

**Coming of Age During a Divisive War:
Reflections on the Draft,
the War in Vietnam, and
Their Consequences in Our Lives**

2021 Update



The Harvard-Radcliffe Class of 1969

Compiled by Martin Chalfie

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Introduction

We grew up during a time when previous views of ourselves and others were questioned and discussed (and are still being discussed); civil rights, racism, the role of women, alternative life styles, and gender identity were topics of increasing importance. All of these concerns were important filters through which each of us viewed our lives and our hopes for the future.

One of the most important influences on our lives growing up, and especially when we were undergraduates at Harvard and Radcliffe, was the War in Vietnam. We lived through it, we reacted to it, some of us went on to serve in it, some of us supported it, and some of us protested it. Fortunately, none of our class died in the conflict, but we knew people that had. And all of us were affected by the War in major and minor ways.

This collection of essays reflects the many ways that the war affected us, changing our view of ourselves, our country, and the world. This Reunion has given us an opportunity to reflect on how the War affected us and to share our stories and our perspectives now that fifty years have passed since graduation.

On a personal note, I did not realize when I suggested this project to the class how much I would be moved by these essays, by everyone's concerns, experiences, and insights. To me what comes through these essays are strong and deeply held feelings, but also friendship and respect for each other despite differences of opinion. As a result, I feel closer to the class and in even more awe of its members than I have in the past. The privilege of collating these essays has intensified my regret that I didn't know more of my classmates when I had the chance as an undergraduate or build even stronger bonds with those I did know. I am very glad to hear their voices now.

Martin Chalfie

A Very Close Call

Warren W. Ayres

When Martin proposed the creation of this collection of essays, he suggested the essays might range from the trivial to the profound. My essay will fit better into the “trivial” category than the “profound.” But I hope at least some of you will be interested in hearing the story of a classmate who was drafted into the US Army right after graduation, who came within a hair’s breadth of being sent to Vietnam, but who escaped that fate thanks to pure serendipity.

My draft board was breathing down my neck almost from the day I arrived at Harvard in the fall of 1966, after having spent the previous year as an exchange student at an English public school. Noticing that I had “broken the traditional course of undergraduate study,” my draft board ordered me to report for a physical at the Boston Navy Base. The bad news is that I passed the physical. The good news is that I managed to convince my draft board to leave me alone until I had graduated from college.

With the writing clearly on the wall, I had a keen interest in Vietnam events during my college years. I remember, for example, attending a Vietnam teach-in at the Brattle Street movie theatre, organized (if memory serves) by Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky. I remember a visit from the brother of one of my roommates, on leave from the Marine Corps, who told us about his experience in Khe San. This was serious stuff.

I was not surprised to receive my “Greetings” letter in June 1969 shortly after commencement. I remember my mother tearfully asking my father if “something could be done.” The answer was no, of course. In late August my father dropped me off at the Federal Building in Pittsburgh and wished me luck. I passed the physical for a second time and took the oath. Most of us were assigned to the Army, but a few unfortunate souls were assigned to the Marines. One of the men in my group declined to take the oath and was roughly escorted out of the room by two stone-faced MP’s. The rest of us were put on a bus for the airport. Before the day was over, we were in another bus driving through the entrance gate to Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Basic training was like nothing I had experienced. From the moment we stepped off the bus, we were harried and insulted without let-up by our drill sergeants. My background and education were worlds apart from those of the other men in my training company, most of whom turned out to be decent guys, but some of whom struck me as potential war-criminal material. I learned lots of new skills, like how to strip down and clean an M-16 rifle, how to throw a hand grenade, how to treat an open sucking chest wound. I kept my head down and did not advertise the fact that I was a Harvard graduate.

After basic training I was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky for armor training. “This is good,” I thought. “Surely they don’t need tank crewmen in Vietnam. I’ll probably be sent to Germany.” By this time I was growing accustomed to the military routine, and the combat veterans who gave us instruction were not interested in browbeating us, but simply in teaching us how to do our job and how to survive. I learned an additional set of new skills, like how to distinguish a phosphorous shell from a high-explosive shell, how to drive a tank cross-country at night, and most importantly of all—and don’t forget this--when you are looking through the tank periscope to take aim, keep your forehead tight up against the periscope sight, so that the recoil of the tank doesn’t break your nose when you

press the “fire” button I received an award of which I have since been inordinately proud—best tank gunner in my “class.” (I’m sad to say that have lost the award certificate; otherwise, it would be proudly displayed on my wall next to my Harvard diplomas!)

Well, it turned out the army used tanks in Vietnam after all—small Sheridan tanks which were supposedly well adapted to jungle warfare. I believe that the Sheridans were in fact pretty useless. My strong suspicion is that the armor soldiers were desperate to get their share of career-enhancing combat experience, so they used the Sheridans as their ticket to the battle zone. I “graduated” from tank school in late March 1970 and received my orders to report to Fort Lewis, Washington for transshipment to South Vietnam.

I don’t mind admitting that I still tear up when I think of my parents saying goodbye to me at the Pittsburgh airport when I boarded the plane for Seattle. By this time, I could feel the walls closing in on me. There was a very real chance that I would never see my parents again, nor they me.

At Fort Lewis, after receiving my issue of green camouflage fatigues, jungle boots, and green underwear, I sat around with hundreds of other GI’s awaiting further orders. The weather was beautiful—unusual for that time of year in the northwest, I believe. Mount Rainer was clearly visible to the south, and the mountains on the Olympic peninsula to the northwest. Their beauty was enhanced in my mind by the contrast to the tropical landscape I expected to see in the very near future.

As the hours of waiting stretched into days, we got the feeling that something was up. And indeed, it was. President Nixon had started the process of drawing down troop levels in Vietnam. (My eternal thanks to you, Tricky Dicky!) As a consequence, a large number of us were “diverted” from Vietnam to Korea. So, it was back to the supply room to hand in our jungle gear and receive regular army clothing in exchange. A few hours later we were boarding a chartered airliner for a flight to South Korea by way of Anchorage and Tokyo.

At Osan Air Force Base we were dispatched to various locations on the peninsula—in my case to Camp Casey, about twenty miles north of Seoul, headquarters of the 7th Infantry Division. At the division reception center, a soldier walked in and asked if anyone in our group of new arrivals could sing. Violating the cardinal rule against volunteering for anything in the army, I raised my hand. That is how I came to spend my Vietnam-era military career singing and playing piano accompaniment in the 8th Army Chorus. Everyone in my chorus was a draftee who was just serving out his 24 months and thanking his lucky stars that he wasn’t slogging through rice paddies in Vietnam. Our division commander during most of the time I was in Korea was Hal Moore, who commanded US troops in Vietnam in the first direct fight between the US Army and regular units of the North Vietnamese Army. Our chorus sang for him and his staff many times, including at one memorable Hawaiian luau for which we had to learn the words and music for “Tiny Bubbles.” All this while combat was still raging a few thousand miles south of us. Bizarre!

So, what did I learn from my mercifully short military career, apart from a motley collection of useless combat skills and the melodies and lyrics to “Army Blue” and “Screaming Eagles”? Many other lessons, for sure, but primarily a keen sense of how arbitrary life can be.

Vietnam – A Lens to Harvard Complicity and US Imperialism

Brook Baker

The largest political party where I grew up in northern Kentucky was the John Birch Society. My father was a drill sergeant in the Army stationed in Central America in World War II, and my twin brother was in ROTC at Washington and Lee. I knew little - probably even less - about Vietnam or the war when I arrived at Harvard, though even in the fall of 1965 there were anti-war "agitators" at the Freshman Union, one of my earliest memories of Harvard.

I went home that Christmas of my freshman year, and attended a class reunion at my very small school, Beechwood (graduating class of 34), and saw my high school classmates gathered around an older school mate who had volunteered in the Army and become a sniper. He bragged about having dozens of Viet Cong ears that he had cut off young men he had shot. My classmates expressed admiration - I was horrified.

Hundreds of hours of dining room and dorm rooms talks later and as a result of the growing anti-war advocacy of my then girlfriend and now wife, Judith Kauffman, I too joined the growing anti-war movement, affiliated with SDS and the worker-student alliance, and engaged in four years of anti-war and anti-racism activism as an organizer. Along with many others, I learned about the deep-racism that animated the war, the complicity of Harvard in the war effort, the vicious underbelly of U.S. and corporate imperialism, and the interconnection of global and domestic politics.

In 1969, I was on a bus in Boston with a mix of Harvard students and other young men from Cambridge and Boston to attend my draft physical. I was torn between seeking conscientious objector status, going to jail, or other forms of resistance, but I dodged the draft with a 4f deferment of marginal merit, granted by a sympathetic examiner. My twin, Gary, was poised to go to Vietnam as a 2nd lieutenant but ended up with stateside duties following an industrial accident. My father, conservative and racist to the core, never truly forgave me for joining SDS - nor I him for his lifelong racism and anti-Semitism.

Although the hubris of my New Left politics faded, my commitment to anti-racism and to fighting corporate power, and US military adventures and neoliberal policies never really faded. The insights gained from the anti-war movement, including the power of social movements, has motivated much of my work since, most recently in global HIV/AIDS activism. But like many others who avoided the draft, I have long harbored a sense of guilt at the privilege I gained by avoiding the war. Someone else, probably working-class or poor, took my place and experienced and participated in the horrors of war. No psychic or physical wounds for me or the vast majority of my classmates, but we live in a country that continues to eat its young - and the young of its putative enemies. The true lessons of the War in Vietnam have yet to be learned.

Jay Ballard

(I wrote this in 2009 for my high school daughter's classmate who was then doing a project on the Vietnam War.)

1) *When/where were you born? Where did you live in the 1960s and what were the living conditions at that point of time? Can you give me some information about your educational and family background? For example, what high school/college did you attend and what socio-economic class would you classify your family before the war?*

I was born in Boston on July 1, 1947. I lived in Geneva, Switzerland in 1961 having lived in Europe for about 5 years with my parents (my father was in international business) and my older sister, Leslie (1945) and younger brother, Geoffrey (1950). I returned to the US in July 1961 and lived in Pound Ridge, NY till 1963 (where I attended a large public high school (Fox Lane School), when we moved a short distance to New Canaan, CN where I attended a small private boys day school (The King School), graduating in 1965. I then attended Harvard with the Class of 1969 (Al Gore's class), where my father (AB '40 (JFK's class), MBA '42) and mother (Radcliffe '42) had also gone. I would say that my family was upper middle class, comfortable but not wealthy. My sister Leslie went on to become a chemistry instructor at Andover for 34 years!

2) *How did you get involved in the Vietnam War? Did you volunteer to serve in the army or were you drafted by Nixon's draft lottery?*

I was drafted on the last day of the draft, June 28, 1971, and that summer and fall went through basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey; advanced training in artillery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma; and Army Intelligence School at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. I received orders to Vietnam and flew there from Travis AFB in Oakland, CA just before Christmas 1971.

At the time I graduated from Harvard in June 1969, the only ways to avoid being drafted were to be in medical school, teach in an American school, have a physical or mental disability, or get a position in the Army Reserves or National Guard. Otherwise you were sure to be drafted, and probably shipped off to Vietnam. Getting a spot in the Army Reserves or National Guard usually took political pull-you had to know someone to get in. Many doctors in the anti-war movement would help you get a physical or mental deferment, but that took money and know-how. Mostly poor kids wound up getting drafted. My story was a little different.

A few months before graduating from Harvard, I and a few of my friends who hadn't been prescient enough to go pre-med, decided we had to do something to avoid being drafted! We didn't want to flee to Canada or Sweden which some kids did-for various reasons. In my case even though I was against the war and active in the anti-war movement I didn't want to leave my country not knowing if I would ever be allowed to return. My friends and I decided that teaching was our best bet-but we didn't want to teach in some dreary US town (we were all 21 and thought we were too good for that!) so we got out the travel books and all applied to teach in schools in American Samoa, Guam and the US Virgin Islands-which we were clever enough to find out all qualified because they were insular possessions of the US! We were all lucky enough to be offered teaching jobs in St. Thomas, USVI. I taught at the Antilles Day School in St. Thomas from September 1969 till June 1970. On December 1, 1969 (<http://www.sss.gov/lotter1.htm>) the first draft lottery was held and I drew number 93 - a low number that meant I would certainly be drafted unless I stayed exempt as a teacher or in some other way. My sister Leslie (born 9/14/45) would have drawn number 1 if girls

had been subject to the draft. They weren't. I didn't want to teach another year in St. Thomas so I decided to return to Harvard, take pre-med courses, and try to convince my Norwalk, Connecticut draft board (you register in the state where you reside when you turn 18) not to draft me immediately so I could get into medical school and be exempt from the draft.

