration represented a group of Americans in the nation's capital, publicly challenging the government. The protesters were in the heart of Pentagon-FBI-big money-lobby territory, going face to face with a self-righteous government that had become completely convinced of its own invincibility.¹⁴

In 1966, as the bombing of North Vietnam came closer to urban areas, the movement gained momentum. The image of the United States bombing a peasant nation had

¹²George Donelson Moss, Vietnam An American Ordeal (Englewood Cliffs: N.J. Prentice Hall, 1990), 226.

¹³Ibid., 229.

¹⁴Halstead, 41.

become decidedly uncomfortable for people worldwide. In 1967, a large cross-section of Americans throughout the country began to oppose the war. Their primary concerns, however, were not for the growing number of dead American soldiers, or innocent peasants.¹⁵ To most Americans, the problem was with the way the war was being fought. Primarily, this meant the expenditure of large sums of money on an effort that had produced little more than a stalemate. The number of dispirited Americans increased in size. Their contempt for the left wing anti-war protesters however, was still greater than their hatred of the war. The radical anti-war protester continued to remain a minority in the United States.¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

Chapter 5 FORMS OF RESISTANCE

Several options were available to those who hoped to avoid the draft. The resister could simply choose not register for the draft. Most of those who failed to register moved around the country in an effort to avoid the draft board. Others chose to leave the country. Until 1965, the resister could avoid the draft by getting married. Having a child would also exclude him from the draft, as would a student deferment. There was also the option of obtaining conscientious objector status, or proving to be physically or psychologically unable to participate. Those who attempted the latter created episodes at their local draft boards, that if not for the seriousness of the situation, would have been considered humorous.

Fewer than twenty percent of all those exempted from the draft were found to have a psychiatric or mental defect. Of the twenty percent, a large number were actually acts of creativity and desperation on the potential draftees' part. An individual who wanted to convince his draft board that he possessed some form of psychiatric abnormality, faced a formidable challenge when he appeared for his physical. He needed to be just outrageous enough to be thought too crazy for the Army, while not appearing so outrageous that it was obvious that he was faking.¹ This story whose authenticity is somewhat dubious, is

¹ Sherry Gershon Gottlieb, Hell No We Won't Go! the Draft During the Vietnam War (New York, Viking Press, 1991), 35.

indicative of the lengths some individuals felt compelled to go in their efforts to avoid being drafted:

Charlie was number four in the lottery. Two weeks before his physical, he stopped bathing, stopped shaving, stopped changing his clothes. By induction time Charlie was ripe. Just before he left for his physical, Charlie smeared peanut butter around his scrotum, anus, and thighs. He showed up stinking and obviously crazy. The time came for him to drop his pants. The doctor asked in horror, "My God, man, have you been sleeping in your own excrement?" Charlie thought for a second, wiped up some of the peanut butter with his finger, and stuck it in his mouth. Tasting it, he answered, "Yup." The Army decided it could do without Charlie.²

Stories such as this were common and created a surreal atmosphere at local draft boards around the country:

I went to the physical. The first part of the test was written stuff, so I kind of did just what they wanted me to--I didn't work too hard, but I didn't screw off on them. At the end of that, I dropped two tabs of acid. By the time we got to standing around in line, I was gone. I figured that since I was terrified of them, probably the easiest thing for me to do was just be terrified. . . . I just amped up the terror until I was so terrified that I kind of went into paralysis. They sat me in a room, and I sat on a bench and played with my fingernails for three hours without looking around or getting bored and talked to the doctors. I had blood dripping on the table (from my fingernails) while I answered their questions. . . . Finally, near the end they gave me a piece of paper. . . I got my 4-F. In some ways it was a catastrophic day for me: emotionally, and it was lots of acid-I think it took ten years to undo the damage I did that day in my head. But it may have saved my life, too. I don't regret it at all.³

. . . At the induction center. . . I sat down to take a basic test showing you a picture of a hammer and saying, "What is this?" Instead of taking it, I wrote a few different essays-on time and space, on masturbation and God; I mixed in some poetry. . . . I checked off every drug; I checked off headaches. . . . For occupation I wrote "wizard."⁴ Then the psychiatrist thought he would trap me by asking what I

²Ibid.. 62.

³Ibid.. 62.

⁴Ibid.. 53-54.

would do in a particular hypothetical situation: Suppose you're in an alley and a man who is obviously crazy backs you up against a brick wall and places a knife to your throat. This crazy man is about to cut your throat any second, and by sheer coincidence you have a loaded revolver in your hand and pointed at his stomach. Would you pull the trigger? I gave it a long take, ten seconds or so, not moving or reacting. Then: "I. . . I don't know man. . . I don't know!" I then curled up in a fetal position and rolled off the chair onto the floor. . . . The whole day of wandering around stinking and naked with these people made it very easy to do. I'm sort of bleating on the floor, rolled up in a fetal position and I'm thinking "Jesus did I go too far? What's he going to do now? I can't stop now-I'm on the tail end of a roller coaster!"⁵

Depending on their acting ability or lack thereof, young men were categorized into one of the following categories:

- 1) I-A Available for military service. Not particularly good news if you wanted to avoid service in Vietnam.
- 2) I-A-O Conscientious objector available for non-combat military service.
- 3) I-O Conscientious objector available for civilian work.
- 4) I-S Student deferred by statute: In high school and below twenty years old or in college: eligible for I-A but deferred until end of term.
- 5) I-Y Qualified for military service in time of emergency.
- 6) II-A Deferred because of civilian occupation.
- 7) II-C Deferred because of agricultural occupation.
- 8) II-S Student deferment.
- 9) I-D Member of reserve component or student taking military training.
- 10) III-A Deferred because of extreme hardship to dependents.
- 11) IV-B Officials deferred by law.

⁵Ibid., 59.

- 12) IV-C Aliens under certain conditions.
- 13) IV-D Minister of religion or divinity student
- 14) IV-F Physically, mentally or morally unfit.
- 15) IV-A Registrant who has completed service, or sole surviving son.
- 16) V-A Registrant over the age of liability.
- 17) I-W Conscientious objector performing civilian work contributing to the maintenance of the national health safety.
- 18) I-C Member of armed forces; reservists on active duty.⁶

Resistance in the Military

Resistance to the draft and the Vietnam War was quite varied, and it was by no means limited to protests on college campuses around the United States. Resistance had also expanded to the ranks of the military. The men who fought in Vietnam had grown up listening and reading about the glory of war, and the obligation of every American citizen to protect the United States. The men listened as their fathers or uncles told them of heroic deeds achieved during war. Many of America's sons went to Vietnam expecting the same kind of war that their fathers had experienced, they all wanted to be heroes. "I had volunteered to go, I wanted to be there. I thought it was the right thing that we should go and protect democracy there. I believed in the Domino Theory, I believed that Cardinal Spellman was right when he said "Kill a Commie for Christ." I really truly

⁶ Questions and Answers on the Classification and Assignments of Conscientious Objectors, (Published by the National Service Board for Religious Objectors Washington, D.C. 1966), 5-6.

believed, I mean it was the cause, I was a young man, I'd been brought up in a Navy family. I was very proud having become a Marine and fighting for my country."⁷

Young men who became draft age in the 1960s, were well informed of their duty to their country. American fathers had impressed upon their sons the value of war as a breeding ground for manliness. Many believed manliness could only be verified by going to war, hence war was not only a young man's obligation, it was a basic rite-of-passage from boy to man.⁸ "My old man, when the war came, 'he says oh go, you'll learn something. You'll grow up to be a man. . . .' If my folks had to send their poodle, they would have cried more tears over that than over me. But I'm supposed to go because I'm a man."⁹

The glorification of war and heroic exploits depicted in movies, further intensified the notion in America's young men that to fight for your country was an important step in becoming a man. "Maybe I had seen too many Marine movies, but I felt, and it was supported by my father's patriotism, that what we were doing was right. . . ."¹⁰ President Kennedy further reinforced the sense of obligation one owed to his country when he said,

⁷Bill Short and Wilda Seidenberg, "A Matter of Conscience: Resistance Within The U.S. Military During The Vietnam War." Vietnam Generation 2, 81.

⁸ Lloyd B. Wells, The Tainted War Culture and Identity in Vietnam War Narratives (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 44.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 83.

“Ask not what your country can do for you: ask what you can do for your country.”¹¹

Unfortunately, what young men discovered in Vietnam was vastly different from what their fathers had experienced in World War II. An entire generation of men born after World War II, whose images of warfare had been shaped by the movies and their fathers, soon realized that what they had learned about war was quite different than what they were encountering in Vietnam. In order to survive Vietnam, soldiers first had to rid themselves of all their preconceived notions about war. Americans in the 1960s had prepared for a war that only existed in the movies and in the minds of World War II veterans.¹²

The Vietnam War was a far different war than any the United States had fought before. The terrain was different. There were no set battle lines. Soldiers fought and died to capture the same plot of territory in Vietnam over and over. The enemy was different than any other that American soldiers had faced. The enemy in Vietnam was a guerrilla fighter, skilled at hit and run tactics. Death and injury often came to American servicemen in the form of a concealed device. These devices ranged from some type of explosive weapon, such as a land mine intended to tear at bodies, to something as simple as a sharpened stick smeared with feces that could cause severe infection to those unlucky enough to step on them. Whatever the type of hidden device, they were very efficient at removing a soldier from the field. In addition to injury and death, these devices caused a

¹¹ Short, Seidenberg, 82.

¹² Wells, 22.

disruption in the cohesiveness among the troops, negatively affecting morale, as soldiers continued to fall to an unseen enemy.

Unlike World War II, whose soldiers were welcomed by the populace they were liberating, the American GI in Vietnam had to be wary of the very people he had been sent to help. During the day the GI could travel through what appeared to be a friendly village, only to find later that the same village was feeding or hiding the Vietcong. Civilians in Vietnam found themselves forced to walk a very thin line: Be friendly to the Americans, so that the soldiers would not destroy the village under the supposition that it was communist, while also being friendly to the Vietcong, so that they did not destroy the village as a means of making an example out of them. This set of circumstances made it difficult for the Americans to distinguish who was the enemy and who was the friend.

Free fire zones, areas in which anyone who entered was considered the enemy, were established in Vietnam. It was not uncommon that civilians who entered free fire zones were shot and killed. Frustration mounted among GIs as they witnessed the deaths of their buddies at the hands of an enemy that was so elusive that American soldiers had limited chances to retaliate. The inability to retaliate fueled feelings of frustration and anger-causing actions that contributed to the deaths of innocent civilians, including women and children. Frustration made a terrible situation worse, as was the case in a small hamlet named My Lai. It was at My Lai that American soldiers lost control, seeming to lose all sense of morality, as they led several hundred women and children to a ditch and executed them. This was not the war young American men had envisioned. The Vietnam War became too much for some of them.

The disillusionment and disgust experienced by men in Vietnam led a significant number of soldiers to join the resistance against the war. They found they could no longer, in good conscience participate in the war. Several GI publications filled with articles about GI anti-war activities were published. One such publication, The Fatigue Press, was produced by Jim Weeks, a soldier who deserted when he was ordered back to Vietnam. The reason for his refusal to return: His company had purposely tripped a claymore mine that killed fourteen school children who had the misfortune of walking by his outpost. Another soldier, William Whitmeyer, serving with the 172nd Armored Regiment became enraged with the standard practice of killing Vietnamese civilians. Still another Marine deserted shortly after watching U.S. jets napalm a village full of civilians just across the road from his platoon's outpost:

I don't know why they did it. We'd been working in that village doing pacification work. I was part of a medical team doing work in that village. After the strike. . . we found seventy or eighty badly wounded Vietnamese and fifteen dead. We loaded them into our trucks and drove them down to Dong Ha and the medical officer wouldn't treat them. They said the facilities were needed for American boys, yet there weren't any American wounded coming in. So we had to drive them all the way down to Da Nang, about one hundred miles. About ten people died on the way. This is against humanity, this insanity, it's against the natural flow of energy. I decided I didn't want to have anything more to do with it. . . .¹³

Soldiers who had seen the horrors of war found ways to resist. The military anti-war movement began as individual acts by soldiers who could no longer handle the moral and

¹³ Roger Neville Williams, The New Exiles: American War Resisters in Canada (New York: Liveright Publishers, 1971), 271.

political ambiguities of the war.¹⁴ “In grade school we learned about the Redcoats. Those nasty British Soldiers that tried to stifle our freedom. . . . Subconsciously, but not very subconsciously, I began to have the feeling that I was a Redcoat. I think it was one of the most staggering realizations in my life.”¹⁵

Forms of protest included measures that were violent as well as non-violent, individual, organizational, anti-war, and anti-military. Approximately nine percent or roughly 900,000. Vietnam era servicemen participated in some form of anti-war activity, be it publishing anti-war newspapers, writing Congress, participating in demonstrations, or turning to other more violent forms of protest, such as fragging their superiors.¹⁶

The GI who refused to serve his country in combat soon found himself, just as many of his civilian counterparts, forced to sever ties with family members who were ashamed of him, or unable to understand his actions. He also could count on harsh treatment from fellow soldiers, and a military that considered his dissent as cowardly and un-American.¹⁷ “I told my father I was on thirty day leave. But after thirty days were up my father became suspicious and knew something was wrong. A short time after the thirty day period, I was awakened by the police. My father had called the police and reported me. . . . I was taken to the Naval Brig and started to get worked over by the Marine

¹⁴ Richard R. Moser, The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 41.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶ Barbara Tischer, ed., Sights On The Sixties (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 213.

¹⁷ Short and Seidenberg, 84.

guards. . . . Two of these guards told me this was my last weekend, that they were going to kill me.”¹⁸

Resistance among American soldiers can be categorized into three distinct phases of dissent. The years 1965-1967 were a period of time that consisted primarily of individual dissent. In 1968, an underground anti-war press was created, by 1969, the third phase of dissent in the military had begun. The third phase included such acts as disobeying orders, going AWOL (absent without leave), and desertion.¹⁹ The number of soldiers who went AWOL while serving in Vietnam can be used as a barometer to gauge the level of dissent among those in the military. In 1966, for example, the rate of men in the Army that went AWOL was 57.2 for every thousand men, by 1972, the rate had increased to 166 per thousand. The numbers in the Marine Corps were even higher. In 1972, it stood at 170 per thousand.²⁰ Between the years 1968 and 1973, the capabilities of the military had been severely disrupted by the increasing number of AWOL offenses and desertions. Interestingly, and possibly an indication of the complete disgust and feeling of remorse over their time in Vietnam, one-fifth of the 93,250 deserters were soldiers that had already completed their tours of duty in Vietnam.²¹ In 1971, the Army experienced absences higher than any other time in its history. The AWOL and desertion rates were

¹⁸ Ibid., 95.

¹⁹ David S. Surrey, Choice of Conscience Vietnam Era Military and Draft Resisters in Canada (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 53-4.

²⁰ Ibid., 58.

²¹ Moser, 77.

three times higher than the Korean War rate. At one point, an American soldier was going AWOL every two minutes, and one was deserting every six minutes.²² It was estimated that the absenteeism deprived the military of approximately one million man hours. This number amounts to nearly half the total time actually spent in Vietnam.²³

The GI anti-war movement had begun with individuals who decided to speak out against the war. For his decision, the GI often was rewarded with a harsh jail sentence. In 1965, Henry Howe, a soldier from Fort Bliss in El Paso, was sentenced to two years in prison simply for participating in a public demonstration against the war.²⁴ The GI anti-war movement in the United States experienced a dramatic change after 1967. The movement changed from scattered groups protesting, into a domestic social movement.²⁵

Soldiers, fed up with the war, risked jail sentences by participating in anti-war demonstrations. On Christmas Eve 1968, thirty dissenters in uniform and a number of civilians met in front of the JFK square in Saigon to demonstrate against the war. In July of 1969, one hundred African-Americans held an anti-war protest in Qui-Nhon. In November of 1969, an ad signed by 1,365 active duty servicemen was placed in the New York Times calling for Americans to join the November 15 anti-war moratorium.²⁶

²² Myra MacPherson, Long Time Passing: Vietnam and the Haunted Generation (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1984), 36.

²³ Ibid., 80.

²⁴ Moser, 68.

²⁵ Ibid., 69.

²⁶ Ibid., 57.

Soldiers in Vietnam also used a highly effective form of protest: Combat refusal. This form of protest began a rapid rise in 1968. During that year alone, there were at least ten major refusals and hundreds of minor ones. The First Cavalry Division alone reported thirty-five cases of combat refusal in 1970. At times, entire units refused combat orders.²⁷ Soldiers simply refused to go out on missions they deemed unnecessary or unreasonably dangerous. Those officers who tried to push their soldiers harder than they wanted to be pushed, sometimes became the victims of the soldiers' most dangerous form of protest, fragging.

Fragging was the actual physical attack on officers by men under their command. These attacks were often fatal, and experienced an alarming increase during the Vietnam War. In World War II, a war in which 18 million men served, there were 370 reported cases of violence directed at officers that resulted in court-martials. By comparison, during a two year period in Vietnam, from January 1970, through January 1972, in which there were 700,000 men serving, 363 cases of violence directed at officers that involved explosives, and another 118 cases listed as possible fragging were reported. These figures do not include attacks directed at officers in which knives and rifles were used. The psychiatry division at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, documented 800 incidents of fragging, from 1969 through 1972. This figure also excludes cases involving guns and knives.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., 45.

²⁸ Surrey, 56.

Perhaps the most courageous form of resistance was made by those men who served in Vietnam as in-service conscientious objectors. These were men who, while they were conscientious objectors, were also compelled by a sense of duty as Americans to contribute. They served as truck drivers, cooks, and perhaps one of the most dangerous jobs in Vietnam, medics. Men who became medics bore witness to the absolute destruction that bullets and explosive devices can do to the human body. They experienced the same stresses of combat as their fellow soldiers. In the middle of a battle often in unprotected areas, it was not unusual to see unarmed medics treating their fallen comrades.

John Lawrence, an Army medic in Vietnam from 1968-1970, spent the first six months of his tour in Vietnam as a medic with the 24th evacuation hospital. The 24th was a direct casualty receiving center, whose primary function was to stabilize casualties and ship them out. The six months Lawrence spent at the evacuation hospital gave him the "opportunity" to experience the horrors of war up close, and as a result he has spent years in therapy.²⁹ Lawrence saw bodies stacked like cordwood. He saw nineteen and twenty year old men die with frightening regularity. He saw too much blood. He saw limbs and intestines piled up on the floor, and bodies of dead soldiers that expand and explode from the extreme heat of Vietnam.³⁰ These experiences traumatized

²⁹Gerald R. Gioglio, *Days Of Decision: An Oral History Of Conscientious Objectors In The Military During The Vietnam War* (New Jersey: The Broken Rifle Press, 1989),21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

him to such an extent that he spent the next several years, with the help of a therapist, trying to cope with the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, an illness that affected a considerable number of the American soldiers who served in Vietnam.³¹

In-service conscientious objectors found themselves in a unique situation. They were against war, and the killing associated with it, but because of the sense of obligation they felt to their country, they believed it was their responsibility to help in some capacity. When they returned home from the war they came home as Vietnam Veterans. Many of the in service conscientious objectors found that they did not fit in with either group, the anti-war protesters or the pro-war group.³² "Upon coming home I got into a real abusive situation with myself and substances. This was a response not just to Vietnam, but to my family's and my country's response to going to Vietnam, and to my being a conscientious objector. . . . I felt unable, powerless, worthless, and very bad when I came back. I was angry and depressed."³³

Perhaps the most interesting and most knowledgeable anti-war protesters were those individuals who had gone to Vietnam and come back after their tours of duty to protest

³¹ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder will be examined later in this paper.

³² Gioglio, 268.

³³ Ibid., 298.

against the war. Many anti-war veterans were motivated to speak out because of their belief in the democratic system and the ability of citizens to affect change.³⁴ Jan Berry was just such an individual. He was a West Point graduate who served in Vietnam as an Army radio technician with the 18th Aviation Company in 1962. His feelings about the war first started to change when he began having contact with U.S. advisors. "When the Special Forces people came back from their missions they were saying things to the effect that we should be should be supporting the other side, because these people have legitimate grievances and the other side is the only one. . . really trying to help do something for these people."³⁵

Jan Berry's views on the war changed so dramatically, that in 1967, he along with a small group of Vietnam veterans, formed the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). The group held its first meeting on 1 June 1967. The foremost priority among its members was to make sure that they were all educated about the war. Their own experiences were not enough. The members made a conscious decision that they would learn as much about the war as possible. The members wanted to ensure that they could

³⁴ Richard Stacewitz, Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 191.

³⁵ Moser, 43

intelligently argue against continued American involvement in Vietnam. Initially, they dressed in suits and ties to show that they were serious. Dressing in this manner helped distinguish them from the radical protesters who received most of the media attention. At future demonstrations, some members wore their dress uniforms, complete with the medals they had won. Vietnam veterans, medals and all, seen protesting against the war had a convincing effect on the public.³⁶ Anti-war protesters could no longer be viewed as a collection of misfits and radicals.

The group vowed to debate anyone, at any time. They asked questions. For example, they wanted to know why the elections promised by the Geneva Accords in 1956, had never taken place. The group was convinced that only by raising the tough questions could the level of public consciousness be raised. The ultimate goal of the VVAW was to inform the public about the reality of the Vietnam War. The VVAW believed that by providing additional information the public could then be better able to make a decision about the war.

The ranks of the VVAW were filled with patriotic men who had gone to war when their time came. Its members believed in their country and the democratic system. In spite of this, many of the VVAW members had their faith shaken by the events of the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. After witnessing the beatings and the tear gassing of American citizens, many members became disillusioned. Morale dropped as members began echoing such sentiments as, "To hell with it. If this is the way things are

³⁶ Stacewitz, 201.

going in this country, I'm not going to participate."³⁷ As morale dropped, so did the number of VVAW members. As membership declined, the Los Angeles chapter, coordinated by James Boggio, agitated for a radical approach directed at those in power. This agitation caused a split among various chapters. Despite the problems with membership after the Democratic Convention, the VVAW survived. The group even experienced a resurgence after the My Lai massacre in 1969.³⁸ By 1972, the VVAW had become very political and had grown to a 50,000 member mailing list.

One of the biggest moments in the history of the VVAW came in 1971. On 18 April 1971, fifteen hundred veterans converged on Washington D.C. to stage a four day protest.³⁹ The event was dubbed Dewey Canyon III, named after Dewey Canyon I, a mission in which a secret invasion of Laos was carried out by American soldiers. Despite threats of arrest, the group camped at the Washington Mall. President Nixon in an attempt to discredit the group, claimed that the demonstrators were not authentic Vietnam veterans. They were in fact, according to Nixon, nothing more than hippies. However, when a reporter interviewed the protesters, she was presented with over a thousand combat cards (military service cards DD-214). When this information was reported the next day in the newspaper, it completely discredited Nixon's allegations. The demonstration came to a climax on 23 April 1971, as one by one, seven hundred veterans

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

walked up the steps of congress and stood before a fence that had been erected to keep them out. At the fence they each announced their name, rank and the awards received while serving in Vietnam, as each spoke, he threw his medals over the fence. It was a powerful statement, seven hundred men giving back the medals to those who had once conferred those honors upon them.⁴⁰

The grievances that the veterans expressed at Dewey Canyon III received little coverage in the press; however, the actions that the veterans took enabled them to come away with a feeling of solidarity and empowerment.⁴¹ John Kerry, who would later become a U.S. senator from Massachusetts, described the veterans' actions in these terms:

We are determined to undertake one last mission, to search out and destroy the last vestige of this barbaric war, to pacify our own hearts, to conquer the hate and fear that have driven this country these last ten years and more, and so when thirty years from now our brothers go down the street without a leg, without an arm, or a face, and a small boy asks why, we will be able to say "Vietnam" and not mean a desert, not a filthy obscene memory, but a place where America finally turned and where soldiers like us helped it in turning.⁴²

The veteran turned protester was not the radical, communist hippie, that the press so often presented as anti-war protesters. These men were heroes. Men who had served their country on the battlefield, only to come home disillusioned and disgusted by their country's actions in Vietnam. They had seen the best and worst that war had to offer and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 249.