I enrolled again at Harvard as a special student for 70-'71, took pre-med courses and worked in the labs at Mass General Hospital in Boston to support myself (they also paid my tuition at Harvard which was a good thing because my father had had a stroke in 1967 and could not afford the tuition). My draft board was very cooperative but finally contacted me in May 1971 to let me know that unless I had been formally accepted to medical school by June 28, 1971 they were going to have to draft me as that was (then) the last day of the draft. Although I had applied to several medical schools I did not get accepted before the deadline and was drafted.

3) *Many young, well-educated, healthy men left the country to evade the draft. Were draft-evaders common during those times? Did you see the draft as a nuisance? Do you think the draft hampered your own academic/social pursuits?*

While I don't have any hard numbers, I think the number of men who actually left the country, usually to Canada, less frequently to Sweden or other places that welcomed draft resisters, was rather small in percentage terms. An even smaller number refused induction and went to prison. I knew of one person at Harvard who did that.

The vast majority of privileged draft-age men avoided military service by teaching, medical school, getting a coveted spot in the Reserves or National Guard often through political pull from their well-connected parents, cooked-up physical or mental disability, or once the lotteries were in effect, by drawing a high lottery number.

Draft evasion was common among the privileged, but most urban and rural poor, including a disproportionate number of Blacks and Hispanics, went without complaint. Of course we didn't call it draft evasion-we called it anti-war protest or draft-resistance, but the result was the same.

The draft was more than a nuisance: for men of my age it totally warped and shaped your life for at least 10 years. Men who had no interest in medicine or teaching became doctors and teachers; men who might have pursued a political career, or graduate studies in English, Law or the sciences-anything but medicine, did not; men got married and had children quickly because if you had two children you were exempt; some men, as noted fled the country, went to jail or went underground. It's hard to exaggerate the omnipresent threat the draft represented to my age cohort. And of course, it affected not just the men but their families, wives and significant others.

4) *Were you at all involved with the anti-war movement?*

I was involved but only on the periphery. I never held any leadership position in SDS, Vietnam Veterans Against the War or other anti-war groups. But I attended many, many teach-ins, sit-ins, anti-war rallies-including the October 1967 March on the Pentagon. The great majority of college students were anti-war, although there was a small minority who took ROTC, volunteered for service or otherwise decided to serve in the military. In my Harvard class of 1200 I think about 15 ultimately served in Vietnam. I saw the number published somewhere years ago. I was one of that unlucky few.

5) *How did you prepare before leaving for Vietnam? Were you briefed on the social and political situation of the Vietnamese people? Did you have to go through basic training?*

We received no information of any kind regarding social or political situation of the Vietnamese people, or the progress or lack thereof, of the war from the Army either before or during service. But you would have had to be deaf and blind not to have a pretty good awareness because the War in Vietnam news dominated the nightly TV news and newspapers non-stop from about 1963 to 1975. It was impossible to avoid. It permeated everything, like a fog. It was always all around you. It was inescapable. When I was in Vietnam the only way I knew what was going on in the war (outside my small area) was through reading the Sunday New York Times which I had mailed to me and received sometimes weeks late.

6) *Where were you assigned? What was your rank/role in Vietnam? Were you more involved in combat or administrative work? What did your role in the war entail?*

I was very lucky. When I arrived in Saigon in December 1971 as a Private First Class (PFC E-3), after a brief processing at Camp Alpha on Tan Son Nhut airbase (the main civilian and military airport of Saigon at the time) I was sent to Long Binh Post, about 30-45 miles north of Saigon. It was a dreary army post in the jungle with many primitive barracks in rows and lots of red earth. It would have been hell to spend 12 months (the length of an Army Vietnam tour) in such a place. There was not much to do when you were not on duty, and the level of conversation with mostly inner-city urban poor was not exactly highbrow. A long way from Cambridge, Mass! Within two hours of arriving at Long Binh I was stripped to the waist, ordered to dig an apparently purposeless ditch in loamy red earth outside an officers' barracks in 95-degree sun. I remember feeling very disoriented, almost an out-of-body state, and asking myself how I had managed my life so poorly as to get sent to this hellhole.

But there was a hidden angel watching over me. Camp Alpha was the main transit camp through which, at that time in the war at least, all American Army personnel were "processed", i.e. equipped with rifles and other gear, tested for drugs, examined medically and given further orders to proceed to some other army post or station somewhere else in Vietnam. It was also the place from where soldiers were sent on leave or "R and R" to Hawaii, Sydney, Bangkok, Taipei, Hong Kong, etc. It was just as dreary a place as Long Binh, but far smaller with only about 75 "permanent party" "cadres"-the then-current Army lingo used to distinguish soldiers who served permanently in a place from those just passing through. Among the people passing through were high-ranking Army and Marine generals, high ranking civilian defense department workers, etc. As a result, although a unit this small would have normally been commanded by a Captain (O-3), we were commanded by a full "bird" (so called because their insignia of rank is a small eagle) Colonel (O-6) and a very tough, experienced First Sergeant (the top enlisted, i.e. non-officer position in an Army unit). I believe this was done to ensure that the Camp Alpha command personnel would have the experience, diplomatic skills and rank to "stand up to" high ranking visitors when needed.

The other Camp Alpha personnel also had to be intelligent, diplomatic and reasonably presentable as they were charged with running computers to process flight manifests, briefing departing and arriving flights, and other administrative tasks that required some education and ability (not much, but some). Because of this, the First Sergeant at Camp Alpha would comb through incoming soldiers "201 files"-the Army personnel files that contain among other things results from Army IQ tests, education, civilian occupation, etc. he would then select persons to work at Camp Alpha. I was one of the few chosen, and was sent to be a cadre at Camp Alpha after only 3-4 days at Long Binh. My work at Camp Alpha varied over the approximately nine months I served there. In a war zone the normal workweek is 7-days, 12-hours per day. You very quickly get accustomed to this-sort of like prison I suppose. At various points I worked as a flight briefer, DV (Distinguished

Visitor) clerk-kind of like an aide, dealing with visiting generals, etc., military policeman, and towards the end, when most US troops had been withdrawn and bodies were scarce, as a truck and bus driver, ferrying soldiers and their gear to their R and R flights or their flights “back to the World” as going home for good was referred to. As I said, Camp Alpha was a dreary place-but it had one great advantage. Permanent party personnel were allowed to go into the city of Saigon whenever they were free of duty! And Saigon was then and now a lovely bustling city of four million with good restaurants, hotels, etc. I even found a place I could play squash at the Cercle Sportif de Saigon, an old French Indochina War country club relic!

7) *What were war conditions like? Did you spend most of your time working or did you have leisure time? If so, what did you do for leisure?*

For me it was not Platoon, Deer Hunter, or Full Metal Jacket. For me it was not so bad because my work was not at all dangerous, I could go into Saigon whenever I pleased, and had many friends who were college-educated and in the same boat as I was. In our spare time we built a swimming pool. I and one of my friends created and taught a class on how to balance a checkbook. We visited the restaurants and bars of Saigon. We read. We waited for our DEROS (date of estimated return from overseas) date to come so we could go home.

8) *How did you maintain relations during the Vietnam War? Did you write home and keep in contact with family and friends? Did you form lasting friendships during the war?*

This was difficult-maintaining relationships. There was no internet or cell phones. Telephone calls were prohibitively expensive. We could send and receive letters free of postage, just wrote “FREE” where a stamp would go; but after many months it got hard to maintain the flow of a real relationship. I wrote my parents, friends and siblings but not frequently. I did form a few relationships-in an odd twist one of my friends, originally from New Jersey, is now a mailman in my Ohio neighborhood.

9) *What were some of the best and worst part of your experience in Vietnam? Were there any moments that were particularly memorable?*

The best part was leaving to go home and resume my life in “the World”.

I also remember a 3-day “in-country” R and R I was given to Vung Tau, a charming seaside town two hours south of Saigon by car (30 minutes by Army helicopter). The French had named the town Cap Saint Jacques, and there were still many streets and restaurants with French names (as was also the case in Saigon). I remember I had a lunch at the Auberge des Roches Noires, on a terrace overlooking the South China Sea. The war seemed far away. I was able to swim and relax with friends for a few days and forget about the war.

The worst was the tedium and the unremitting tropical heat, the loss of control over your own life, and the sense that most men your age were back home, getting married, having children, getting on with their lives, pursuing careers, obtaining graduate degrees, etc. while your own life was in suspended animation in a by then clearly pointless and unwinnable war.

Another “worst part”, in a more general sense, was this: in other wars that America has fought, both before and after Vietnam, men who were drafted into or volunteered to serve were trained together in units, sent off to fight in units, and might well stay together as a kind of community for the duration of their military service. This permitted friendships to form and brought the mutual support, sense of structure, and familiarity that any community develops over time.

Service in Vietnam was organized along totally different lines, I believe intentionally, to prevent this sort of camaraderie or esprit de corps from developing.

Every soldier was in his own lonely war. The men you trained with were not the ones you served with. You received orders to Vietnam, traveled alone to, usually, Travis Air Force Base in Oakland, CA, a vast military base with thousands of soldiers milling about in apparently total chaos. You got on a plane to Saigon, traveling with a few hundred soldiers you'd never laid eyes on before; and when you got to Saigon you were again dispersed to hundreds of different Army units. You really felt that you were in your own private war.

Even after you had been assigned to a permanent unit each man there had a "tour" of one year-but none of these tours began or ended on the same dates. It's as though each student at Andover matriculated and graduated on random, different days. So, when I arrived at Camp Alpha I arrived alone. When I left nine months later, I again left alone for Boston, in my case, on a civilian Pan Am 747 filled with a mix of soldiers, diplomats, civilian contractors, etc., via Manila, Honolulu, Los Angeles and finally arrived in Boston exhausted and disoriented. There you were suddenly, alone, back in civilian life, with none of the people milling around you at Logan even aware that you were a soldier, or had just returned from the War in Vietnam. There were no parades, no welcoming ceremonies, no Army debriefing of any kind-just pick up your suitcase and take the Blue Line to Government Center, then the Green Line to Park Street, and finally the Red Line to Harvard Square, where you emerged a blinking alien on a strange planet.

10) Were you surprised with the outcome of the war? What were your views on the purpose of the war? Were you apathetic or did you align yourself with the idea that the war was a fight against communism?

By the time I left Vietnam in September 1972 it had been clear for some time that America would lose the war. The war was massively unpopular in the US, and the political will to continue it had clearly been broken. The Paris peace talks were in their final stages and most American troops had been withdrawn-the last ones left in March 1973.

At the time, i.e. in the timeframe 1966-1973, I believed the war was a colossal error by the US. I did not believe that it was a fight against communism, but a last ditch attempt to prop up a dying colonial world order. As the years have passed, however, I no longer have the same certainty. The political repression and social and economic conditions in South Vietnam following the North's victory in 1975 were not reassuring. But now Vietnam seems to be emerging as a potentially vibrant Southeast Asian economy. Political and democratic conditions seem to be improving.

But I still believe that war is rarely the answer and that our intervention was a mistake.

11) How did the war affect/change you? Were you sad or relieved to leave Vietnam? How did you get your life back on track after the war, did you return to college or look for a job?

I don't think the war changed me much. I did not see much combat and was not wounded. I did not become addicted to drugs as many did. When I returned to Boston in September 1972 I got a small apartment on Mt. Auburn Street in Cambridge (it's now a bookstore). I was still technically in the Army till June 1973; but after a short stint as an advisor to a National Guard unit on Commonwealth Ave. the Army allowed me to return to MGH (Mass General Hospital) where I was given a job in the neonatal ICU. I briefly again considered medical school but ultimately decided to attend law school which had the advantage of taking a year less. And so, I became a lawyer. Ironically, without the draft I would probably have become a doctor.

The War in Vietnam convulsed, politicized and radicalized an entire generation. It is difficult to explain the magnitude of that convulsion to anyone who didn't experience it.

My senior year at Harvard in 1969 the student body went on strike, opposition to the war being a main cause. Deans were briefly taken hostage. University buildings were "occupied" by students for weeks until forcibly ejected by the Massachusetts State Police. Exams were cancelled. Similar strikes and protests occurred at Berkeley, Columbia and hundreds of campuses across the US and Europe.