⁴¹ Douglas Allen and Ngo Vinh Long, eds., Coming To Terms: Indochina the United States and the War, (Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: London Press, 1989), 256.

⁴² Ibid., 249.

had concluded that this was a war that the United States had no business participating in. These men were patriots who loved their country, and in protest just as in battle, they were far from disrespecting the values that she stands for, they were in fact, valiantly defending them.

Civilian Resistance to the Vietnam War

Civilians in the United States found several different ways to protest against the war. Some demonstrated in the streets, and on college campuses at anti-war rallies. Some burned their draft cards, fled to Canada, or avoided the draft all together by moving from place to place with the hope that their draft board would be unable to catch up with them. Many applied for and won conscientious objector status, doing two years of public service in the United States or serving in the military in non-combat roles, some as medics. Still others, gave their lives in protest, dousing themselves with gasoline and setting themselves on fire.

Whatever form of protest they chose, the decision was not an easy one, and it often came with a price. Just as it was for those in the military who resisted, civilians who resisted the war also faced consequences such as the threat of jail, violence against them, and in some cases, the loss of life was a possibility. Many felt the division between family members: "The older man in the photograph had his arm around his son. . . within four years of the time that photograph was taken, Carl and his parents had come to see each other as the enemy."⁴³ Such was the divisiveness of the Vietnam War. Not since

⁴³ Tollefson, 3.

the Civil War had families in the United States been so torn by an issue.

Fortunately, there have always been men in the United States who are willing to go to war to protect the country's interests. There have also been those whose convictions provided them the courage needed to stand up and protest against their country's participation in war. During the Vietnam War, both warriors and protesters fought and died for their beliefs-not only in the jungles of Vietnam, but also on the streets and campuses in the United States.⁴⁴

During the 1960s, draft protests began to take on a new dimension. These protests were unlike any others seen in the United States. Draft evasion became dominant. Individuals, through illegal or legal means, simply avoided the draft hoping to outlast the war. Some of the methods used to avoid the draft included obtaining conscientious objector status, having a child, claiming a physical or psychological problem. This particular method was one that appealed to many draft resisters, because a drug problem, or homosexuality could be considered a problem with which the military did not necessarily want to deal. Until 1965, a man could avoid the draft by getting married, or student deferments could also be obtained, undergraduate deferments were available until 1970. Still others left the country. Paranoia caught up to some of these individuals as they began to look over their shoulder to be sure they were not being followed. Even those who fled to Canada feared that the United States' government would send agents searching for them in an effort to bring them back to the United States to face prosecution

⁴⁴ Ibid.

or military duty.⁴⁵

The movement to refuse the draft had begun to grow in 1965, and Congress took notice. The members of Congress responded angrily, claiming that the movement must be crushed, "Draft resisters show a sense of utter irresponsibility and lack of respect. . . . What these people have done is furnish fodder to Hanoi and the Viet Cong."⁴⁶

When the United States began drafting men to serve in Vietnam, the base of the draft resistance expanded beyond the pacifist and religious communities. It came to include political, as well as moral opponents. Those opponents included among their ranks individuals opposed to all war, as well as those who opposed the Vietnam War specifically.⁴⁷ This was a major divergence from those who had attempted to attain conscientious objector status during previous wars. Prior to the Vietnam War, conscientious objectors were defined as those who could not fight and kill in any war. Many of the conscientious objectors during the Vietnam era were opposed only to the war in Vietnam.

The anti-war battle in the United States was much more than street demonstrations. It invaded homes, becoming an argument over the dinner table, leading to fractures in families that even time has been unable to heal. It led to tearful good-byes and silent

⁴⁵ George Q. Flynn, The Draft 1940-1973 (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 175.

⁴⁶ Kohn, 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

anger.⁴⁸ Parents, finding themselves at a loss to understand their children's actions, were angry and embarrassed. As a result of their acts of resistance, protesters were treated with hostility by their parents who viewed them a disgrace to the family. Most parents perceived military service as an honor and an obligation to one's country, the only way to protect this country: "What can I say to a son who has become a deserter and traitor to his country, family and friends. You know that this is what you are. . . . You are asked to be referred to as a man. You must be kidding. A man is not a sniveling coward who has to run away from authority or discipline, because it is temporarily inconvenient. You must really be a feather in the cap of your Godless communist friends."⁴⁹

Those who tried to gain conscientious objector status often found the road a difficult one, not only at home, but also when attempting to convince their draft boards that they should be exempted. Young men were denied conscientious status almost twice as often as they were exempted; 170,000 received deferments from the draft as conscientious objectors, while 300,000 men were denied.⁵⁰

According to section 6(j) of the Universal Military Training and Service Act of 1951, all men were required to register for the draft when they became eighteen years old. The Act made them liable for military training and service until the age of twenty-six. The tour of active service for draftees was twenty-four months. The Act provided that an

⁴⁸ Tollefson, 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁰Tollefson, 6.

individual could be granted legal status as a conscientious objector if he was a person who by reason of religious training and belief, was conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form. Those who received conscientious objector exemptions were required to perform twenty-four consecutive months of civilian work that contributed to the maintenance of national health or safety. Those individuals who were opposed to only combatant service in the armed forces, but were willing to do non-combat duty, could attempt to secure a I-A-O classification. With this classification, the individual was inducted into the armed forces, and each one of his commanding officers was made aware of his non-combat status, thus ensuring that he would be assigned to positions in which he would not be required to fight. These assignments included such positions as clerk, cook, or medic. If the individual was opposed to both combat and non-combat duties, he could apply for I-O status. If granted, he would be exempted from military duty but as noted above, in order to satisfy the requirements of section 6(j), he was required to find work in the civilian industry that would contribute to the maintenance of national health or safety.

Many believed section 6(j) was unjust and prejudicial because it required that the conscientious objector be opposed to all war. Some conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War faced prosecution because they found themselves unable to truthfully claim that all war is wrong, protesting specifically against the Vietnam War. For their resistance, they faced the possibility of up to five years in jail and up to ten thousand

dollars in fines.⁵¹

Some men refused to participate in the draft at all. Philip Supina, a Boston University graduate student wrote this letter to his draft board in Tucson, Arizona on May 1, 1968: "I am enclosing the order for me to report for my pre-induction physical exam for the armed forces. I have absolutely no intention to report for that exam. . . or to aid in any way the American war effort in Vietnam."⁵² Supina was convicted of draft evasion and sentenced to four years in prison.⁵³

Legislation introduced and passed into law in 1965 made the destruction of a draft card illegal. The destruction of a draft card thus became a crime punishable by a prison term of up to five years. Those who burned their draft cards could be jailed. They also alienated the mainstream law abiding critics of the movement, who viewed the act as one of cowardice, perpetrated by an individual attempting to shirk his duty. Draft card burning came to symbolize the public and collective resistance to the draft. The action brought resisters into the streets, where, by burning their draft cards, they were committing crimes of civil disobedience against the Selective Service Act.

David Miller, who would later become a radical protest leader at Le Monge College, led his parish in a mass draft card burning demonstration in Syracuse. On 15 October

⁵¹ James Finn ed., A Conflict of Loyalties The Case For Conscientious Objection, (New York: Pegasus, 1968), viii.

⁵² Sevy, 73.

⁵³ Ibid.

1965, Miller burned his draft card in full view of television cameras. His was the first widely publicized act of civil disobedience to be televised. A large portion of the American public took a dim view of Miller's actions, many believed his act was nothing short of treasonous. The New York Daily News demanded that, "the communist incited beatniks, pacifists and damned idiots who are demonstrating, be tried for treason."⁵⁴

The following day, demonstrators paid the price. They were met with violence from counter-protesters who were armed with paint and eggs. On the same day at a demonstration in Oakland, California, protesters were met by Hells Angeles who waded into the crowd producing several injuries.⁵⁵ Miller's actions, despite coming on the heels of the new draft card destruction legislation, and the possibility of bodily harm, inspired others to demonstrate by burning their draft cards.

Tom Cornell, David McRenolds and Edelman Lister, planned to burn their draft cards on 6 November 1965. Two days before their planned demonstration, Norman Morrison, a thirty-two year old Quaker and father of three, burned himself to death at the Pentagon in protest of the war. His actions set the stage for an emotionally charged day. Cornell, McRenolds and Lister were met by counter-demonstrators who carried signs that read, "burn yourselves instead of your draft cards" and "drop dead red."⁵⁶

The demonstrators lit their draft cards only to be sprayed with water from counter-

⁵⁴ Michael Ferber, The Resistance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 24.

⁵⁵ Small, 47.

⁵⁶ Small, 49.

demonstrators. The men dried off their cards and lit them again. When they had finished, the police escorted them, an officer in front of them and an officer behind them, to awaiting police cars. The men fully expected to be taken directly to jail. However, in a vivid example of the tension that was building between those who supported the war and those who did not, the men realized that the police were taking them home. The police had escorted them away from the demonstration not to take them to jail, but to provide protection from the counter-demonstrators.

The division between those who protested the war and those who supported it created the potential for dangerous confrontations. Once an individual decided to make an anti-war protest, regardless of the method he chose, his life was permanently altered. Many across the country resented his actions. His family, embarrassed by his behavior, often turned away from him, unwilling or unable to understand his actions.

CHAPTER 6 THE PRINT MEDIA AND THE VIETNAM WAR

The War Reported in American Newspapers

The war in Vietnam, as reported in the mainstream press, was one that had been filtered and engineered for the readers in the United States. Often misinformation from the military to the press led to inaccurate reporting. Editors were also responsible for some of the inaccuracies in the news reports. Information disseminated by the military often conflicted with what the journalists in Vietnam were witnessing and reporting. This discrepancy led editors to disbelieve the reports they received from their reporters in the field.

This is not intended to suggest that the entire print media was guilty of falsely reporting the war in Vietnam. In fact, as the war continued year after year, a younger generation of journalist emerged. The new generation was one that had been molded by campus demonstrations, and had experienced protest activities first hand. They brought these experiences with them when they began their careers writing for various newspapers and magazines across the country. The New York Times was one publication that in general, was willing to question the role of American troops in Vietnam, often publishing articles critical of the United States involvement in Vietnam.

The Times examined the American role prior to the arrival of U.S. combat troops in 1965. For example, as early as 1962, Times reporter David Halberstam had misgivings

about the United States role in Vietnam. On 21 October 1962, he reported: "This is a war fought in the presence of largely uncommitted. . . peasantry. . . . The closer one gets to the actual contact level of this war, the further one gets from official optimism."¹ The New York Times continued to publish articles critical of the United States involvement in Vietnam. On 15 August 1963, David Halberstam reported that South Vietnamese casualties had increased 33% while enemy casualties had actually decreased.² The United States public had not expected to read of such distressing numbers. Most believed that the United States military efforts in Vietnam were going well. Marguerite Higgins, a reporter for the New York Herald, in her article "Vietnam Fact or Fiction" reported that she had just returned from a four week trip to Vietnam and flatly denied Halberstam's assertions, stating that his report was false. The furor became so intense over the differences in reporting that at one point, the Times suggested that Halberstam tone down his dispatches; he threatened to quit and the matter was forgotten.³

The print media that reported the war was often no less confusing than the war itself. While articles published in the Times were often critical of the United States involvement in Vietnam, many of the other print media attempted to paint a positive picture of the everyday events of the war. These attempts were most evident in the early stages of the

¹ David Halberstam, "U.S. Deeply involved in the Uncertain Struggle for Vietnam," New York Times, 21 October 1962, 1.