In the midst of that the War in Vietnam raged on, with enemy "body counts" and US casualty numbers announced nightly on the TV news. The civil rights and women's rights movements were in full swing. In 1966 when I was a sophomore living at Eliot House someone asked me if I was a Republican or a Democrat. I was totally apolitical and had only the vaguest understanding of what the terms even meant. By the spring of 1967 I knew. And had taken sides. It was a time when it was impossible not to take sides. You were either one of "us", or one of "them" and everybody understood what the terms meant.

Draft Deferment Leads to Overseas Teaching and Travel to Over 40 Countries

Jim Beniger

The dead cannot speak, and Jim died of early onset Alzheimer's in 2010 in Torrance, California, at the age of 63. So this essay is written on his behalf by classmate Anne Harvey.

Jim was born and grew up in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. He did not speak much about his past or family except to say that he had a sister, and that his family was petit bourgeois. At Harvard, he lived in Eliot House and wrote for the Crimson. During the summer he had worked as a reporter for the Wall Street Journal covering the Democratic convention in Chicago. He had also spent a summer as an intern at the Department of Justice. When I met Jim in fall 1968, he was writing his history thesis on the Lakota Sioux and their Ghost Dance movement of 1890 (a Native American millennial movement which ended in a massacre). Years later he confided that he had made a mistake by majoring in history.

Regarding Vietnam, to obtain a draft deferment from his Wisconsin draft board, following graduation he decided that he would teach overseas, and to look for a job he bought a small handbook directory listing independent schools outside the US. He applied for and received an offer from International College, a boy's boarding prep school, affiliated with American University Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon. Since it was a residential program, in addition to a salary, he would also receive room and board. Before departing overseas, he spoke with classmate Paula Hajar to find out what Lebanon was like and what to expect there. He took a circuitous route to travel to Beirut. After graduation he flew to Europe and went with me to a small Spanish fishing village that had a course for foreigners to learn conversational Spanish. I was starting to learn Spanish in order to research my history thesis on agrarian radicalism in Spain.

When my language program was over we traveled by train to Barcelona, then across northern Italy, through the former Yugoslavia (which is where he indicated that his ancestors had come from) we traveled across Bulgaria, ending up in Istanbul. He then flew on to Beirut, and I went back to Amsterdam to get my charter flight back home.

While living and teaching in Beirut, Jim wrote telling me about the wonderful and novel things he was doing and experiencing. He wrote of trips to places I had never even heard of, such as Byblos and Baalbek. He wrote of traveling to Cairo with friends, and he also wrote about the interesting food in the school cafeteria, such as hummus and tabbouleh. He visited Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. And he related to me the treatment of young women who violated the family code of honor (thrown off Pigeon Rock). He attempted to learn Arabic, but had given up and stated that every word seemed to be made up of three letter syllables, and the language consisted of simply rearranging these three letter syllables in what seemed to him an unintelligible random way.

The war in Vietnam was the catalyst for Jim temporarily leaving the US and exploring the world.

When his year of teaching at IC was coming to an end, Jim decided to continue his deferment by teaching, not in Lebanon, but rather at a high school in Colombia). Once again, he had found the school using his little handbook directory of independent schools. He was going to teach social studies to high school students in Cali, Colombia.

Following his suggestion, I then applied for a teaching position at the same school, and was offered and accepted a position teaching fourth grade (all subjects) at a bilingual (Spanish/ English) school in Cali.

Jim kept in touch with his Wisconsin draft board and his deferment continued uninterrupted. To go to Colombia, he did not even head back to the US. He made the most of his free time between teaching jobs. With his deferment in hand, he simply continued his exploration of the world. Since he had had free room and meals for the year, he had been able to save his entire salary and thus could afford to pay for a trip through the Soviet Union on his way to Colombia.

At that time travel through the Soviet Union was expensive, highly regimented and had to be booked and paid for in advance to the official government agency (Intourist). Since he was American the Soviets wanted him to pay for and travel first class. He pleaded student status, so they let him go second class at a reduced rate. He took a Russian ship through the Mediterranean to the Black Sea disembarking at Odessa. He traveled north by train from Odessa to Kiev, to Moscow on to Leningrad, stopping in each city and exploring the sites. From there he traveled through Scandinavia and south through Europe before flying to Colombia.

Jim was only a few years older than the high school students he taught in Colombia, and he developed wonderful personal relationships with them. They told him about their love of the music of Santana and mourning for Janis Joplin. For a weekend excursion, they drove him to Medellin, and took him to a special bakery where the secret thing to order was “galletas chilenas.” They told Jim that in the meadows around the school where the Cebu cattle wandered grew psychedelic mushrooms which they used. Jim gathered some mushrooms, and mailed a sample back to an ethnobotanist at Harvard, Professor Schultes for analysis. Jim thought the professor would be interested in such matters based on work he was doing at the university.

He received a reply back from a Harvard grad student informing he that he had not collected the sample properly. For proper analysis, he should not send a physical mushroom itself, but rather a spore print.

I do not recall the exact order of events, but during the 1970-1971 school year while Jim was teaching in Colombia two things happened. a. He applied for graduate admission at UC Berkeley in Sociology for the following fall term. b. He and I were told that we had to stop teaching because the school had not been able to get the necessary work visas for us, due to the fact of a change in Colombia’s work visa rules.

Jim already had his deferment for the year from his draft board, and rather than going home took a huge circuit trip by local bus overland around South America, passing through Ecuador, Peru , Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia. Many countries were visited twice. Returning back to Cali, he received news of his admission to grad school at Berkeley. The journey then continued back home to the US through Central America and Mexico by bus.

He still had his draft deferment, and that summer went back to journalism and worked as a staff writer at the Minneapolis Star newspaper. In the Fall Jim enrolled at UC Berkeley for grad school in statistics and sociology, where he received his Ph D in sociology in 1978. He ended up in a teaching career, eventually becoming a professor at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California (USC). I imagine the teaching that he did while overseas would have equipped him well for personalized teaching at the university level. Certainly, he would

have been able to communicate well with people of many different cultures and countries because of his travels all of which were a result of his deferments.

Collateral Damage

Jean Bennett

I hated the Vietnam War. My brain couldn't parse tortured arguments defending daily carnage and systemic corruption. My heart felt the foundations of those justifications had been laid in quicksand. Then my father, who'd rebelled in 1937 against his Cambridge upbringing by escaping to Peking, a decision that morphed into a lifelong diplomatic career, joined the pacification program. In 1968, just three days before the Tet Offensive, he arrived in the Mekong Delta, soon to witness his friend's capture, triggering his POW imprisonment for the remaining seven years of war. I loved and respected my father; I'd always admired his sense of humor, patient explanations, and unbridled support of independent thought. But writings like *The Village of Ben Suc* magnified my pacifist inclinations. At Radcliffe I embraced denial by avoiding political debates.

Until SDS took University Hall, drawing a line in the sand. Even doing nothing was taking sides. Choice was a mirage; I had to stand with the anti-war, anti-expansion students. My Chinese mother, understandably anti-communist in part because Mao had caused her to lose family and homeland, felt I lacked filial piety. Dad, in contrast, wrote, "If I believed what you believe, I would do as you have done. The only way this war will stop is if the American people turn against it. But I have facts you can't know, so I feel differently." In the summer of 1969 I was again arrested, this time for helping high school students plan anti-war actions in working-class Chelsea, nestled in the shadow of the Tobin Bridge. In September I joined the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), a humorless communist party (which may be redundant).

By 1971 I'd abandoned political action and buried myself at Harvard Ed School. Then Dad became head of the political section of the American Embassy in Saigon, where Mom could supervise terrified gardeners in the vine-covered house once occupied by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. She tried to lure my husband and me out one summer, which we both had off as public-school teachers.

War-entrenched Saigon seemed a bridge too far, but Mom dangled the bait of "seeing with your own eyes. How many of your activist friends can do that?" So I dashed off an irritating list of things to visit: a jail, school, orphanage, hospital, refugee camp, court, plus two venues indelibly depicted in *The Quiet American*: Cholon, the Chinese district, and the Continental Hotel bar, the once-and-current waterhole for foreign journalists. Finally, I asked to do something "useful," not just take tennis lessons.

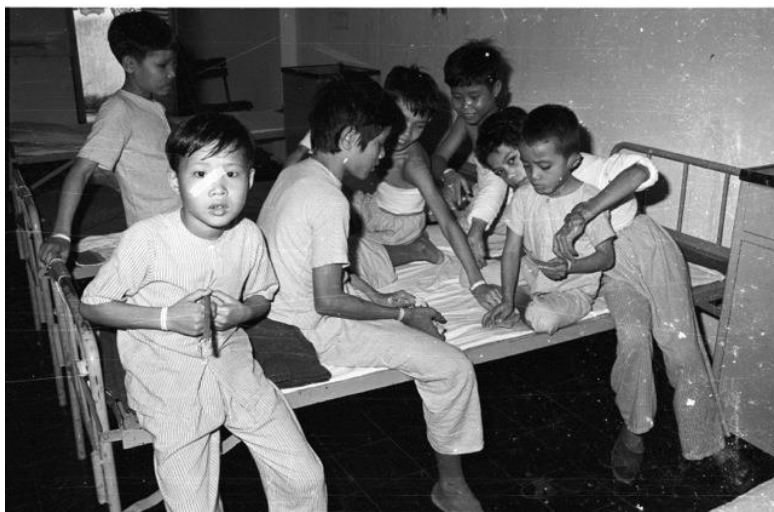
"Done!" shot back the reply.

Thus, Dennis and I spent the summer of 1973, during the much-touted ceasefire, in Saigon. Mom wrangled Dennis an internship with Citibank, an experience that eventually sucked him from Boston Public Schools to Stanford Business School, a trajectory difficult to reverse.

Mornings I volunteered at the International Rescue Committee children's hospital. Here lived the collateral damage: wounds from gunfire, shelling, or mines; burns from explosions; ravages from a flesh-eating virus seldom seen since Nazi camps; cleft palates from defoliants. There was only a single napalm victim. When I asked why, a nurse said matter-of-factly, "No one survives napalm. She was lucky some just splashed on her face."



I spoke no Vietnamese and the children had only comic book English — Okay! Number One! USA! You got gum? No way! Number Ten! — but we managed through the universal languages of curiosity and joy. I was meant to amuse children bored silly while recuperating for months between surgeries that took up to seven years to complete. There were almost no toys. A donated hoop and ball sparked rabid competitions where possession seemed the only rule. We invented games with chairs in the oven-hot courtyard and slapped cards on beds surrounded by interfering spectators. We belted out songs whose lyrics they couldn't understand but mimicked enthusiastically. A



favorite was “Zing-go-bell.” I have no idea why I'd chosen “Jingle Bells” in that hammering heat, but once introduced it became the required opener for daily sing-alongs.

These children believed in us, the few-and-far-between adults. One, undergoing nose reconstruction, had attached to her cheek a flesh sausage, one end of which was still part of her upper arm. While awaiting new paths of circulation to develop, she had to keep that arm

pressed to her face. I couldn't have done that — held an arm in the air for weeks without benefit of cast or brace.



I learned more from these children than I can enumerate. Due to restricted supplies, they received few analgesics, routinely accepting pain. I sat with them post-operation, singing softly in a foreign tongue, massaging feet or applying wet washcloths to foreheads. I am still in awe of their courage. And their irrepressible joie-de-vivre.

When a doctor suggested exercise for limbs, Mom corralled Embassy wives to chaperone the children at my parents' pool, the seed of a program that would continue after my departure. On the first day the kids pushed willy-nilly off the bus and threw themselves in — none of them swimmers, but all unfazed by the 4-foot depth of water. Each rose to the surface to paddle frantically amid hysterical group laughter. Their nonchalance towards risk is why some were wounded; their ability to laugh is how they survived.



On my final day the older boys gave me one of my most cherished possessions: a helicopter made entirely from hospital trash — IV tubing, metal strips from saline bottles, plastic clamps, and tiny rubber hoses. That helicopter embodies those children: their optimism, persistence, and willingness to greet a world that had irrevocably harmed them.



A friend took remarkable photographs, capturing their essence, their overriding spunk, even as some grinned with scarred faces barely recognizable as human. A social worker reported that when returned home their families hid

them away, bowing to the cultural obsession with physical beauty. I understood because on our zoo field trips people shouted angrily at me, “Shame on you for bringing them out in public!”

In August a small convoy of family and friends drove north to Danang and Hue in army jeeps. Astonishingly, Dad let Dennis and me join his inspection of Quang Tri, made famous by news clips of an entire population retreating south along the jam-packed highway, joining the almost 300,000 displaced persons in the province. This once-bustling town of 35,000, the South Vietnamese provincial capital closest to the DMZ, had been obliterated the previous year by American aerial bombing and North Vietnamese shelling. The place mirrored 1946 Hiroshima—a sea of rubble interrupted by a few brave pockmarked structures. We saw no one in that vast band of demolition until we reached the river where soldiers were swimming — Americans on our side, North Vietnamese across. It seemed a convivial event with cheerful calls back and forth, but war raged eerily in the trees among massive metal speakers aimed at opposing shores. The North Vietnamese blasted what resembled Chinese martial music; the Americans retorted with Sinatra’s “Strangers in the Night.”

Leaving Quang Tri I felt dizzy and nauseated. Dad diagnosed dehydration so we stopped at a solitary roadside stand, open-air beneath a corrugated iron roof. Warm Coke never tasted so good, the water being unreliable. I gazed at an idyllic scene of a lone farmer working his field on a sunny day. Then came the explosion, rocketing his body into the air.

I jumped up.

“Sit down!” Dad barked, his hand instantly on my arm. “That whole field’s mined. There’s nothing we can do.”

I laid my head on the uneven wooden table. Faster than surgeons could rehabilitate, more victims were being produced. That was and is the reality of war, the relentless parade of the wounded — physically, emotionally, or both. The so-called survivors.



Photo credits: Helicopter, Jean Bennet; all others, Mark Ashida

My father's last decade was heartbreaking because of brain damage caused by health issues stemming from exposure to Agent Orange. That, too, was collateral damage. In 2003 I sat frozen watching Fog of War, thinking of all who'd suffered when those in charge knew better.

Whenever my students unearthed my arrests, they'd romanticize the situation. I'd answer their questions, then add an unsolicited opinion:

"Always consider the consequences of your actions. Civil disobedience means breaking a law to make a political or moral statement. But be ready to pay the price. When I was arrested in college, I pled guilty to trespassing. Of course, I was trespassing. The college announced its plan to arrest us, and I chose to stay. That's how civil disobedience works. You admit guilt and you pay the price, which for me was \$25.00. I rummaged in my jeans' pockets and found \$17.50. The judge quipped, 'What do you think this is? Lay-away? If you don't have the full amount, you have to plead not guilty. It's either/or.' Luckily for me that's all I had. A conviction would have barred me from schools; I would have unwittingly sacrificed my calling, to be a teacher. So, think before you act."

Vietnam as Viewed from Afar

Dr. Bill Bushing

Prior to entering Harvard in the fall of 1965, I already had misgivings about the Vietnam conflict. As more information became available through various national and local outlets, my opposition to the conflict deepened. Freshman year I joined several demonstrations including a few organized by SDS. At the time I didn't find their methods out of line with my own beliefs. During the spring I attended the People for Peace Concert in Boston.

However, I did write my draft board I believe in my sophomore year and politely stated that I would not accept an assignment in Southeast Asia if called. For some reason the draft board appeared to lose my file after that. They didn't "find" it until the fall after graduation.

In later years my opposition continued to grow. However, my protests focused on the government and the policies it put forth rather than the service personnel who in many cases were forced to fight against their will. I had family members and friends who served during the conflict and bore no ill will toward them. Many of my activities were within the "draft sanctuary" movement. We would gather in a church or college building and surround an individual who did not wish to be drafted. On occasion we would protect AWOL service personnel as well. It was a very non-violent way to express our feelings about the conflict.

My opposition continued through my four years at Harvard, growing more pronounced over time but never becoming violent or overly radical. Of course, I had the benefit of a student deferment during my tenure at the College. I was not really in any danger of being drafted until after graduation. I applauded the targeting of Secretary McNamara because that focused on one of the policy makers behind the conflict. I don't believe I ever acted inappropriately toward military personnel. One weekend a friend of mine from high school was my guest in the house dining hall after a swim meet. He was a cadet at the Naval Academy and in uniform. Sadly, he was booed by several in the dining hall. The sad thing is he was also against what was happening in Vietnam.

Senior year I roomed with three classmates all of whom were in Naval ROTC. I didn't see that as a divisive factor. We were friends and each of us was approaching the reality of Vietnam in a different way. Following graduation, I did receive a teaching deferment since I was hired by a rural school in California. That fall I went up to Berkeley to visit several classmates in graduate school up there. On December 1st we watched the draft lottery on television. There were many moans from some in the group as they received low numbers. I was fortunate in getting #271 so I was essentially out of the draft.

I continued teaching for nine more years after that. I injected a number of issues related to Vietnam in my biology classes such as the effects of Agent Orange both on the ecosystems and the populace including our own military personnel. Many of my students had been somewhat sheltered and were astounded to hear of such things. Some would face the draft in short time.

Vietnam continues to affect me today. I've become friends with several former military personnel who served there, including one former Marine who returns to Vietnam to build schools and other structures for the people. Our discussions have been important because he was there...and I wasn't. I value his input and consider him a good friend.

I found it very sad that so many who served came back to such hostility from fellow citizens. They deserved better. The government not so much! Although I do not see any homeless vets out here on Catalina Island where I live, when I go to the mainland they are often quite evident. This is a problem our government needs to be more active in solving. It was at the government's bidding these people served and were traumatized. The government needs to address this far more aggressively. They are owed that.

It still saddens me that 58,000+ of our military personnel died during that conflict, not to mention an estimated three million Vietnamese civilians and combatants. Some were friends from high school. What did we achieve to justify that?

Giving Advice

Martin Chalfie

As I assume it was for most of my classmates, the War in Vietnam was an ever-present aspect of my growing up. For me it was a sad but distant problem. I grew up in suburban Chicago, so the War was something to watch on TV, something to think about in the abstract. I had strong feelings about the war, but I think these initially came from my general upbringing and not as much as a reaction to the war. My great grandfather had been a “career soldier” in 19th century Russia, a term applied to Jews who were conscripted into the tsar’s army for a period of 25 years. The story I was told was that my grandfather, not wanting to share his father’s fate, emigrated first to England and then to the United States. And when my father talked about his time in the Navy in World War II, he seemed to spend most of his time talking with his friend John Truman (the nephew of then-senator Harry Truman) about how John could influence his uncle to get them out of the war. In other words, I came from a background if not of pacifism, at least of a great dislike of war.

Thus, I was not inclined to be for a war, such as the one in Vietnam, that seemed so obviously flawed, when I entered Harvard. A few years ago I wrote the following in a biographical essay. ‘My college years (1965-1969) were a time of considerable student activism and experimentation. I was not immune to the changes that were going on around me. I was strongly for civil rights, against the War in Vietnam, and owned a pair of black and red striped pants. I was not, however, much of an activist (I would have been classified as a liberal). Nonetheless, during my last semester at Harvard, I and virtually all of my friends went on strike after the University had allowed the Cambridge police to come onto campus and beat student protestors. The initial confrontation had made the national news, so when I decided to boycott my classes, I called my parents to tell them my reasons. My parents were sympathetic, but did not want me to get in trouble (the fears of what had happened during the Red Scare of the 1950s made them caution me against joining any political organizations). Our conversation lasted more than an hour. At the end, my parents reluctantly agreed with my actions. Not willing to end our conversation at that point and trying to get a rise out of my parents, I said, “Mom, Dad. Be sure to watch the news tomorrow night, because if there is another confrontation, I’m going to be right there on the front lines” (something that I would not have done). My mother replied, “Marty. If I ever find out that you were anywhere where there was violence, I’ll murder you.” Our mutual laughter finished the conversation.’

In our senior year, many of my classmates and I became increasingly concerned about the War, the draft, and the real possibility that we would have to make a decision about whether we would participate or not. I began reading more about the Selective Service System (the “Draft Board”) and trained to be a draft counselor. The training involved reading Arlo Tatum and Joseph S. Tuchinsky’s Guide to the Draft, the draft regulations, and literature provided by the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCCO), which documented the many changes to the draft laws and regulations and going to several training sessions. For the next couple of years, I counseled others on what their draft obligations were in Cambridge, my hometown of Skokie, IL, and New Haven, wherever I happened to be living.

I now realize that this training had an unexpected influence on who I am and how I give advice. When I began draft counseling, I found that counselors took two different approaches, both stemming from an opposition to the war (or to war in general). Some counselors thought their job

was to convince draft-eligible men to opt out of participating in the war; talking people into being conscientious objectors or even leaving the country was appropriate because the counselors felt these options were the correct choices and because it took these men out of the pool of potential fighters. The other group of counselors, exemplified by those in the CCCO, believed that everyone was entitled to all the available information, but no one should be talked into a particular action. Everyone was expected to make and take responsibility for their own decisions. Or as the back of the Guide to the Draft stated: “The authors make no attempt to persuade anyone to follow a specific course, but instead set forth the alternatives, explaining how to proceed, and what are the likely results of each choice.” For example, we were advised that we never wanted to have someone come back to us several years later and say that we had ruined their lives because we had convinced them to leave the country and while they were away one of their parents had gotten gravely ill and they had been unable to see them before they died.

I felt much more comfortable with this latter approach and still use it today in my life as a researcher and a professor whenever I am asked for advice. I have lots of opinions, but I realized several years ago that I am still following the guidance I received when I was training to be a draft counselor. For example, I feel very strongly that graduate students often apply for postdoctoral positions incorrectly, and I often counsel them on what I believe is the correct way to apply. I do not, however, tell them where to apply. That is a decision that they have to make.

In addition, I have been fortunate to talk with students all over the world, and during these conversations, I am frequently asked for advice on which research area they should enter. I usually reply by telling students that I don't truly know what will work out for them and that, in any case, I don't want them to blame me years later for steering them in what they have come to feel was the wrong direction. Instead, I suggest that how they start does not really matter, because their own discoveries will generate the research areas of the future and that they should simply work in an area that excites them. Although some students are annoyed that I don't tell them what to do, I hope that they are taking responsibility for their decisions just as I hoped that people seeking draft advice had done so many years ago. I am not sure that my current attitude toward advising would have developed without my decision to learn to counsel people on the draft as a response to what was happening in the country during the War in Vietnam.

On Saying No

Larry Cohen

The closest I came to Vietnam was a bright fall day in 1970 when I was the only passenger on a small yellow bus from the Coolidge Corner draft office to the South Boston Induction Center. I carried a letter explaining why I was refusing induction, but until it actually happened, I wasn't sure I was going to do it. I was mindful of the fact that my father had passed through the same center on his way to World War II. He had not said anything one way or the other about my plans, but I knew he felt that in the end, whatever one's misgivings, it was best to follow societal rules if at all possible. And then there were all those kids from South Boston who had been with me at the draft physical. Why should they have to go and not me?

At the center I found that I was the only inductee that day. There had been others scheduled, but they had simply not shown up. I went through the medical assessment, where my high blood pressure was written off as anomalous, and then during the mental assessment, when I was asked if there was any impairment that might affect my service, I blurted out that I did not intend to serve. The examiner, probably used to such behavior by then, excused himself for a moment to let someone know, and then explained that officially I needed to go through the induction ceremony and, at the end, not step forward when I was told to do so. He directed me to a waiting area. (On my way there, weirdly, I ran into a Harvard classmate who was serving in the Coast Guard. Somehow we chatted pleasantly even while my heart and mind were racing.)

The induction hall was huge, built for the mass inductions of the past, and when I was finally called in, I felt overwhelmed by it. An officer and his assistant processed onto a stage and went through a ritual introduction. As I listened, it suddenly occurred to me that since I was alone, it was unclear what stepping forward actually meant. What if my leg twitched? What if they just came and scooped me up and sent me off? As the moment approached, my leg did start shaking, but when I was asked to step forward, I managed to keep it under control. The officer led the induction oath, with a silent response, and then processed out, trailed by the assistant. A moment later he returned and asked me to come with him. We sat in a hallway. He actually seemed kindly and did not harangue me, but he did let me know that formally he needed to give me a second chance by going through the ceremony once more. Then I would be free to leave. He asked if I had brought a statement, and I gave it to him. I assume it still sits in some vast archive somewhere.

The second round was no easier than the first, but again I managed to control my leg, and then I was "free." I had not really known what would happen; in fact, I half expected that I would be arrested immediately. But I was simply dismissed. I walked slowly back to Park Street and took the streetcar home.