² David Halberstam, "Vietnamese Reds Gain In Key Area," New York Times, 15 August 1963, 1.

³ William M. Hammond, Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 13.

war. The efforts included the reporting of high enemy body counts and “gung-ho” stories about our brave and virtuous boys in action. Conversely, the media attention given to demonstrators was usually negative, often portraying demonstrators as bizarre long-haired misfits, which in many cases was not true. For example, at the first campus teach-in, many of the participants were not long-haired radicals, but rather straight looking individuals with short hair and ties. The media also focused on the lurid and easily stereotyped images of the demonstrations. If there were flags of the National Liberation Front flying at the demonstrations, they were photographed and printed in newspapers and magazines, no matter how outnumbered they were by the flag of the United States. The minority of rock throwers made for much better copy than those who demonstrated peacefully.

The mainstream media wrote about the war under these terms until the Tet Offensive. After Tet, the American public demanded to know more about the war. The American public wanted to know how an enemy that the media reported all but defeated, could show such tenacity during the Tet holiday. Despite the increase in critical war coverage after the Tet Offensive, the coverage of the protesters did not change much. The media comments on the peace movement were twice as often unfavorable as favorable.⁴

President Johnson’s initial response to the Tet Offensive was to use the media in order to create a public relations drive designed to promote optimism. American news

⁴ Tom Wells, The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 260.

correspondents in Vietnam were briefed daily by Gen. Westmoreland in order to reassure the American public that the war was under control. In addition Johnson informed the Washington press corps that the Communist operation had been a complete failure.⁵

The American press was not convinced and consequently neither was the American public. The final blow to Johnson's plan came when Walter Cronkite rejected the official forecasts of victory. Cronkite was considered the nation's most reliable journalist. The public trusted his updates on the progress in Vietnam. Upon his return from Saigon, he reported to the American people that it seemed more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam was to end in a stalemate.⁶ The above incident involving Cronkite was not a journalist shaping the public views, it was instead, the public's views expressed by a journalist. The Tet Offensive shook the American public and raised questions about our leaders' ability to win the war.

Unfortunately, the print media as a whole continued to demonstrate a lack of courage when reporting the Vietnam War, and the subsequent anti-war demonstrations. When demonstrators began protesting in the streets they were an unpopular group. The media realized that the outrageous sold newspapers, and as a result they focused on the negative antics displayed by a minority of the protesters. The media under-reported the actual number of protesters, often focusing on the outlandish behavior and dress of some of the protesters. This type of reporting was misleading. In reality, the protesters represented a

⁵ Karnow, 560.

⁶ Ibid.

cross-section of America, as a group, they included housewives, high school and college students, men and women, both middle-age and young.

In 1962, Robert Kennedy returned from a trip to Saigon brimming with confidence and affirmed that, “We will win.”⁷ During the early stages of the war, with public sentiment firmly in support of whatever means were necessary for victory, the New York Times reported that: “The Vietnam War is a struggle this country can not shirk.”⁸ This confidence would not last however, as the media experienced a metamorphosis during the course of the war.

The War Reported in Magazines

Magazine articles during the Vietnam War closely mirrored American newspaper articles written during the same period. However, they rarely were they as critical of either the military, or the war protesters. Often critical articles were in a text that included ways the United States could extricate itself from the war. Magazine editors, like their newspaper counterparts, nonetheless, seemingly found some of the bizarre antics of protesters impossible to resist, often printing them as representative of the movement as a whole. Magazines experienced a change in the way they reported the war similar to the one newspapers went through, as the war marched on to its inevitable conclusion.

⁷ Ibid., 272.

⁸ Ibid.

Time and Life Magazine provide examples of the changes that some of the printed media went through during the war. In the early 1960s, as the U.S. intervention in Vietnam began to grow, the top editors of Time and Life realized that they could not ignore the war and opened a bureau in Saigon. Despite maintaining their own bureau, the magazines' editors relied on information supplied by the White House, State Department, and Pentagon officials. The articles were generally positive and supportive of the war effort in Vietnam, casting a warm glow on the conscience of the American citizen. In 1965, Life's chief editor, Hedley Donovan, went to Vietnam to see for himself how the war effort was going. After the usual round of briefings and a look at the battlefield, he reported "The war is worth winning."⁹

In July of 1965, Life Magazine reported that, "while the battle in Vietnam is disagreeable, it is necessary. The U.S. must halt communism at the boundaries of the Cold War. North Vietnam is attempting to conquer a country that the United States has agreed to protect."¹⁰ In December of 1966, Life referred to the anti-war protesters as mindless hooligans and "an outrage against the morals of a generation."¹¹ Such reporting, again, was a reflection of public sentiment at the time.

In late 1967, Donovan's opinion about the war changed, and the change was reflected

⁹ Ibid., 502.

¹⁰ Eugene V. Rostow, "The Hard Realities of Power Demand That We Must Fight On," Life 59 (2 July 1965): 32.

¹¹ "Campus protest yes violence no," editorial, Life 61 (2 December 1966): 4.

in an October editorial in Life. Donovan reported that the United States had gone into Vietnam for honorable and sensible purposes, but the undertaking had proved to be harder, longer, and more complicated than American's leaders had foreseen. The price for victory had become too expensive, no longer worth any price as he had earlier reported.¹²

Despite Donovan's doubts, Life continued to support the United States' role in Vietnam, publishing articles that attempted to prove, even in the most horrible situations, the South Vietnamese still trusted and believed that the United States was there to help. For example, in November of 1967, Life published an article about a little girl whose leg had been shot off after she walked into a free fire zone. A free fire zone was an area in which Americans operated under the assumption that if anything in that area moved, it was Viet Cong. It was deemed safer, for the soldier, to shoot first and ask questions later. The article reported that when the American soldiers realized that the little girl was not a Viet Cong, they helped her, and even though she had been relieved of her leg, the little girl was not frightened because the American GI's were so gentle.

The little girl's family received 4000 piastres, approximately \$35.00 for the girl's injuries. She could have received more from the Vietnamese government, but because the family delayed and did not fill out the paperwork within the specified time limit, they were denied any other compensation.¹³ The article placed the blame on the little girl for

¹² Karnow, 503.

¹³ Don Moser, "The Edge of Peace," Life 65 (8 November 1967): 26-35.

failing to realize how dangerous a free fire zone was. It then blamed the fact that the family received such a paltry sum of money in compensation for their loss, on the family themselves, for not getting the necessary paperwork done in a timely fashion.

The article printed in Life Magazine showed the horrible effect of war, a child horribly wounded by the American military, but it continued to depict the American soldier, the same one who had shot the girl, as a gentle individual only there to help her. It is impossible to believe that an American GI with good intentions, would be enough to relieve a little girl of her fear and anger at being shot. The article would have the American public believe its fighting forces were fresh faced saviors to the people of Vietnam. The truth, unfortunately, was that most of the Vietnamese regarded the American GI as just another invader in a long history of struggle.

Subsequent articles continued to support the United States' efforts in Vietnam, but began to question the methods the military was using to achieve its goals. Again, this is a reflection of the changing attitudes of the American people. The majority of Americans did not question the need for U.S. involvement in Vietnam, they did however, question the strategies that their government continued to use in that involvement.

In January of 1968, Life presented the first of a two part editorial, complete with suggestions on how the United States could end the war in Vietnam. While neither was critical of the war, or non-supportive of the U.S. efforts, the editorial suggested that it was time for the United States to end its involvement in the war. The editorial claimed that the suggestions for achieving this end were actually, "logical developments of

Westmoreland's strategy to date."¹⁴ The editorial suggested a switch from the hunting down of enemy big force units, to the uprooting of Vietcong guerrillas and the infrastructure inside South Vietnam. a greater emphasis on the training and build-up of the South Vietnamese Forces. and lastly, a change in bombing patterns that would include a reduction of the bombing on North Vietnam while increasing the bombing attacks on those areas closer to the fighting front.¹⁵

This particular editorial is reflective of the majority of public opinion at the time. While not encouraging the United States to pull out of the war and abandon its efforts there, it clearly expressed an interest in shifting the emphasis toward a more southern strategy, aimed at a gradual de-escalation of the war against North Vietnam, while at the same time intensifying attacks on the Viet Cong Guerrillas in the south. The assumption was that this strategy would be accompanied with a plan to increase the effort made to prepare the South Vietnamese to assume a greater role in their own struggle. The editorial also pointed out that Westmoreland had consistently beaten the NVA and VC forces. He soundly defeated the best Communists units whenever he was able to engage them. For example, he destroyed them by a kill ratio of four to one in the battle of Plei Me-la Drang.¹⁶ Clearly, the editorial supported the efforts of the U.S. fighting forces, but Life Magazine, like the American public, wanted to see a change in tactics.

¹⁴ "Reexamining The Conduct Of The War," Life 64 (5 January 1968): 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The second editorial in the two part series, explained that the original United States commitment made by Eisenhower in 1954, and repeated by Johnson and Kennedy, was to help the South Vietnamese establish a strong viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression.¹⁷ The Life editorial supported the commitment made by our presidents and reminded its readers that the U.S. job would not be complete in Vietnam until South Vietnam, which had suffered much from the war, became a part of the process of self determination, economic progress, and stable political climate that was occurring in the rest of non-communist Asia.¹⁸

In April of 1968, Life reported a shift in public opinion. Americans questioned whether a complete defeat of the communists in Vietnam was worth the cost.¹⁹ The shift in public opinion was reflected by the change in the type of articles that had begun to appear in the media. Clearly, the media that had once blindly supported the war in Vietnam, "at any cost," had come to realize that the President and his military leaders had been waging a war that had become impossible to win. With this realization, came a change in the nature of the articles, from blind support to serious questions and doubt, and eventually to pleas for a withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam.

¹⁷ "How the Fighting Might End," Life 64 (12 January 1968): 4.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Life 64 Editorial section April 12, 1968, 4.

The change in media response to the war did not bring with it a lessening of the criticism aimed at the men who were fighting in Vietnam, nor for those individuals in the United States protesting against the war. The media continued to focus on the negative aspects of the protesters. This negative reporting continued even after Tet, which can be viewed as a turning point in both the public and the media's response to the events in Vietnam. Protesters were portrayed negatively in the printed media approximately twice as often as they were depicted in a favorable light.²⁰ Likewise, while the media rarely condemned the soldier in the field, even defending some questionable behavior, it had come to report the war in a negative fashion. This did not necessarily create the public's resentment towards the war, but it did contribute. As the resentment grew, the soldier, in the eyes of the American public, was held responsible for the military's failures in the war.

²⁰ Wells, 260.

CHAPTER 7 RESULTS OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY PROTESTERS AND SOLDIERS

Regardless of whether an individual served in Vietnam, chose to stay home and fight against the war, or became a soldier only to later change his mind about the war, he often paid a costly price. As has been discussed above, the threat of jail, the alienation of family and friends, as well as possible abuse, were very real consequences of their actions. The sections that follow are further examples of the type of experiences that, as a result of their choices, the Vietnam Veteran and the Vietnam War protester have in common.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Other than death, possibly the worst trauma to affect veterans and protesters alike, was Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, commonly referred to as PTSD. The term PTSD is a relatively new term for an affliction that has damaged war veterans since the Civil War. The disorder was formally recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. It is a psychological disorder that is brought on by catastrophic events considered to be outside of the normal human experience. Examples would include fires, assault, natural disasters, or the type of situations found in combat: long periods of tension, lack of sleep, hostage or prisoner taking, and extreme danger. A list of symptoms associated with PTSD include insomnia, nightmares, outbursts of anger and emotional distancing. It is

not surprising, in light of the above information, that PTSD is common among war veterans.