In retrospect, the government was prosecuting very few draft refusers. But I didn't know that then. I had already dropped out of graduate school, figuring that it would not be worth finishing a degree in physics if I was going to have a criminal record and could not get research grants. I spent the next two years doing not much other than reading all the subjects I had not had time for in college and watching films at all the programs that were springing up around Cambridge and Boston; I was, I suppose, educating myself in a way, but I was also becoming increasingly depressed. Depression may, in fact, have the most lasting effect of refusing induction and its aftermath, but it was only in

retrospect that I could see how it held me until I was about 30. I'm sure that I'm not the only one who came out of that period feeling unmoored.

Then in 1972 the draft suddenly ended. Just after the announcement, I got a confusing note from my draft board saying that there had been an error in processing my original draft notice and that they would be sending a new one, except that now there was no point since there was no draft. And so once again I was free, and with no criminal record since officially what I had refused was an improper induction.

A month later I took off for Europe and Israel and traveled for several months before coming home to vote for George McGovern. Shortly after I returned, a chance meeting in Harvard Square got me started proofreading at The MIT Press. I thought this would be a temporary way station as I retook my bearings, but thirty years later I retired from the Press as Associate Director and Editor-in-Chief.

For four years at Harvard, every meal seemed to include a discussion and argument about Vietnam, but by graduation I felt I knew almost nothing. My decision that day in South Boston was more gut than rational analysis. Since then, I have learned much more, and it has all tended to reinforce my decision to refuse induction. And yet, over time I have also developed increasing respect for those who did choose to serve and who managed, despite the odds, to do so honorably and without being broken, and also sympathy for those who were broken. The moral choice was impossible. Looking back, I believe that the only right response was to choose a path based on your best sense of the right and then do your best to follow it with some modicum of integrity. When I think about that induction day now, I am proud not so much of the choice itself, but of the fact that I made a choice and was willing to deal with whatever consequences it entailed.

American and/or Canadian?

Robert Cushman

A #13 in the lottery in the fall of 1969 put Vietnam and military service top of mind. I had no intention of joining the military and had never been athletic enough to get a 4F. Having spent a year abroad, I was a senior at the time and like so many others in our class, it preoccupied and ruined my final year.

My parents emigrated to Canada in 1952 and I had every intention of heading home after graduation. Although I had participated in my share of anti-war protests, the prospect of becoming a draft dodger just by returning home to Canada seemed harsh.

What to do? At that point I was starting to take pre-med courses and the option of enrolling in a medical or dental unit in the Reserves or National Guard seemed like a reasonable compromise.

Late in my senior year I found my way to the armoury in Boston as a new recruit in a dental Army Reserve unit. Later I spent the required 6 months at Fort Dix for basic training and a stint of useless paper pushing. I returned the following summer with my unit to provide a few weeks of dental care at Ft. Dix where I spent my time handing instruments to dentists, cleaning up and autoclaving. George W. Bush was not one of our patients, but I do think he availed himself of a similar service from the National Guard at about this time.

Beyond the boredom and the interesting social cross section of boot camp, my most vivid memory was a single meeting in Boston. The inner city was ablaze in riots that night and there were legitimate concerns about getting home safely from the waterfront armoury. But the rabid racism of my fellow Reservists was what I did not expect and have never experienced before or after that night. I realized that I was odd man out, a college guy from Cambridge, and kept my mouth shut.

Sometime later I enrolled in medical school at McMaster in Hamilton, Ontario, some 100 miles from Buffalo. I had hoped to have a deferment by then but somehow the bureaucracy was paralysed by the concept of a Canadian medical school. Somewhat ironic given that the father of modern medicine, William Osler was born 1 mile from McMaster, and later left McGill to revamp American medicine at Johns Hopkins. But what does a Draft Board know, or even want to know?

After my experience in Boston, it was with trepidation that I enrolled in a Reserve medical unit in Buffalo. If the armoury in Boston was unfriendly, what would my experience be like on the fringes of the American Midwest? I thought things could only get worse.

To my surprise, my fellow reservists in Buffalo were much like me, essentially grad students or young professionals just trying to cope and minimize the impact of the War in Vietnam on their lives. Almost to a man, they were anti-war and cynical. Quickly I grew my hair long again, and after smelling a waft of marijuana one Sunday afternoon in the armoury, I was emboldened to start wearing a ridiculously poor fitting chestnut wig (Halloween garb no doubt), provided by the American wife of one of my professors, for opening and closing exercises. All was well.

The monthly commitment started at 7:30 a.m. Saturday morning with check in, a quick march, and the perfunctory lacklustre salutes, and ended much the same way on Sunday at 3 p.m. In the interim I worked in my army fatigues as an orderly at the Buffalo General Hospital, slept in the interns'

residence and had more than enough spare time to peek at charts (how things have changed!), talk to the medical trainees, and even practice my rudimentary physical exam on the odd patient.

Fast forward 18 months and finally I was granted a med school deferment. I was able to retain my American citizenship which allowed me to come to reunions, to visit family and friends and now to get clobbered by additional Trumpian US taxes on top of the “socialist” Canadian rates. I escaped having to apply for amnesty by signing up, but I have never worked, nor spent more than a few weeks in the US since then.

What was an inconvenience for me, and often the source of good stories today, was so different for so many of our cohort. A few years back I was in Washington and visited the Vietnam Memorial for the first time. I had to go back the next day. It brought me to tears, peering at name after name. The monument stood in such contrast to so many other war monuments, bellicose and jingoistic, that dot the city.

Yes, the United States finally did the right thing and got out of Vietnam, but not before the carnage and the scarring that continues to dominate the American political landscape today with involvement of the young in the quicksand of the Middle East. I count myself as one of the fortunate.

The Three Major Decisions of My Life After Harvard

Henry Doerr

The three major decisions of my life – becoming a doctor, marrying a New Zealander and immigrating there - were a direct result of the War in Vietnam and, in particular, of the assassination of RFK.

Going back to our Freshman year- '65-66, I was a supporter of the War, believing (quite naively as it turned out) that LBJ and his team of advisors, (many of who were “the best and the brightest” from the JFK administration,) developed a rational policy direction based on reliable intelligence, calm analysis and wise judgement.

By '66-67, our Sophomore year, LBJ's “credibility gap”, the ineffectiveness of his strategy and his increasing isolation became much more apparent to me as well as to many others whose views also changed. We all saw the escalation and the mounting casualties daily on the TV or in the papers. What had begun as opposition to War at a political or philosophical level deepened to then include the not inconsequential personal threat as we began to consider the increasing likelihood of being drafted and of having to serve in Vietnam despite our anti-War views?

So each of us, in our own way, began to think seriously of how we might avoid the draft once our 2-S student deferment ended. For me, as a lapsed pre-med, that year I suddenly got “religion” again and decided to return to the pre-med stream (as I think nearly 40% of our class of '69 did compared with the usual 20%).

Of course the tumultuous events of 1968 only hardened our anti-War views and efforts- the Tet Offensive, the “tiger cages”, the heroin-addicted returning GIs, the corruption of the South Vietnamese leaders, the success of Eugene McCarthy and the surprise decision by LBJ not to run again. However, the War still raged on. Then came the two traumatic assassinations: Martin Luther King Jr in April and RFK in June, the latter affecting me deeply.

I had stayed up to watch the results of the California Democratic Primary and turned off the TV just after RFK famously said, “On to Chicago”. Waking the next morning to the terrible news, my first reaction was that I could not and would not live in America; that judgement dominated my thoughts and decisions for the next several years.

Yes, I went to Med School so I was “safe” from the draft for a further four years. And, of course we continued to march, to speak out and even managed to get the traditionally conservative Medical Students to go out on strike during the “Moratorium”. But, not surprisingly, during my Med School elective '71-72, I took the opportunity to travel to New Zealand (English-speaking, Western heritage and values but, crucially, anti-War and NOT America). And it was during that seven months elective that I met a young Med Student named Mila.

I received my MD in '73 and was the only member of my Med School class to complete my Internship outside of the US- Victoria B.C. in fact. To do so, I had become a “landed immigrant”- a Canadian citizen. As such I was no longer subject to the US draft rules and, unlike many Americans who fled to Canada, I was not legally a “draft dodger” so I was at liberty to return freely to the US to visit my family, a particularly relevant matter as my Mother was dying of cancer. (You'll recall that the then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau did not allow the US authorities to

extradite Americans from Canada for breaches in the US draft laws but they could not cross back over the border without jeopardy).

While by 1974 that all became a moot point when the War finally wound down, by then I had a Kiwi spouse and, following a year's General Practice in rural Minnesota to be near my ailing Mother, we decided to return to New Zealand where we have lived ever since, practicing medicine and raising three children.

So, in summary, one of the momentous "what ifs" of history significantly influenced me: had RFK not been assassinated, I have no doubt he would have decisively won the '68 election and used that mandate to end the War many years sooner than Nixon did (with many less casualties and without the enormous social upheaval). I would not have felt compelled to go to Med School, travel to NZ for my elective, meet and marry a Kiwi and permanently settle there.

Vietnam, Pacifism, and a Career

Tim Earle

The War in Vietnam helped define me intellectually and politically. Although never a political activist, I participated in my share of protests (just one of the group), wore proudly an armband at graduation, and then went on to create an academic career to consider how human societies have developed, considering warfare in social evolution.

I was raised in a Cambridge academic family, my father a Brandeis Professor. He descended from a long-line of New England Quakers: a conscientious objector in World War II, his father in World War I, and so a line of pacifists back through the Civil War and War of Independence. I was a natural pacifist, I guess. At that time, I attended Quaker Meeting in Cambridge and stood vigil with them. I registered on religious grounds as a CO, discussed with my bride removal to Canada, and eventually received a 4F (high blood pressure).

The brutal slaughter, destruction, and waste of the War in Vietnam were daily lessons of what was wrong with war, the US, and world politics of confrontation. Of course, participation in some wars have been hotly debated even among pacifists, and many Quakers fought in the Civil War because of their commitment to the abolition of slavery. Against Nazi and Japanese intolerance and aggression, World War II seemed 'a just war,' but, the War in Vietnam showed armed conflict in its starkest reality. Like many others, I saw Vietnam as a colonial war, which we had inherited from the French. I came to Harvard to study evolutionary biology with Ernst Mayr, but the War turned me as a voter toward progressive politics, and shifted I shifted my major to anthropology. My first opportunity to vote was the Massachusetts 1968 presidential primary, when I cast my ballot for Eugene McCarthy; his campaign poster Peace by Ben Shahn still sits over my desk. I was deeply disillusioned by Harvard's dealing with student protests and the War, and since then I have resisted telling people that I went here as an undergraduate.

Although not religiously based, I continue to be a pacifist believing in humanity and our potential for peace. Academically, I became an anthropological archaeologist. My honors project in Peru looked at warfare as significant in social evolution. When I arrived at the University of Michigan to continue my studies, protests against the War were in full swing, and my professors were actively involved in class boycotts and teach ins. I found the discussions and debates inspiring, and I became committed to what was to become my career, studying archaeologically 1000-year sequences in human history to discover patterns of social change. I have concluded that, after property in land became established and defended, war has been nearly constant. Warfare's role, however, has been highly variable and linked inexorable to changing conditions in political economies that create power relations controlling people and resources.

As conditions that encourage warfare are clarified, our focus must shift to considering conditions for peace. I think that peace is both possible and necessary, but to achieve peace will take all human creativity, good intentions, and social sciences with a consideration of deep history. My focus on social sciences as offering potential for progressive solutions developed in part, because of the War in Vietnam. Human history has taught me how peace is possible, how to teach about progressive values, and how hopefully to influence human, if only in a small way, to make reasoned calculations for war and peace. The War paradoxically helped make me an optimist for a world based on improved knowledge and a regard for its place in future change.

The Best Education

Alexander Forbes Emerson

in 1989 i wrote a bit about them harvard days. 20 year memoires are fairly common in the war game. anyway my wife made a book from my little pile of poems. i Called it SOMBER REUNION, and Ann did a lovely job of it, as she was an artist.

i attach one poem....the book is on the web if you go to www.connectedwords.com.

the poem THE BEST EDUCATION was informed by a couple of things. the title comes from my world war 2 era P-51 pilot father on one his many phone calls to me at harvard, calls urging me to get into uniform, saying , almost crying, things like YOU'VE HAD ALL THE ADVANTAGES IN LIFE AND THE BEST EDUCATION AND YOU'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING TO EARN THEM!!!

the details about napalm research under Louis Fieser i guess i got from a chance talk with a sardonic grad student who was working for Fieser. i was taking nat sci 5 and chem 20 in kind of a "smartesse oblige" mode, thinking maybe i should be a doctor cause i was smart.

anyway i met this guy on the road out in front of Mallincrodt labs main steps, and he told me about working on napalm, how dow chemical wanted a stickier product because the vietnamese had learned to scrape it off their pajamas, and how they at the lab got it so it would stick like shit to a shingle and burn to the bone. they tested their concoctions out in harvard stadium during the week.

anyway it was an interesting conversation for a confused maybe premed student, a conversation which took the shine off the harvard myth forever for me, though that process had help from other quarters.

anyway, for what it's worth, here is THE BEST EDUCATION. my website has it with my voice, and with other related poems. COLD COMFORT you might look at, too, as the profitable amorality of Harvard is caught a bit in that too.

THE BEST EDUCATION

I.

I was at Harvard.
Taking Chemistry 20.
Down the corridor,
a professor worked
to make napalm stickier.

The Vietnamese had learned
to scrape it off
their pajamas.

DOW chemical wanted
an improved product.

The professor worked,
diligently,
to improve the torch
of liberty,
and finally got it right,
so it would burn
to the bone.

II.

The telephone rang.
It was my mother.
Breaking.
A body bag, was coming home.

A Personal Legacy of the War in Vietnam

Jay Epstein

The war in Vietnam shaped my life at Harvard and subsequently in ways that affect me to this day. Although I didn't hold radical views, my outlook as an undergraduate was strongly anti-war due to mistrust of the information coming from our government, skepticism about the rationale for the war and horror at the brutality of the fight itself, particularly regarding civilians. My first reaction was to stay an extra year at Harvard. I had entered college as a sophomore, but declined to graduate in 1968 under the risk of call-up. As a member of student government, where I represented Leverett House on the Harvard Policy Committee, I took an active interest in the question whether ROTC had a legitimate place on campus. In this role, prior to the occupation of University Hall, I participated in a debate with a representative of SDS in which my opponent argued for removal of ROTC by whatever means, while I argued for change from within. With two other members of student government, one from Harvard College and one from Radcliffe, I had developed an argument that activities of ROTC should not receive academic credit because of the unique exception that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences did not have oversight of the military curriculum. At the same time, our review supported the position that the military had a longstanding history of a meaningful presence at Harvard which benefited the nation. This position received little support at the debate. However, subsequent to providing our thesis in writing, the three of us were invited to a meeting of the faculty senate to present it. To my knowledge, this was the first time in Harvard history that students were invited to this forum. Ultimately, Harvard terminated ROTC as an academic program while permitting it to remain a part of university life. I don't know whether our student advocacy played a role in this decision, but it may have. I reacted with personal dismay at the violent turn of events that later ensued, but learned many political lessons from the strike. These I applied later at medical school. Having searched for a route to deferment consistent with my general interests in science, I redirected my career toward medicine as a safe haven apart from politics. But, when it became known that President Nixon had expanded the Vietnam war with bombings in Cambodia, I led a student strike to give a voice to protest, disrupting a test period. This was widely supported by my fellow students, who were accused by a shocked administration of opportunistically avoiding exams, missing the point of a message that was not lost on the public media.

Echoes of these times are found in my career. Briefly, in 1971 I left medical school during my second year when call-up under the draft was well below my draft number. I returned to medical school in 1973, by a freer choice, ultimately to become an internist and infectious disease specialist. However, my path evolved toward public health where I engaged in research and regulation at the Food and Drug Administration overseeing development of blood products for 24 years including many to support combat injuries. A bit ironically, I served as an active duty Navy reserve officer for several years in the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, perhaps inspiring my older son to pursue a military career that is ongoing. As was the case in 1969, I was never anti-military so much as opposed to the specific war in Vietnam, a view that shaped my life and career adding an unexpected political education and role.

Ron Fischler

I was like most of us, very opposed to the war in Vietnam. While I participated in protests in college, I wasn't in SDS or one of the occupiers of campus buildings as some friends and roommates were. Like many who had decided to go to medical school, I was dismayed to learn that deferments were no longer being given. I had the misfortune of having a very low draft no.--38-- which meant I was likely to be drafted after graduation from medical school. So, I began looking at my options and attended a lecture at the Med School on Indian Health Service by an alumnus a few years out. He described the adventure and the meaningful role he was playing, and that it satisfied the draft requirement for military service (Indian Health was organized under the Coast Guard and we were considered Coast Guard officers even though we were not issued uniforms) and I signed up. You had some choice as to where you would go, so classmate John Philbrick and I arranged to fly out to Albuquerque and rent a car. We toured a number of southwest reservations in a week's time in Arizona and New Mexico, and we both selected San Carlos, Az. It had a small hospital in a rural community of 5000 and it was near a lake and mountains and 30 min from a small town and 2 hr from Phoenix. Not being totally isolated was important for my wife's happiness. About that time, Dustin Hoffman's movie "Little Big Man" came out and I became passionate about using my government service to be of help to the Indians previously oppressed by the white man and now trying to manage in the modern era. I quickly learned that the Apaches were not particularly impressed with the government nor its white employee's romantic visions. Humbled, I had to earn respect slowly.

It turned out to be a wonderful experience and a professional highlight for many years to come. There were 5 doctors, all out of good schools, sharing similar values who worked with very little but gave great care. (We had limited lab and x-ray and could fly out the sickest patients and had specialists available over the phone and a few came to the reservation.) We had nurses and public health staff, a dentist and a psychologist and a pharmacist, and we became friends with teachers and tribal and Bureau of Indian Affairs staff, playing volleyball after work in the "hospital compound" located on the campus along with the Apache hospital staff. The enormous social problems on the reservation: poverty, poor diet, lack of education, unemployment and alcoholism took their toll and manifested themselves in the illnesses and abuses we tried to ameliorate. I learned that "community medicine" meant using relationships and education and teamwork to encourage change. And we worked to inspire some locals to get their education so they could eventually take over. And a few did and it was gratifying to see. We were young and curious and learned all we could about the culture when we were allowed in, and we were. We also enjoyed the beautiful natural resources around on the lake, on white water rivers, mountains, on horseback or 4 wheeling or on dirt bikes, and we traveled to nearby reservations to observe their rituals. And we had fun and made lifelong friends that are still among our closest. And we learned how to manage on our own. We befriended the Tribal Chairman, a Medicine Man and we shared their world for a brief but important time.

Most significantly, we fell in love with the Southwest. When the Indian Health experience came to an end (I wound up extending to a 3rd year,) I had the opportunity to return to Boston Childrens' Hospital to complete my Pediatric residency, but I chose Denver instead. And when it came time to look for jobs, I selected one at the University of Arizona in Tucson where I joined the faculty in Family Medicine and Pediatrics. Eventually we made our way to Phoenix and to starting a private pediatric practice.

The War in Vietnam had a very significant effect on my career trajectory and our life. I doubt we would have wound up in Arizona otherwise. Working in the Indian Health Service gave me a community perspective in the delivery of healthcare and the experience of prepaid comprehensive care. And it made me an advocate for universal service by all citizens.

Reflections on a Pivotal Time

Gerard Goulet

The War in Vietnam was a backdrop to our collegiate experience that occupied an increasingly large part of the stage with each year of our matriculation. It was, however, only one of the upheavals going on in society at the time. Race relations, Black Power, the assassinations, civil unrest, problems of fair housing and recruitment on campus were also causes of student activism. For the most part, the activists were focused on the underprivileged—those who could not avoid the draft, those who could not get good housing, those who could not reasonably aspire to a life better than that of their parents, those who experienced racial and other forms of discrimination. It was a time of awakening to the problems that existed within a largely complacent society. Even for those who were not activists, there was much in their platforms to support.

To understand what the War in Vietnam meant for me then and in succeeding years requires a little background on my life before Harvard. I grew up in a lower-class household within a close-knit extended family. I had 10 uncles, all but the youngest of whom had served in the military in either World War II or the Korean War. My paternal grandfather had served in World War I and my father had quit college to serve in World War II. I wouldn't say military service was an expectation for my generation but it certainly wasn't a foreign concept. My family trusted government and I was brought up with no reason to think differently. War was then, and remains, a last resort to be avoided, if at all possible. In that regard, our involvement in Vietnam was aberrant but we expected the government to justify the war's continuance at some point.

When it came time for college, my early decision path was pretty narrow—likely a Catholic college that gave financial aid. Then came one of those fortuitous encounters that change lives. While working as a counselor at a local scout camp in the summer of 1964, I was introduced to a Navy Ensign stationed on a ship nearby who had attended college on a regular Navy ROTC scholarship. He encouraged me to consider that option. I applied and was successful. I was also accepted at Harvard but without financial aid. So, my choice became Harvard on a NROTC scholarship or another college on a full scholarship. The trade-off for this 17-year-old in 1965 was 4 years of college at my first choice in exchange for a commitment to serve on active duty for four years—a commitment to which I was not averse based on family history. One could second guess that decision then and now but, to me, Harvard offered an exposure to a more diverse student body and a broader range of opinions and ideas than the alternatives, so I chose the Navy and Harvard.

The most immediate consequence was that I avoided the uncertainty and anxiety that plagued many of my classmates. I knew I would be on active duty upon graduation. This was factored into my post-grad plans. I still trusted the government. As campus militancy increased, I appreciated that others held strong opinions that the war was morally wrong rather than simply poorly thought out, but I waited for the government's justification.

One of my roommates for the three upper-class years was a member of SDS, I was continually exposed to the doubts and mistrust that fueled the passion of that organization's adherents. We were thrust together in one of those Harvard housing snafus that crop up from time to time. We were each separated from the two individuals with whom we expected to room, and then all 6 of us were assigned, not to a house, but to three 2-man rooms in Claverly. Interestingly, my new roommate and I were the only 2-person group of the three that survived that year intact. I think our rooming

beyond sophomore year worked because we respected each other, defended our right to disagree, and realized that we both sought the same end. We believed in our country, we saw the way to make it stronger differently, but we thought that trying to understand our different perspectives made more sense in getting to a solution than shutting off all debate. He wanted quick results. I saw change as incremental. In national politics, he was a Gene McCarthy backer while I supported RFK. In our local world, we would sometimes walk across the Lars Andersen bridge together, I to a drill in uniform and he to a protest in civilian clothes. But, the war in Vietnam was a background issue that still had to compete with all of the other things in our day-to-day lives— studies, athletics, dating, etc. These were areas of common ground. As to the larger issues, he has always remained an activist with his passions on his sleeve for all to see. In that regard, he may occupy the extreme end of the liberal spectrum and I may be closer to the opposite end of that spectrum. But, I see us as occupying that same spectrum now and having always done so, despite tactical differences in approach. More importantly, we were good friends then and remain good friends all these years later.

Though I became somewhat more ambivalent about the war as graduation approached, I still saw the concerns of the protesters as no more than strongly held beliefs lacking evidentiary foundation. Thus, neither Harvard nor my classmates changed my feeling about my obligation to serve wherever assigned, even if I had developed reservations about the wisdom of our participation in that war. What Harvard and my classmates did do was to expose me to opinions I would likely never have formulated on my own. And when the evidence to support those opinions began to come to light in 1971, it was much easier to process that information and adapt my thinking.

As it turns out, I was among the most fortunate of those who served from 1969-1973. I was assigned to a destroyer based in New England for my two shipboard years. In retrospect, I don't think I could have had a better first job out of college. As a 22-year-old, I was thrust into the role of providing guidance and counseling to young boys of 18 and to men twice my age. My commanding officer was an extraordinary individual who recognized what his liberal arts-educated ROTC and OCS-sourced officers brought to the table and deployed those talents to maximum effect. This positive experience differed markedly from the experience of many of my peers.