The first documentation of war neurosis occurred during the Civil War. Military leaders and soldiers referred to the ailment as soldiers' heart. The symptoms of soldiers' heart included depression and listlessness. Military leaders noticed it among many of the troops.¹ The Surgeon General of the Union Army diagnosed the condition as nostalgia, and noted that three out of every one thousand troops were afflicted. Civil War records show an incidence of insanity in six out of every one thousand troops. Military physicians also noted similar numbers among the troops in the Franco-Prussian, Spanish American, and Boer Wars.²

The first recognizable symptoms were noticed in World War I veterans. The term shell shocked was used to describe the disoriented and dazed state that afflicted some of the troops. Physicians attributed the psychological damage that affected the soldiers to exploding artillery shells. The physicians were stumped however, by the number of men that exhibited signs of shell shock who had never been exposed to the battlefield barrage of artillery. This fact contributed to the theory that those who displayed symptoms of shell shock were weaklings and cowards, who had been only marginally adjusted before their war experiences.³ Sigmund Freud argued after the war that shell shock was not

¹ Wilbur J. Scott. The Politics of Readjustment (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1993), 29.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid. . 30.

physical in origin. He maintained that it was a psychological illness, brought on by catastrophic and incomprehensible events that overwhelmed the psyche.⁴

World War II veterans displayed symptoms similar to their First World War counterparts, although the condition had become known as battle fatigue. The United States' First Army in Europe reported one hundred-two psychiatric casualties per one thousand troops.⁵ In an effort to reduce these number, each division was assigned a psychiatrist. A soldier who was thought to be suffering from battle fatigue was given rest and relaxation (time off). Treatments included doses of sodium pentathol and hypnosis to encourage the soldier to talk about his experiences. The treatments were designed to get the soldier back into the battle as quickly as possible.

Battle fatigue became increasingly common among veterans. The problem was considered serious enough that in 1944, a symposium was held to discuss the high number of psychiatric casualties. Psychiatrists found that the contributing factors to battle fatigue were: lack of will power, extended time in a combat zone, and poor leadership, which led to low morale and defeat in battle.⁶ With this information, military leaders attempted to establish preventative measures to lower the number of psychological casualties. Unfortunately, the measures would prove to be short term fixes for a long term problem. Society as a whole, was slow to recognize the on going price

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. . 32.

⁶ Joel Osler Brende and Erin Randolph Parson, Vietnam Veterans The Road to Recovery (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), xii.

veterans, especially those of the Vietnam War, paid for their experiences in war. PTSD as discussed above, is not new, only its name has changed through the years. The symptoms: nightmares, insomnia, excessive startle reaction to loud noises and outbursts of anger were recognized among hospitalized veterans of World War I. The military and the public, however, have often considered those who suffered from the disorder as weak. The average American citizen prefers to believe that their soldiers are strong individuals, both mentally and physically. Ideally, he is an individual who is able to survive the trauma of war unscathed. Consequently, when the public hears of veterans who have been diagnosed with a psychological disorder such as PTSD, they are unwilling to acknowledge it. A soldier who suffers from PTSD has been perceived as someone who must have been weak to begin with, obviously not soldier material. However, nothing could be farther from the truth. The reality of war is brutal and ugly. A soldier who is able to survive war with his body intact is fortunate, however, that does not guarantee his psychological state has not been affected by what he has seen and done.

During World War II, it became apparent, that the killing and sustained exposure to the death of friends, and the possibility of one's own death, could have lasting traumatic consequences on a large percentage of combat veterans.⁷ The evidence also began to indicate that the lasting psychological problems that can occur, as a result of the trauma of war, are not visited only on the weak. To the contrary, it has been documented that some

⁷ Robert Hendin and Ann Pollinger-Hass, Wounds Of War (New York: Basis Books Inc., 1984), 6.

of America's greatest heroes have been tormented by their experiences in war.

Audie Murphy, for example, was the most decorated American soldier of World War II. He was wounded in battle on three separate occasions. While serving with the infantry in Europe he was personally credited with 214 enemy kills. He was not the kind of man people would consider either cowardly or weak. After his death in 1971, it was reported that he was never able to escape the nightmares that visited him while he slept. It was during these nightmares that he would relive his terrifying war experiences. He was unable to sleep without a loaded pistol under his pillow.⁸ As Audie Murphey's problems demonstrate, regardless of its name, soldier's heart, shell shock, battle fatigue or post traumatic stress disorder, the traumatic consequence of war on an individual's psyche were not limited to the weak.

During the Vietnam War, military command addressed the problem of PTSD by providing each battalion with medical personnel specifically trained to treat psychiatric disorders. In addition, each infantry and marine division was assigned a psychiatrist and staff. It was believed that with personnel so close to troops, those suffering psychiatric difficulties would have help readily available. This accessible help enabled troops to return to duty quickly after treatment. Initially, the approach seemed to pay dividends, as only five of every thousand troops suffered from psychiatric breakdowns during the years 1965-1967. However, as the military and others would learn later, their efforts were nothing more than Band-Aids that masked the psychiatric problems suffered by Vietnam

⁸ Ibid., 6.

veterans. In the long run, the efforts of the military to prevent PTSD had the effect of prolonging an inevitable problem. In fact, their misguided efforts, and the nature of the Vietnam War may have actually increased the effects of PTSD.

A larger number of veterans from Vietnam War were affected with the symptoms of PTSD than veterans from any previous war that involved American soldiers. According to the National Vietnam Veterans' Readjustment Study, in 1990, 15.2% of the male Vietnam veterans were suffering from full-blown cases of PTSD. Another 11% were suffering from symptoms that were severe enough to be adversely affecting their lives. There is also a lifetime prevalence of PTSD in 30.6% of Vietnam veterans.⁹

To understand how this is possible, despite the safeguards the military had installed to prevent PTSD, one must look at the type of war that the U.S. had gotten involved in. As stated above, the Vietnam War was a guerrilla war with very few long battles. The American soldiers trained for duty in Vietnam were not receiving the type of training they needed to fight a guerrilla war. The enemy would hit and run, causing death and destruction, often leaving before the American soldier could get to him. Americans were cut down by an unseen enemy, who was proficient at setting booby traps intended to maim and kill American soldiers. Those who survived the attacks were left with blood on their hands and no sign of the enemy, the level of frustration among American

⁹ Richard A. Kulka, et al., Trauma and The Vietnam Generation, with a forward by Alan Cranston (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1990), 52-53.

troops was extreme.

The elusiveness of the enemy led to a large number of civilian deaths, as they became scapegoats, absorbing the full brunt of the American GI's frustration. Some of the deaths were inadvertent, while others were in retaliation for the killing of a fellow soldier. Veterans felt guilty about acts they had witnessed, or taken part in, such as rape or the mutilation of the enemy.¹⁰ The guilt associated with these actions played a role in the stress disorders developed by veterans.¹¹

The American GI found that in many circumstances it was difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between friend and foe. It was not uncommon for a soldier to see the Vietnamese woman who did his laundry, walking the base grounds during the day, and have the base experience a surprisingly accurate mortar attack that night. These realities made it difficult for the GI to feel safe at any time. This led to extended periods of anxiety.

The one year tour of duty, intended to limit a young man's exposure to the trauma of war, was also a contributing factor to the psychiatric damage suffered by American GIs. The problem with the one year rotation in Vietnam was that the new recruit, who had received inadequate training before he arrived in Vietnam, found himself learning as he went. If he was careful and learned from the men who had been there for a while, his chances for survival were much improved. However, just about the time he became

¹⁰ Henden, 28-31.

¹¹ Ibid.

him to go home. The man who replaced him came in just as he had, inadequately trained, trying to survive long enough to learn the ropes. The constant rotating in and out of troops, led to a lower level of experience among troops and damaged the cohesiveness of the military fighting unit.

The second problem with the one year rotation, was that the soldier in Vietnam knew all he had to do was hold on for one year and he was out. Unlike previous wars, where death or peace was the only way to get out, the soldier in Vietnam was well aware that he would be rotated out of the war in twelve months. In effect, he buried his feelings, fighting them, confident in the fact that if he could survive a year he could go home. Once he made it home, he believed his problems would disappear.

It was not uncommon for a soldier with problems to put off going to see a psychiatrist because he knew he would be away from the war within a year. The soldier mistakenly assumed that once he got home, his problems would cease. Unfortunately, his problems did not go away when he returned home, in fact, they were often exacerbated by his return to the normal routine at home. The soldier with problems was likely to suffer a psychological breakdown. In addition, as men rotated in and out of combat on individual schedules, the emotional support they might have experienced had they been with the same group throughout their tours was lost.

As indicated above, the initial numbers of psychiatric casualties during the Vietnam

War were low, which would seem to indicate that the military's efforts to prevent them had paid off. The low numbers, however, were in fact artificial. Doctors and military personnel had consciously attempted to keep them low. They were often more concerned with their careers, and the bottom line, than they were for the psychiatric welfare of the soldier. Psychiatrists, fearful that the military would transfer them to a more difficult assignment, made a deliberate effort to keep the numbers low. Psychiatrists gave the military what it wanted. Psychiatrists avoided identifying combat as the source of the soldier's mental problem. Instead the troubled GI was classified as either a passive independent character, or a passive aggressive character. This gave the military the opportunity to cite a low psychiatric rate in Vietnam. A character disorder can be defined as a condition that preceded combat, hence the Veteran's Administration was not required to compensate those who suffered from it. Lastly, individuals with anxiety had to be evacuated out, while those with a character disorder were sent back into combat.¹² The problems that occurred as a result of the doctors' actions surfaced later as soldiers returned stateside. Many found it difficult to adjust to life at home.

The quick return home of Vietnam veterans was a factor that also contributed to their problems. When a soldier finished his tour of duty in Vietnam, he was whisked away from the war, often landing in the United States within forty-eight hours. Soldiers in Vietnam were rotated directly out of their fighting unit, put on a plane and sent home. In

¹² Levy, 86.

previous wars, a soldier had time to adjust to his new environment. As far back as ancient times, warriors had rituals to cleanse themselves from the atrocities of war before returning back to society. From the Aeneid, an epic poem by Homer, Virgil ascribes these words to Aeneas: "In me it is not fit, holy things to bear, red as I am from the slaughter and new from war, till in some stream I cleanse the guilt of dire debate and blood in battle spilt."¹³

Veterans who returned home after World War II were greeted with ticker tape parades and generous GI bills. These rituals helped to absolve the veteran of any guilt he may have felt as a result of what he had done in the war. It showed the veteran that he was appreciated. The World War II veteran knew that he had the support of his country for the deeds he had been forced to perform in war. World War II veterans who spoke of nightmares, or recalled the bombing of cities inhabited by citizens, were helped to bury their demons by the American public who viewed them as heroes.¹⁴ When the Vietnam veteran came home, the show of support and understanding was missing.¹⁵ Most returning Vietnam veterans changed out of their uniforms and into civilian clothes at the first opportunity. As one veteran put it: "I was killing gooks in the Delta and seventy-two hours later I am home in bed with my wife and she wonders why I'm different."¹⁶

¹³ Sevy, 56.

¹⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶ Ibid., 63.

The war dragged on and as it did, the morale of the troops declined. The constant taking and retaking of land left American soldiers wondering what their country's goal in Vietnam really was. They perceived their government's actions as evidence of its lack of commitment. The soldiers' realization that their government was not one hundred percent behind them, made them feel as though their lives were senselessly being wasted.¹⁷ This realization and the emotions it fostered in the minds of American GI's was a contributing factor in the rise of psychiatric casualties. The brutality of the war and the inadequate remedies that the military provided to affected soldiers, combined to produce more psychiatric casualties from the Vietnam War than any previous war in which the United States had participated.¹⁸

Conscientious objectors who became medics also suffered from the symptoms of PTSD. Among those involved in a study performed by Gerald L. Gioglio, fifty-seven percent were found to be having trouble adjusting to civilian life.¹⁹ It is not uncommon to find soldiers suffering from the symptoms of PTSD, but it is surprising that those who were against the war, refusing to participate in combat also suffered from PTSD. This would suggest that it was not just participating in the killing, but the entire experience, the stress and grisly scenes, as well as the ethical and moral dilemma of America's

¹⁷ Hendein. 9.

¹⁸ Ibid., xvi.

¹⁹ Tischer. 223.

presence in Vietnam that was so overwhelming to the individual.²⁰

There has not, as yet, been a study to determine the prevalence of PTSD among the anti-war protesters who refused to serve in Vietnam. However, it is clear that the situations experienced while demonstrating were similar to those found in combat: long periods of tension, lack of sleep and extreme danger. These situations could adversely affect them and lead them to suffer from symptoms of the disorder.

Descriptions of various demonstrations sound similar to descriptions of battle. Situations at some of the protests became violent. The likelihood of injury and death was a very real possibility, as is illustrated by this report:

After the militants first probe at a coordinate far to the left of the Pentagon was repelled, they regrouped, toppled a section of wire fence, and raced across the Pentagon's mall into the left side of its plaza. . . . On the heels of these shock troops were much larger forces. . . . Suddenly, another, more daring thrust. Two dozen members of the liberation army, flushed from their penetration of the enemy territory. . . sprinted toward a poorly guarded side door of the Pentagon. . . . They were routed. Army troops inside, overwrought by the tension of endless hours of waiting. . . slammed into them. Afterward, crusty trails of blood decorated the floor of the Pentagon.²¹

The violence in Washington was not an isolated incident. In Chicago another "battle" had flared up. "We set up a hospital just to bring these people in and sew them up. . . the action involved 26,000 men in uniform. Army intelligence viewed the situation as dangerous. This was not Vietnam, this was Chicago."²²

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wells, 196.

²² Maclear, 224.

The war in Vietnam swept across America, as a family somewhere received news of a loved one's death on an average of every thirty minutes. The number of dead soldiers reached a rate of one thousand a month by 1968. The horrible numbers brought a change in America, as protesters attempted to change the conscience of America. The battles in the streets of America were brought into homes via television. As the conflict in the United States began to intensify, war protesters and war supporters alike increased their efforts.²³

The war in Vietnam raged on and protesters in the United States were taking their cause to the streets of America. When possible their protests were coordinated to occur at events that would expose them to the largest audience. This ability to upset the status quo made political leaders nervous and caused some overreactions on their part. The results of these overreactions were often tragic for the protesters and innocent bystanders as well. The Democratic convention in Chicago provides a vivid example of the dangers that protesters found themselves exposed to.

Protesters arranged to hold a demonstration that would coincide with the Democratic convention in Chicago. Mayor Daley, anticipating one hundred thousand demonstrators, brought in twenty-six thousand police and National Guard troops to help control the situation. This number was greater than the number of troops used in any one battle in Vietnam. The number of protesters that actually showed up was estimated at between five and six thousand. The protesters, outnumbered by almost five to one, were told that

²³ Ibid., 227.

there would be no demonstration. They were warned that the police had been given orders to shoot to kill. When the protesters refused to leave, they were met with clubs and tear gas. The officers moved into the crowd of demonstrators chanting kill, kill, kill. Individuals, demonstrators as well as curious bystanders, were assaulted by as many as six police officers at a time.²⁴

The police, out of control, charged the hotel where candidate Eugene McCarthy was staying, clubbed newsmen to the ground and resembled frustrated soldiers on a search and destroy mission. When the "battle" was over, eight hundred people had been injured, some seriously. The similarities to Vietnam continued as the entire event was televised world-wide. The same scene was played out in varying degrees at different locations across the country, paralleling the struggle in Vietnam. These were battles that pitted countrymen against each other.

Chicago was not the only battlefield in America. At Kent State, a rally drew a thousand student protesters gathered around the victory bell, while ten thousand others stood off and watched. School administrators who could have calmed the increasingly tense situation by meeting with students, instead called in the National Guard. The response was predictable as the Guard fired tear gas at the protesters. Rocks and spent tear gas canisters were thrown back at the troops who turned, conferred among themselves and retreated to the top of a small hill. Once at the top of the hill, the

²⁴ Ibid., 226.

guardsmen turned and fired into the crowd of demonstrators. In just thirteen seconds, the Guardsmen had expended sixty-one rounds of ammunition, killing four and wounding nine others.²⁵

On 13 May 1970, three hundred students gathered at Jackson State College in Mississippi to protest the war, and the drafting of black students. Five students were arrested in a minor incident. The mayor, in response to the demonstration, called in the National Guard. A blockade was placed around a thirty block area. On May 14, a number of students gathered outside one of the dormitories on campus. The police ordered the gathering students to leave. In response to the request, the students threw bottles. The students were again ordered to leave, and again they responded by throwing bottles. The police opened fire, killing two and wounding fourteen.²⁶ On 29 August 1970, the police attempted to break up the National Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles. The attempt resulted in the deaths of three protesters, killed by police inflicted gunshot wounds.

Conditions outside of the normal human experience can cause an individual to suffer from PTSD. Such conditions would include brutal beatings, and witnessing the shooting deaths of one's fellow protesters at the hands of the police. That being the case, it is reasonable to assume that a percentage of the protesters who were assaulted, and those who experienced traumatic events while protesting, could suffer the symptoms of PTSD.

²⁵ Kenneth J. Heineman, Campus Wars (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 249.

²⁶ Halstead, 558.

One protester, who spent time in jail for his part in protesting the war, recounted that after all these years, he still has nightmares and insomnia because of his experiences. "My prison is inside me now, I still see it in my dreams."²⁷

While it is true that the experiences that protesters may face while demonstrating are potentially traumatic, it has not been documented as to whether or not this trauma is significant enough to have caused PTSD among Vietnam era protesters. It is not however, a great stretch of the imagination to assume that some protesters would have been at risk. For example, the organizers of the demonstrations held in December of 1999, to protest the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle Washington, displayed great foresight when they decided to have special counselors on hand to assist any protester who felt the need for help as a result of his experiences. One protester in particular, was said to have displayed many of the symptoms of PTSD. She had worked as a medic administering first aid to protesters who had been beaten or had been tear gassed. While she attended to one such victim, she was grabbed by police, sent to disperse the protesters. She received a sprained wrist and sore ribs in the confrontation. As a result of the attack she sought out the aid of a counselor, and it was recommended that she should continue to see a therapist to help her deal with the emotional trauma she was suffering as a result of her experiences at the protest.²⁸

²⁷Tollefson, 175.

²⁸Lorraine Fish, counselor at the WTO protests held in Seattle Washington. Phone interview, 19 December, 1999.

Agent Orange

While protesters in the streets of the United States were assaulted with tear gas, GI's fighting in Vietnam were sprayed with a different type of chemical: the poisonous active ingredient contained in the herbicide Agent Orange. Vice President Johnson traveled to Saigon in 1961, to consult with Vietnamese President Diem about what future assistance the Americans would be providing. As a result of the trip, the Combat and Development Test Center (CDTC) was formed. The CDTC's function was to develop counterinsurgency methods and weapons. The first priority of the CDTC was to test and evaluate the use of herbicides to destroy concealing tropical vegetation and enemy food supplies.²⁹

Within two months after the formation of the CTDC, equipment and personnel began arriving in Vietnam to test the strength of various chemicals. The tests were ordered to determine if the chemicals were powerful enough to deplete the dense forest vegetation that provided cover for the enemy. The tests were also to determine the chemicals ability to destroy guerrilla food supplies.³⁰ The tests included the use of three different chemicals for aerial spraying: Dinoxial, trinoxol, and concentrate 48. The program continued through several stops and starts through 1964. Despite the fact that the tests provided questionable results as to the value of aerial spraying in Vietnam, the program

²⁹ Paul Frederick Cecil, Herbicide Warfare The Ranch Hand Project (New York: Praeger, 1986), 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23

continued and by the end of 1964 had been named operation Ranch Hand.³¹

Early in 1964, a less expensive herbicide, Dioxin, code named Agent Orange became available. With the availability of a less expensive herbicide, the United States government was able to increase the number of defoliation missions. The American soldier was exposed to this dangerous chemical and thousands of acres of land in Vietnam were laid to waste. The defoliation missions reinforced the soldier's mentality that it had become necessary to destroy the village in order to save it. Many years later it became apparent that the chemicals were toxic to humans, and did indeed cause a number of health related problems for the American soldier. The fact that the American government allowed it to happen, and then denied allegations that Agent Orange was toxic, only helped to reinforce the Vietnam Veterans' belief that the government held him in very low regard. Throughout the early missions the United States government denied that it was involved in the spraying of chemicals in Vietnam. It became impossible however, to continue the denials and in March of 1966, the American government admitted that it was indeed responsible for the aerial spraying. Military officers told newsmen that the chemicals sprayed in Vietnam were the same chemicals sold in hardware stores across the United States as weed killers.³²

Dioxin, however, was much more powerful than the military was admitting in its news briefings. In its undiluted form, Dioxin has been called the most toxic manmade

³¹ Ibid., 56.

³² Ibid., 72

substance known today.³³ The chemical is so powerful that it knocked down a 150 foot hardwood tree in forty-eight hours. Vast areas were turned into wastelands where nothing survived. Dioxin in its undiluted form is one hundred times more powerful than nerve gas and one drop could kill twelve hundred people.³⁴ So powerful is the chemical Dioxin, that as a result of a spill in 1976, at a Dioxin production facility in Seveso, Italy, the Catholic Church and the Italian Government permitted abortions for all pregnant women who had been exposed to the chemical. Many of those who did not have abortions or miscarriages, gave birth to babies with birth defects such as missing bones, and spinal development outside of the body.³⁵ In addition, the United States Department of Agriculture specialists recommended that the chemical company involved be forced to purchase the land within a specified area, build a nine foot high plastic coated mesh fence around the area, and burn in an incinerator at one thousand degrees centigrade, all buildings, trees, and road surfaces in the contaminated area.³⁶ The United States Military was using the same chemicals in Vietnam in the 1960s and early '70s as the ones spilled in Italy.

In 1967, 6,847 sorties were flown dumping 4,879,000 gallons of herbicide over one

³³ Robert Klein, Wounded Men Broken Promises (New York: McMillan Publishing, 1981), 159.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 160

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

million acres of land in South Vietnam.³⁷ The United States sprayed over five million acres of Vietnam between the years of 1962 and 1970. Much of the spraying was done by helicopter and C-123 cargo planes; however, troops on the ground also sprayed using trucks and backpacks to spread the substance. It was not uncommon for soldiers to get sprayed either from C-123s, or while they sprayed from the back of the trucks.³⁸ The chemicals were also sprayed near American base camps in an effort to destroy the foliage that provided the enemy protection from the U.S. soldier's field of fire. Unfortunately, spraying the chemical around the base, allowed some of the spray to enter the water supply. This resulted in soldiers drinking and showering in contaminated water.