One unfortunate consequence of the campus protests surrounding the draft was Harvard's decision to end ROTC shortly after we graduated. While the program lived on for Harvard undergrads in attenuated form at MIT, there is little question that numbers of students in circumstances like mine lost an opportunity to attend an Ivy League school and bring that different educational experience to bear on the military establishment. I believe ROTC grads brought an open-mindedness and skepticism to the officer corps that was very different from the conventional focus of the officers trained at our military academies. We seemed capable of stronger connections with the enlisted personnel and better able to address the changes that were occurring in society so as to continue to motivate our subordinates. It seemed to be why we were often entrusted with the collateral duties of assisting drug abusers, helping investigate behaviors considered aberrant in a military context, and coordinating efforts to improve morale. We understood the value of listening to the opinions of others and often served as effective liaisons between the top down leaders and the better educated crew members that the draft had produced. This advantage may not have been as great as my experience led me to believe nor may its material effects have been demonstrated for more than the five or so years after our graduation, but I continue to believe that Harvard's decision (and the similar decisions of other Ivies) was a simplistic institutional reaction that limited the potential positive impact of its graduates on the military services over the next 40 years.

Thus, Harvard (which continues at times to bluntly react to complex issues) was the first institution to disappoint me. Government came next as the revelations about the political decision-making surrounding our engagement in Vietnam multiplied throughout the 70's and beyond. As a result, since that time, I have not accepted government decisions about war (or much else) without question and, for obvious reasons, that erosion of trust has only gotten much worse over the last two years.

An Everlasting War

Rikki Grubb

I happened to be in London on the 30th anniversary of the end of the U.S. war in Vietnam. The decent British newspapers and even the International Herald Tribune covered the ignominious story in detail. When an earnest Asian clerk at a grocery store pointed to the headlines and asked where I came from, I lied and said I was Canadian. He told me that many members of his Vietnamese family had not survived the carnage, which he called the “American War.” His terminology reconfigured mine: I would never again think of it as the “Vietnam War.” But the problem is that “American War” is so unspecific: it could mean so many wars, and only the people whose lands get destroyed or taken away can understand the term in proper context. The bigger problem is that those American wars started before we were even a country, and they keep on coming...

A Draft Board Adventure

Joseph Harabin

During my 1950s childhood, the general consensus was America entered and won the ‘good war’ against evil enemies. Eventually, these enemies became industrious friends and a former ally became an enemy. As I matured I learned that war is psychopathology promoted by the Banking Matrix and their Gray Men to enslave both sides into bond debt and other servitude.

My father served as an enlisted, machine gunner, Private during the invasion of Italy in WWII. I was four years old when he explained. “When you are a soldier in a combat war the overwhelming thought is, ‘kill or be killed’. I immediately realized that war zones were places to avoid.

Over the years, I talked to several wounded veterans who told me, “Never go to war”.

During the late 60s, the consensus of my student friends was that the War in Vietnam was not only personally dangerous but senseless and to be avoided.

After college, while attending Harvard Medical Sciences Graduate School, I received a copy of an impressively well-written letter requesting a draft deferment based on of my invaluable future scientific contributions. I used this time to investigate how I could become 4F, the bureaucratic term for militarily unfit, in case my deferment expired.

This knowledge became relevant when I took a leave of absence to start my company. Soon thereafter I received a letter to report for a draft call medical examination.

There were several role models that were not appropriate. I did not have the racial rage of Malcolm X who went to his draft exam using his rhetorical talent begging to be given a rifle so he could assassinate as many white officers as possible. Nor could I use Muhammad Ali’s failure to volunteer by refusing to step forward at the induction ceremony. I did not have his financial advantage in eventually winning a five-year legal battle that concluded with a favorable Supreme Court verdict.

The Quaker pacifist model was not appropriate since being in a combat arena, unarmed, violated my belief in self-defense.

Other alternatives including a declaration of sexual deviation, mental illness, or escaping to Canada did not appeal to my sense of honor.

I chose to use my knowledge of biochemistry. I studied the medical requirements and concluded I could show that my heart function was not sufficient for admission to the military.

Most drugs that produce high blood pressure are too toxic (5 ounces of salt a day for a month), dangerous, or raise the heartbeat to be too obvious. I finally settled on ephedrine sulfate that raised the lower number diastolic value to mimic the effects of congenital heart disease.

I was helped by reading a book about getting a medical disqualification. The important advice was to present a supporting note from a doctor.

My first exam by a Harvard Infirmly doctor was not successful. He immediately suspected something when, during his exam, he asked, “Drinking a lot of coffee?”

I approached a Canadian friend, a recent Harvard Medical School graduate. I owned a blood pressure cuff so I knew my pharmacy was correct with a high low value, a normal high value, and no racing heartbeat.

I went to his interning hospital and after measuring me he was delighted to report, "Oh, you do have congenital heart disease." He proceeded to work me up with an EKG and other tests. I never bothered with a follow-up appointment since he gave me the letter I needed.

On the day of the exam, I reported to the Boston Induction Center with my doctor's letter and a row of ephedrine pills sewn into the elastic band of my underwear. I was prepared for a three-day quarantine.

The first test was for blood pressure. I knew my values were well into the unacceptable zone, but the grizzled character in a white coat measured me and wrote down a value that was only one point under the legal limit-I was crestfallen.

He lied! Gee Ollie, now what?

I noticed printed signs over the ten physiological measuring booths that said. "If at any time you have a complaint about this examination, ask to see the Base Commander." I asked everyone I could find, "Are you the Base Commander? I need to see the Base Commander."

In the meantime, while our group of boys was proceeding through the various examination stations I began talking to these fellow inductees about the failure values for these various tests. I noticed a group of 15 surrounding me listening to my information. Almost everyone was hoping these exams would discover something wrong. They did not realize this exam was a mere formality except for the obviously impaired. This group around me must have been a sight to behold by any witnessing authorities.

I was finally led to a cubicle with an officer who admitted he was not the Base Commander. I believe he was a medical doctor. I gave him my letter supporting the diagnosis that I had heart disease. I requested a repeat blood pressure test.

He looked at me and asked, "What are you studying in school, son?"

"Neuroendocrinology, sir."

After hearing this answer, he reached into his left-hand top drawer and handed me a single page. "You realize if you have your doctor sign this you will never be able to serve in the armed services again?"

"Yes, sir." I eagerly took the paper and left.

Later reading this document I discovered another problem. The procedure required I go to my doctor for three days of blood pressure tests. The challenge was the dosage of that pressor substance gave me a headache. I did not want to do this for three days.

I applied the Taoist Principle, "When a superior man has a problem, do nothing. Maybe get lucky." I waited.

The day before the signed document was due I visited my doctor and said. "OMG, I need this tomorrow by their deadline."

I knew this fellow as a friend and we were involved in various studies with alternative doctors, healers, herbalists, Buddhists, Ethiopian Christians, Sufi's, and students of esoteric traditions.

He looked at me and asked, “You have been studying Scientology, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I have,” since I recently took two free, two-hour sessions at the local center before I observed their mind control techniques that I found abhorrent.

He asked, “You can use your mind to voluntarily control your blood pressure, can’t you?”

I readily agreed since in my mind popping a pill was voluntary. Knowing I was capable of blood pressure control relieved him of the burden of ‘treating’ me and permitted him to ethically sign off on the draft board medical paper.

I mailed this signed document.

Shortly thereafter I received a draft board letter advising that I was 4F and unfit to serve in the US military.

An expression at that time was, “What if they gave a war and nobody came?”

Draft Deferments Lead to Career as Civil Rights Litigator

Anne Harvey

As a woman, I was not subject to the draft into the war in Vietnam. Nevertheless, the existence of the draft shaped my life in unexpected ways, leading me from one unexpected fortuitous juncture to another as I drifted serendipitously along in life.

When I graduated from Radcliffe, I had no definite plans for the future. My senior year I had devoted to working full time to write my history thesis on agrarian radicalism in Spain.

The only thing I had done to lay a path for the future was to follow my advisor's suggestion and apply for a fellowship at the Colegio de Mexico. My application was denied. My advisor then told me, that, of course, I did not get it due to the fact that I was not a graduate student. But he had known that fact all along, yet he had told me to apply.

Although a member of the class of 1969, I actually graduated in 1970, due to the fact I had dropped out of college for a year and worked. My classmate boyfriend had earlier graduated with the class in 1969 and received a deferment from his Wisconsin draft board by going overseas to teach at a private boarding school. So when I was graduating, he was at a prep school in Beirut, Lebanon.

With his draft board still breathing down his neck, he wrote me that during the next year he was going to be teaching at a high school in Colombia, and that if I applied, I might be able to get a teaching job at the same school. I wrote to the school, a bilingual school in Cali, Colombia and was offered a position teaching a fourth-grade class (all subjects). I had previously spent a summer in Spain to learn Spanish for my thesis, but had never been in South America and knew nothing about how to teach children. Nevertheless. I was offered a job.

On the propeller flight to Baranquilla, Colombia, when I told my plan to my seatmate, he thought my story so unusual that he asked me whether I was with Cuerpo de Paz (Peace Corps). I eventually made my way by bus from the Atlantic coast along the river valley through the highlands to Cali where we found a small living space, over a bar/restaurant and started teaching, at Colegio Jefferson, a small school at the edge of some fields on the outskirts of town. Except for the Colombian Spanish teacher, the rest of the faculty were Mennonite missionaries.

Life went on like this for several months, and I met a woman who was an actual Peace Corps volunteer in Cali. She had a nice apartment. Because of her, I also met a few US expats, who seemed to me to live an unusual lifestyle. Their children went to a private international school supported by the US government. They celebrated the fourth of July with the US consulate in October, because it was inconvenient to do it during the summer when many families were away. I became accustomed to a lifestyle very different from the US. For example, we never had hot water in the shower, something that I still experience as a luxury. For Christmas, we went by bus to the capital, Bogota, which was a long journey up and down several mountain ranges. It was wonderful to wander around a new place, but the problem was that almost everything including the restaurants were closed for a holiday break.

Looking forward to the future, I put together applications to two graduate programs in Latin American Studies, University of Texas, Austin and UC Berkeley. This was more difficult than anticipated given the isolation of where I was, the dearth of information in pre-internet days, the

total absence of phone service, and the huge amount of time required to receive and transmit papers by postal mail. Around this time, we were called into the office of the foundation which supported the school and were informed that we would no longer be allowed to teach due to the fact that the school had not been able to obtain work visas for us. The rules for work visas had changed in the time period between when we were offered the jobs and when we had started. They gave us a small amount of money in Colombian pesos. They probably expected we would go home. We did not. Otherwise my friend would have to report back to his draft board ending his deferment.

We just mailed some of our belongings home, and set off on a journey around the entire continent of South America by local bus traveling at least once through every country except Venezuela, which we had heard was more expensive to be in than New York City. One difficulty was that our little stash of cash was in pesos, not dollars. So, at every border crossing we had to exchange on the black market all of the bills we had into the currency of the country we were entering. We had no credit cards and no travelers checks. We never took an airplane. In our circuit journey we eventually returned to Colombia, where we received the results on our applications to graduate school.

The next fall I would be a grad student in Latin American Studies at the University of Texas, where I was awarded a NDEA fellowship for Portuguese. My classmate friend would be a grad student in sociology at UC Berkeley.

Having that news, we continued our overland journey by traveling through Central America by bus, and started going home. It was a long, long journey through Mexico to the US border. From there we just bought tickets on Greyhound, traveling through Texas, Arkansas, St Louis, etc., all places where I had never been. In the fall, I flew to Austin and found a place to live in a house near campus with other grad students, and began studying Latin American History and Anthropology.

During the fall term I ran into two classmates, Jon Hubbard in the same program, and Melinda Furche at the law school. I put together an application to transfer to UC Berkeley in Latin American History. During this time one of my housemates, who was a third-year law student, happened to mention to me work opportunities that were posted that she was thinking of applying for. She mentioned fellowships in poverty law. Her comments totally changed my idea of what a lawyer was and what a lawyer did. I also heard about lawsuits being filed so that indigenous people in Alaska could get their land back. This laid the seed of what I went on to do professionally. I went from thinking of law as a business field to seeing it as a field where you are dealing with societal issues, helping people.

Around this time my father asked me whether there were any jobs available in the area that I was studying. I had never asked myself that question either in college or grad school. I was just interested in and enjoyed learning about the history and anthropology of Latin America. In response to his gentle question, I was actually not aware of anything, but guessed that perhaps one could teach. I decided that I wanted to switch to law.

I was accepted into the UC Berkeley grad program in history, along with a tuition waiver. When Fall rolled around, I had to decide whether to go to Berkeley, or wait a year and apply to law school. Friends in Philadelphia advised me to try Berkeley anyway. I enrolled in the fall semester 1972, and my classmate friend strongly suggested that I should take a course called "Statistics for Social Scientists", in order to do a new kind of history. I enrolled in the class and found confidence intervals and bell curves fascinating, although I never really figured out how to use this new knowledge. During the course of the semester, met another grad student who was writing his doctoral dissertation on Mexico and its economy. He was auditing the class that I was taking, in

order to teach it the next semester at a university nearby. He helped me with statistics, and I helped edit his thesis. We got married the following summer. By that time, I had applied to and been admitted to law school and then took off to start law school on the East Coast.