In the mid-seventies, after the pullout of United States troops from Vietnam, an increasing number of U.S. veterans voiced complaints to the Veterans' Administration medical personnel of numbness in extremities, weakness, decreased sexual drive, and rashes. In addition, there seemed to be a high number of cancer rates among the veterans, as well as a high rate of birth defects among the children of the veterans.³⁹

Despite the evidence of the high rate of liver cancer, in an age group in which the fatal disease was previously almost unknown, and birth defects, the Veterans' Administration for years refused to acknowledge a service connected relationship between Agent Orange and the number of symptoms displayed by veterans. The

³⁷ Cecil, 109.

³⁸ Klein, 159.

³⁹ Cecil, 166.

Veterans' Administration ignored the fact that the service records of veterans who complained, verified that they had, in fact, served in areas of Vietnam exposed to Agent Orange.⁴⁰ This refusal is even more confounding when one considers the dangers of exposure to the chemicals in Agent Orange that had been so clearly voiced in the United States Department of Agriculture's recommendations in response to the Seveso, Italy spill.

In 1978, Paul Reutoshan, a former helicopter crew chief who had served in Vietnam, shocked a nationwide audience when he appeared on the "Today" show and announced that he had died in Vietnam, but did not know it.⁴¹ His statement was in reference to the cancer that he had been diagnosed with. Reutoshan was convinced that his cancer was a direct result of the almost daily missions he had flown through clouds of Agent Orange discharged from a C-123 cargo plane. Paul died on 14 December 1978, at the age of 28. Prior to his death, he convinced personal lawyer, Edward Gozman, that the cancer was a result of exposure to Agent Orange. Gozman filed a lawsuit in New York State Court against the companies involved in the manufacture of Agent Orange.⁴² In 1979, a class action lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York in Manhattan. The suit named five chemical companies, but did not include the Federal Government. This exclusion was a result of a law that precludes recovery against the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 161-62.

⁴¹ Institute of Medicine (U.S.) Committee to review Veterans and Agent Orange Veterans and Agent Orange Health Effects of Herbicides Used in Vietnam. (Washington D.C. National Academy Press, 1994), 33.

⁴² Ibid., 34.

United States for injuries that arise out of or in the course of activity incident to military service.⁴³

On 7 May 1984, nine years to the day after the evacuation of U.S. troops from Saigon, the class action lawsuit was settled. The chemical companies, while denying that Agent Orange caused adverse health effects, agreed to pay the veterans \$180 million.⁴⁴ The settlement had been a hard fought victory for the veterans who believed that their health, as well as the health of their children, had been adversely affected by Agent Orange.

In 1979, as a result of rising concerns about the possible link between Agent Orange, and the health problems of the Vietnam veterans and their children, President Jimmy Carter established the Interagency Working Group. The groups mission was to bring knowledgeable government scientists together to oversee all Phenoxy herbicides and dioxin related matters, and to identify the areas where scientific study was needed. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan renamed the agency the Agent Orange Workers Group which was replaced in 1990 by the Agent Orange Task Force.⁴⁵

The use of herbicides by the military also raised concerns in Congress. Specifically, the potential health effects of exposure to the chemicals that made up Agent Orange. In 1978, members of Congress began questioning the health of Vietnam veterans who had

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Michael Gough, Dioxin Agent Orange The Facts (New York and London: Plenum Press 1986), 85.

⁴⁵ Institute of Medicine U.S. Committee to Review Veterans and Agent Orange, 34.

been exposed to agent orange. These concerns were divided into three specific categories:

- (1) Access to health care for the current problems that might be related to exposure.
- (2) Scientific answers to questions about health effects of exposure to agent orange.
- (3) Compensation for disabilities possibly related to exposure to Agent Orange.

In response to the concerns, Congress held hearings and introduced several bills on the topic. In an effort to resolve the issues, Congress passed several laws that addressed the human health effects of exposure to Agent Orange used in Vietnam during the Vietnam Era.⁴⁶

In 1981 Public Law 97-72 was enacted. The law expanded eligibility for health care services to include veterans exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam during the war. As a result, veterans were able to receive health care for conditions that required treatment as a result of their exposure to Agent Orange. The program was extended four times and ran through 31 December 1993. In 1984, Public Law 98-542 was enacted by Congress. The law provided for payment, during a two year period from 1 October 1984, through 30 September 1986, of disability and death benefits for Vietnam veterans with *chloracne* and *porphyria cutanea tarda*, an uncommon disorder of *urinary porphyria metabolism* that manifests in patients by thinning and blistering of the skin, which became evident within

⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

one year after service in Vietnam. The law also included the survivors of veterans with such conditions.⁴⁷

The Vietnam veterans believed that their concerns about Agent Orange and the resultant adverse health problems from exposure were legitimate. They had no desire to try to get anything from the government that they did not believe they deserved. The long court battle against the chemical companies, and the length of time it took Congress to react to their health concerns, only increased the veterans' feelings of alienation from their country and government. The fight to get some form of compensation, and the health care that the Veterans' Administration owed them, was another reminder that their sacrifices in Vietnam had yet to be recognized by their government.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 50.

CHAPTER 8 UNREALIZED EXPECTATIONS

The Vietnam War changed almost every American citizen in one way or another. For those individuals who fought in the war, and those who protested against it, those changes were even more profound. Those individuals made their choices expecting that their actions would make a difference, whether it be saving a country from communism or getting the United States out of an unpopular war. Many however, came to believe that their actions had been undertaken in vain, often causing feelings of guilt and remorse because of the choices they made. A large number of these individuals found themselves alienated from their family and friends leaving them alone to work out their personal traumas. The following section will explore the alienation, doubt and guilt that both the protesters and the soldiers experienced as a result of the war.

Alienation

An estimated 50,000 American men avoided the draft by leaving the country. Those who protested the war, whether it was by leaving the country or some other means, ran the risk of alienating family members who could not understand their actions.

My father wouldn't talk about it. Even when the letter from my draft board arrived, I felt very alone. . . . My father was in World War II and fought in Europe. I refused induction in 1967. . . he wouldn't talk to me. He was ashamed that his oldest son wouldn't go to war. . . . The older man in the photograph had his arm around his son. . . within four years after the photograph was taken, father and son had come to

see each other as the enemy. . . .¹

I have two older sisters, one of them was a real right winger. . . . She considered me a traitor and thought I should be lined up against a wall and shot.²

I have never considered telling my parents. . . . Like many in the World War II situation, they were angered and embarrassed by conscientious objectors.³

Such were the experiences for some who decided against serving in Vietnam. Many were faced with the realization that to stand by their convictions would mean being separated from family members. Similarly, many veterans felt isolated. When they returned home they found that they had been changed by their experiences in the war. They felt as though they no longer fit in with the family or among their old friends.

The Vietnam veteran's number one priority during his time in Vietnam was to survive. It was not uncommon for a soldier to mark days off on a calendar in anticipation of his return to the world.⁴ Once home however, the veteran often felt confused and alone. When he returned home he found things had changed. The living room seemed smaller, the steps a little lower, everything it seemed, was different. The world at home seemed like a lifeless imitation of what he had left in Vietnam. One veteran explained it as going from a free fire zone to the twilight zone.⁵

¹ Tollefson, 3.

² Ibid., 153.

³ Ibid., 102.

⁴ Soldiers in Vietnam had come to separate Vietnam from the rest of the world. Vietnam was an aberration. Hence the feeling that when they left Vietnam they would be returning to the world. Brende and Parson 44.

⁵ Ibid., 44.

The veteran came home a changed man. He no longer perceived the world around him in the same way that he had before he left for his duty in Vietnam. He did not understand the people at home. When he reflected back on his struggle just to survive in Vietnam, the every day lives and problems of his friends at home seemed trivial. Likewise, his friends at home found it difficult to understand him. He was often restless and moody. He suffered from insomnia which made him difficult to relate to. He had gone from the war and the life of a soldier, whose job it was to kill, to a processing center in the United States. Within eighteen hours of his arrival, he found himself officially discharged back into civilian life. This whirlwind method left the soldier absolutely no time to make the adjustments necessary to change from being a warrior into a civilian.

“After a short while, my girlfriend told me she didn’t know how to relate to me. . . . I had expected things to be the way they were; but they weren’t. . . . Honestly, I didn’t know how to relate to her either. . . . She said I wasn’t the same man. . . . That something horrible must have happened to me over there to change me so completely. . . . When it came to my family, my mother told me I wasn’t as considerate as I used to be. . . . My father said I wasn’t as diligent as before going to Vietnam. . . . I didn’t know what any of these people were saying. . . .”⁶

Returning veterans faced a nation filled with anger and resentment over an ever increasingly unpopular war that was not going well. Much of the anger and resentment was directed at returning veterans. The unwillingness of the government and the country to take responsibility for the war, left the soldier to be sacrificed. It became his fault that the war was not going well. “I was spit on twice while I was in the Navy from 1967-1971. Both incidents made me feel as though I was in a fishbowl while

⁶ Ibid.. 46

everyone around me was waiting for a violent reaction which would have confirmed their suspicions that all returning vets were baby killers and drug addicts. These and other incidents made me question why I went and who did I really fight for.”⁷

The veteran received little credit for the job he did in Vietnam. When he came home, war protesters blamed him for being part of the war machine, while those who supported the war blamed him and his comrades for the poor results of the American fighting machine. His family and friends did not understand, and the American public seemed to be shunning him. As a result of their experiences, some Vietnam veterans, as well as protesters, faced a future alone and isolated from their families and friends.

The first few days were nice. . . . I was alive. I had made it through some of the most intense fighting in Vietnam. . . . I was looking forward to a big chat with my father about my experiences in Vietnam. I wanted him to be proud of me. . . . I soon became aware of his feelings about me and the war. . . . He said we shouldn't have been in Vietnam and he was embarrassed of me. . . . He said Vietnam wasn't a real war like World War II. . . . Congress had declared it a conflict, not a war. . . . I put my life on the line for Americans and nobody gave a damn, not even my family. My disappointment, isolation, and hopelessness got real deep from this point on. . . .⁸

. . . My best friend and I used to like the same girls, the same food. We went to church together, dated together and all that. We were like brothers You name it, we did it together. But our similarities ended when I went to Vietnam. . . . I was placed in boot camp to be trained to become a killer. I succeeded, they succeeded, at

⁷ Bob Greene, Homecoming When Soldiers Returned From Vietnam (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989), 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

that, but they never retrained me to become a suitable person to live with people again.⁹

In Vietnam, American soldiers, by a margin of ten to one held a decided advantage in reported kill ratio over their North Vietnamese counterparts. In addition U.S. soldiers won nearly every major battle that they participated in. However, many veterans lived with the frustration of winning territory in Vietnam only to be forced, as a result of orders, to relinquish the hard fought land. This failure to occupy areas won in battle resulted in an increased number of American casualties, as soldiers were forced to take and retake the same area. Hence the victories had come to mean little, as soldiers became increasingly frustrated by military leaders who seemed uninterested in winning the war. The soldier in the field had to wonder if his life held any value to the United States military leaders.

Doubt

Vietnam-era veterans who separated themselves from the military program by becoming anti-war GI's or serving as in-service conscientious objectors, experienced the same feelings of self-doubt and guilt that combat veterans experienced. Both groups questioned the reason for the war as well as their own effectiveness. Veterans and protesters alike found themselves doubting what they were doing. For the soldier in Vietnam these doubts were pointed:

⁹ Ibid., 54.

Q. You killed over a couple hundred people during your thirty-three months in Vietnam?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you know why you were there?

A. I can't honestly say. I was told we were going to save the Vietnamese from the Communists. We didn't save anyone. We just killed. Why were we there? I can't honestly say.¹⁰

"As far as the Vietnam war goes, it was such a waste. At the time, most of us felt it was the right thing to do. They told us we had to go and we went and did our jobs."¹¹ Many who went to Vietnam believed that they were doing their part to help defeat communism, only to find themselves destroying peasant villages and killing innocent people while chasing an elusive enemy. South Vietnam, the region considered America's ally during the war, suffered extreme damage as a result of American firepower. The people the GI's were protecting had nine thousand of their fifteen thousand hamlets seriously damaged, while ten million hectares of land and five million hectares of forest were either partially or completely destroyed.¹² The wholesale destruction resulted in twelve million refugees. In addition, 1.7 million Vietnamese people, men, women, and children lost their lives during the war.¹³ Ironically, one of the many contradictions to come out of the war in Vietnam was that the only way to save the village was to destroy it. Considering the destruction that the United States unleashed on South Vietnam, it is not surprising that

¹⁰ Mark Lane, Conversations With Americans (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 55.

¹¹ Harry Spieller, Scars of Vietnam (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1994), 94.

¹² A hectare is a metric measure of surface equal to 10,000 square meters, or approximately 11,000 square yards.

¹³ Harrison, 303.

veterans questioned how they could possibly have been helping in Vietnam. As one wrote: "It was really getting my mind. . . I didn't even know why the hell I was there."¹⁴

Another describes his experience this way:

The chopper ride back to Zulu (base camp) is probably the last one I'll take in 'Nam. Looking down over the rice paddies I knew so well made me wonder if I had a right to be there. When I came into the army I had no question, but I'm leaving with some. Back in basic they told us these people needed help, that they were poor and didn't know how to solve their problems, that we promised them our help, and that we couldn't go back on them. Well, there are times when it seemed we were doing more harm than good.¹⁵

. . . There's death all around us. I hate this place, but there's a job to be done. It's our job, so they tell us, but I don't know the whole story-and nobody seems to be explaining it to us, at least in a way that makes sense. I wonder if we are helping these people.¹⁶

Anti-war protesters, like Vietnam veterans, questioned the value of their actions.

Their concerns were not without merit. Despite the fact that the movement had gained momentum and the nightly news televised the awful horror of war, the majority of the American public continued to support the war in Vietnam. The support continued, despite the Pentagon's call for 45,224 men for the month of December in 1969. This number represented the largest monthly quota since the Korean War.¹⁷

In the secondary combat theater, the streets of the United States, protesters battled to win the hearts and minds of the public, struggling to convince them that America's

¹⁴Lane, 57.

¹⁵ David Parks, *GI Diary* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1968), 131.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁷ "Protests and Now the Vietnik," *Time* (22 October 1969): 25A.

involvement in Vietnam was a mistake. The battle was never an easy one. Protesters were subjected to unfair characterization. The media often under-counted their numbers at demonstrations, and unfairly represented them as unpatriotic communists. The media chose to ignore the political arguments of the protest leadership, while it focused on the radical and bizarre behavior on the fringe of the movement.¹⁸ The anti-war movement did have a modicum of success influencing opinion leaders and decision makers, but because of the negative portrayal by the media, the leaders of the protest movement experienced difficulty influencing the public, who remained opposed to the actions of the anti-war protesters. The general public was so opposed to the demonstrators, that even the right to assemble and protest the war was questioned.¹⁹

The Nixon administration, like administrations before, attempted to discredit the movement. It represented protesters as a danger to such an extreme, that Americans perceived them to be a threat to the security of the country. Shortly after Nixon took office, he attempted to place a label of treason on anyone who did not support the White House policy in Vietnam. Nixon found it impossible to believe that ordinary citizens could genuinely oppose the war on their own. In an effort to prove this, he ordered the establishment of FBI offices in twenty different countries to determine which, if any, had provided the American protest movement with funding. The FBI was unable to find

¹⁸ Small, 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

evidence of any foreign governments supplying money to the movement.²⁰

In light of the attacks on the anti-war movement by the media and the government, it is not surprising that many of its members questioned its success. When observed as a whole, the movement should receive credit for its achievements. The movement was started by a small minority of individuals convinced that their cause was a just one. The movement's members were willing to face the unpopularity of their stand. It was a movement based on the outrage of individuals who viewed the war in Vietnam as both immoral and unjust. It was a movement started from scratch by people who worked for bare sustenance.

Eventually, the movement swept across the country striving to raise the conscience of a nation, inspiring millions to protest the war. In that respect, the protesters accomplished what they had set out to do, raise the consciousness of the American people. Protesters also demanded that political leaders accept responsibility and provide answers for our involvement in Vietnam. When answers and results were not forthcoming, the full pressure of the movement was brought to bear, and an eventual solution to end the United States role in the war was finally found.²¹

Guilt and Shame

A number of Vietnam veterans, and protesters experienced feelings of shame and guilt for some of the decisions they made during the Vietnam War. Young men across

²⁰ Nora Sayre, Sixties Going on Seventies (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 305.

²¹ Halstead, 725.

the United States realized that when their number came up in the draft lottery, they would have to make a choice, either be drafted or consciously find a way to prevent it. Neither choice was free from consequences. For many to answer the call was unthinkable, for a number of reasons. Many found it impossible to participate in a war that they found immoral, and more importantly, none were willing to go to Vietnam and risk getting killed. Self-preservation was a strong motivating factor to many who protested the war.²² To be sure, none of them wanted to go to Vietnam and die. For many, this fear was enough of an impetus to convince them to go against the rules of society, and refuse to participate in the war.

A great many of those who decided to avoid the draft looked to the list of medical excuses that could be used to avoid the draft. An individual could, for example, starve himself, in an effort to be under the minimum weight requirement for the physical, thus being disqualified from military duty. Many found that the feeling of relief for not having been accepted by the military, was followed by a strong sense of shame. The end of the war did not bring relief from these feelings, as some men are still burdened with them after more than two decades.²³

For another example, a group of well educated young men from Cambridge, upon leaving their physicals were snapped back to reality when a busload of Chelsea men

²² Vietnam War Protester Marcos Zechin of San Jose, California, interview by author, 2 June 1998.

²³ Sevy, 216.

arrived for their physicals. "The well educated realized, with a sense of guilt, that these men, the white working class of Boston, had never even thought about the possibility of a way that they could avoid the draft. The boys from Chelsea with their limited education, seemed to walk through their examination like cattle on their way to slaughter. One observer figures that possibly four out of five of his Harvard friends were being deferred, while just the opposite was happening to the Chelsea boys."²⁴

The idea that it was a class war was not lost on those fortunate enough to be connected to doctors who provided medical excuses. Nor was it lost on those who could afford college and avoid the draft for another four years. Many refused to allow these thoughts to creep into their consciousness. For some, the fact that they had let another go in their place, would only later become a source of shame.²⁵

According to a Veterans' Administration study, thirty-three percent of the Vietnam veterans experienced a sense of shame and guilt as a result of their experiences in Vietnam.²⁶ The soldier in Vietnam felt guilt for breaking the taboo against murder, as well as having participated in actions that resulted in the deaths of civilians. These facts combined with the unsavory perception that many Americans held of veterans, one that had been shaped by the media, which asserted that Vietnam veterans were morbidly different from soldiers of the past, resulted in veterans who felt ashamed of their service

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

in Vietnam. Soldiers in Vietnam, just as in any war, were forced to do horrible things just to survive. in addition, there were soldiers who committed unspeakable acts as a form of retaliation, against the enemy. For many of these soldiers the guilt and shame, that were a result of their actions, will be with them for the rest of their lives.

Chapter 9 EPILOGUE

In 1971, John Kerry, representing the Veterans against the Vietnam War, presented a statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that, in part, told of men who came home from war having been taught to deal and trade in violence. He described men filled with anger and a sense of betrayal for having been given the chance to die for the biggest nothing in history.²⁷ John Kerry also took umbrage with Vice President Spiro Agnew's statement that the Vietnam veterans are America's best men. According to Kerry's statement, the Vietnam veteran did not feel like America's best. Many felt that they were hated, and felt ashamed for what they were called on to do in Southeast Asia.²⁸

The group of veterans that Kerry represented had come to the conclusion that nothing that could happen in Southeast Asia would ever realistically threaten the United States. They also came to believe that the war was not about communism, rather it was a civil war. It was a conflict that had been fought for years by people seeking their independence from all colonial power. The veterans found it difficult to rally the South Vietnamese to fight for themselves against the threat the U.S. military was trying to save them from.²⁹ The veterans saw a people, who for the most part, did not know or simply

²⁷ Sevy, 233.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 234.

did not care about the difference between communism and democracy. They just wanted to farm their rice paddies without American helicopters strafing them, and napalm burning their families and villages. The villager wanted everything that had to do with the war, including the United States, to leave them alone.

Kerry's statement illustrated how the veterans rationalized the destruction of villages in order to save them. It also demonstrated how veterans continued their struggle, as America lost her morality and coolly accepted My Lai, while American citizens steadfastly refused to give up their image of American GI's who hand out candy to children.³⁰ Kerry eloquently expressed the sentiments of Vietnam veterans, a large number of men who needed help and recognition from a government that had failed to listen.

Wars have been fought for centuries. The names change, but one thing remains constant, people die. With few exceptions, men have accepted the responsibility of protecting their way of life by killing those with a different opinion. In the United States it has always been considered an individual's duty to protect the "American way of life."

The turmoil of the Vietnam War brought with it a change in the way American citizens perceived war. For the first time, Americans were treated to a daily dose of it on their televisions. Gruesome body counts allowed them to keep "score" of the day's battles. A rising escalation brought a rising consciousness to many Americans. This rise in consciousness, brought with it protests to the war such as this country has never

³⁰ Ibid., 235.

experienced before, it also brought the public face to face with the American soldier who risked his life to do his duty. The fact that people die horrible, painful deaths in war had never been so obvious to a nation, as it was after it was broadcast nationwide to an American audience.

The Vietnam War brought out the soldier, and it brought out the protester. These two groups appear on the surface to be quite different--one was composed of warriors, one of pacifists. Under the first layer, however, the differences blur, becoming similarities. Both the soldier and the pacifist loved their country, searching for a solution that was best for all concerned. The protester was trying to save the nation from itself, from the horrors and death it had become a part of, in a war half a world away. The soldier, initially protecting the world from communism, resigned himself to surviving the rabbit hole to hell he had fallen into. Eventually the differences between the warrior and the pacifist diminished to the point that the two are indistinguishable, melding into one, as men who fought in Vietnam returned home and began protesting the war. Some, as members of the Vietnam Veterans Against The War, hurled their medals back at the institution that had awarded them. These men gave back the medals that represented their heroic deeds done in battle.

The warrior and the pacifist shared parallel paths on different journeys that brought many to the same location. They were heroic, patriotic, and American. They were individuals who had been proud of their country, but who sought desperately to repair her, no matter what sacrifice was required.

The American soldier, whose job was to protect America, was told he was needed in

a far off land to keep a tiny country from being overrun by the evils of communism. He was told if he did not stop communism in Vietnam, it would continue right up the beaches of Waikiki.³¹ Rhetoric from leaders such as Lyndon Johnson, and John F. Kennedy inspired men to fight against communism and protect American ideals. It also resulted in the deaths of over fifty-eight thousand brave men. It brought confrontation to the streets of America. War protesters also were inspired by the rhetoric of American leaders. However, they were inspired to fight against the war rather than in it.

The choices made by the veteran and the protester resulted in harsh consequences to both. Some became alienated from families and friends, others lost their lives. Soldiers went to war. Protesters took to the streets and campuses across America. The possibility of death was a risk that both groups took. Obviously, the risk to the soldier in Vietnam was greater than the risk to the protester in the United States, but as evidence has indicated, death was a very real possibility. Norman Morrison, an anti-war protester, demonstrated the extreme passion that the protesters brought to their cause when, on the steps of the Pentagon, he doused himself with gasoline and lit himself on fire.³²

Considering the many shared experiences, the similarities between the two groups should, upon reflection, not be surprising. Both groups were fighting for the protection of their country, only on different battlefields.

³¹ Karnow, 30.

³² Powers, 87.

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