In retrospect, all of my adventures with my friend from the class of 69 who was avoiding the draft, not only brought me to California where I planted my roots, but also, made me very resilient, and open to and unafraid of new and strange things. Since my roots were planted here, I eventually brought my parents (both Navy veterans from World War !!) out to San Francisco to care for them in their final years. Much to my surprise, they received wonderful care and medical attention from the Veterans Administration here at Fort Miley (so ironically because of the Vietnam war, WWII vets received unforeseen military assistance late in life).

At the time the Soviet Union broke up, my husband was offered a position in Central Asia to develop and head a new university to assist in the transition to a market economy. Because of what I had experienced, I had no hesitation about leaving our home in San Francisco and making a life for our family in a totally foreign culture under difficult circumstances and hardships. My two sons were still in primary school at the time when they were lifted out of their birth city of San Francisco and plunked down into a strange environment and school literally half way around the world where they could not speak the local language. They too have grown up as men of the world, totally open to new ideas and ready to confidently face any challenge that comes their way. Hardship and difficulty do not faze them.

Coming back to the issue of Vietnam, the whole conflict seems especially strange to me in recent years. My husband recently vacationed there, and spoke with American Vietnam war veterans who had returned to heal and to revisit the places where their comrades were killed. I notice that many of the clothes that I buy are made in Vietnam.

Also, I often go to events for the Fulbright Visiting Scholars program for the San Francisco Bay Area (since my husband is chair of the social committee), where Fulbrighters (and their families) spending time at Stanford, Berkeley, UCSF, etc. get together informally in a social setting to get to know US culture. At the most recent event, I was struck by the fact that there was one visiting professor from a university in North Vietnam, and another visiting professor from a university in South Vietnam. The north – south issue was not mentioned.

However, I could not help but feel how the relations between the United States and Vietnam and the people in these countries have changed since the 1960's.

The Pity of it All

Diana Mara Henry

My own first encounter with the war was through a Crimson assignment to photograph a draft card burning at Northeastern in 1968; then illustrating the "Clean for Gene" campaign. In 1970, I was working as a General Assignment reporter for the Staten Island Advance, a Newhouse daily, and was assigned to interview Ed Murphy, a Vietnam Veteran who had been an interrogator and was later responsible for unmasking the Phoenix Project; my article turned into a Sunday feature that ran for three weeks in a row and our friendship has lasted a lifetime; when I decided to become a professional freelance photographer I began by photographing, self-assigned as were my most historic photo-essays, a demonstration in front of the ITT building on Park Avenue in 1971 against the US invasion of Cambodia, and the Memorial Day VVAW events in Lexington, Concord and on the Boston Common; my interest in honoring these men continued through 1981 when I photographed the Vietnam Veterans Hunger Strike at the VA hospital in Los Angeles, where I met Ron Kovic and collected many handwritten testimonies and leaflets against the crimes of Agent Orange and from Black Veterans for Social Justice. The story continues as the men in my photographs have contacted me after seeing them on my website, at

<http://www.dianamarahenry.com/RonKovictributetoDianaMaraHenry.htm> and

<http://www.dianamarahenry.com/MorephotographsoftheWestwoodVAVietnamVeteranshungerstrike.htm>

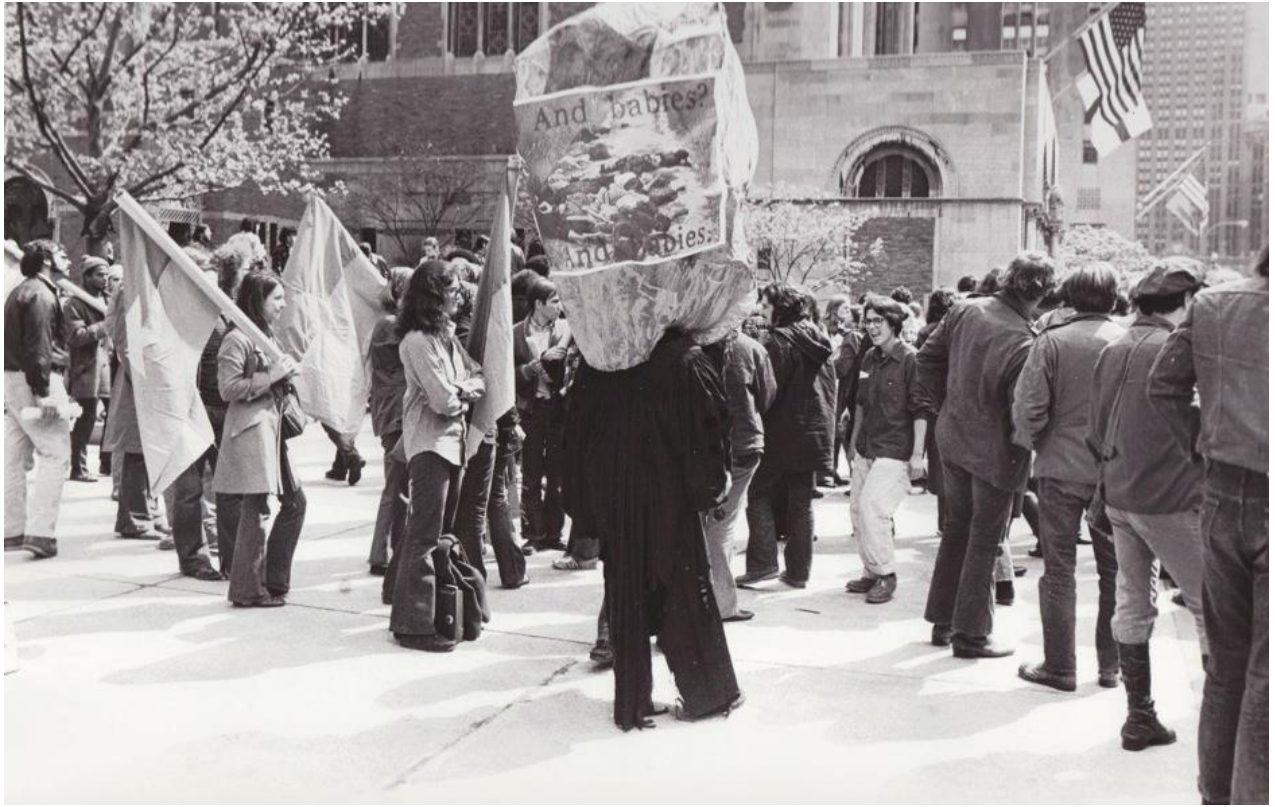
and have written in to identify themselves and their comrades in the demonstrations photographs. Ron Kovic wrote: "Your photos are beautiful and represent such a powerful and passionate time in American history. I believe these photos will last and many years from now they will be looked at and studied just as Mathew Brady's classic and haunting Civil war photos are today. Thank you for being a part of history."

The anti-war spirit and meeting him at the Crimson fueled my interest in the campaign of Senator Al Gore Sr. for reelection, and I worked for him as a volunteer in 1970. I photographed McGovern from the NH primary on through the convention in Miami Beach, providing photographs for the NY and national campaigns. That same year, 1972, I became the staff photographer for Elizabeth Holtzman who played a major part in the Nixon impeachment hearings and for Congresswoman Bella Abzug, who was the first to present a congressional resolution to leave Vietnam, if my memory serves.

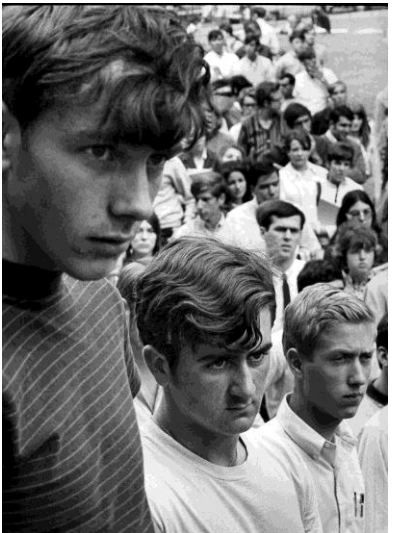
Since I am "known" as a photographer of the women's movement, I should mention that I also made a major document of the Women's Pentagon Action in 1980. These and other essays are accessible through the Spotlight page of my website.

The photographs of all these subjects, in color and black and white, can also be viewed at the Du Bois Library's Diana Mara Henry Twentieth Century Photographer Special Collection online, at

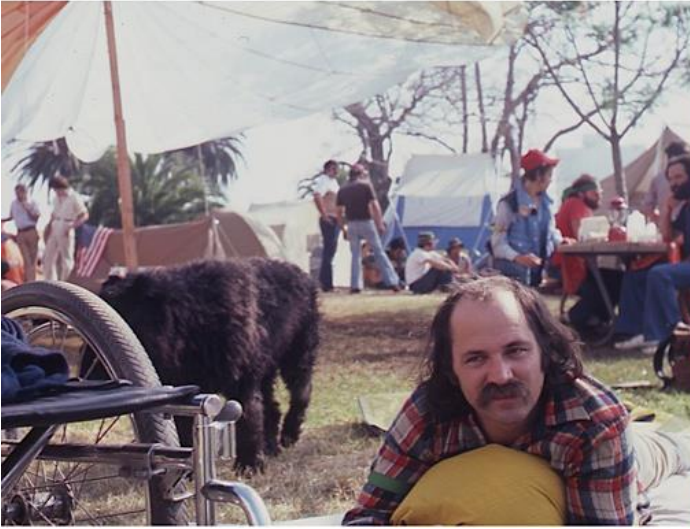
<http://credo.library.umass.edu/search?q=diana%20mara%20henryandfacets=ZnE9RmFjZXRUb3BpYz0lMjJEZW1vbnN0cmF0aW9ucyUyMiY=>



Demonstration in front of the ITT building on Park Avenue in 1971 against the US invasion of Cambodia. Photo copyright for all photos © Diana Mara Henry / www.dianamarahenry.com



Draft-card burning and students watching, Northeastern, 1968.



Ron Kovic at left, Vietnam Veterans Hunger Strike, the VA hospital in Los Angeles, 1981

Memorial Day VVAW event on the Boston Common, 1971. Pushing Jimmie Gould in the wheelchair: Dale Reese. Don Carrico writes, 2/17/2015: "I am the fourth man from the right, between Al Hubbard, to my left and Michael Roach, on my right."



Eleanor Hobbs

As a woman in the Radcliffe Class of 1969 I was not at risk of being drafted into military service and sent to Vietnam. Yet the toxic cloud of Vietnam hung over my college years in ways that have become apparent only through the lens of the passing years. While men had to carefully choose next steps after college to continue deferment of their military service, I was swept along in the current to move ahead to grad school and career, not entertaining any thoughts of hitting the pause button for travel or “time off” for reflection.

My boyfriend (Matt Hobbs Harvard 1968) and I married at the end of my junior year. In it together, we considered all of his (and therefore our) options. A 4F classification was not within reach (no heel spurs), a 1Y from a cooperative psychiatrist, or applying for CO status seemed the best options to avoid the draft. I had attended a Quaker high school in Philadelphia. Some of my teachers and friends’ fathers had been COs in WWII and the Korean war, and I had a number of high school classmates who were COs. Matt and I began attending and ultimately joined Cambridge Friends Meeting and were mentored by several influential Quakers who supported his application for CO status. Our back up plan if he did not get a deferment was to move to Canada. There was no way he was going to enter the military. In the end, he was deferred.

For me one painful legacy of the war was that differing strong opinions about the Vietnam conflict and military service drove a wedge between me and some of my friends, especially relatives of the WWII generation and resulted in a mutual loss of trust and respect. I became disillusioned with the US government and lost confidence in the morality of our elected officials.

Vietnam: A Late Arrival

Jonathan Hoffman

Vietnam was the central issue in our lives during our college years and thereafter. I did not serve in the military (4F, with very flat feet), and I protested the war during our college years. I have been told that our class sustained no fatalities in the war. How fortunate we were. Yet in my public high school in Eugene, Oregon, we were not nearly so fortunate.

In late May of 2005, a Viet vet from the South Eugene High School Class of 1963 called to tell me he and some other vets had raised money to erect a memorial to our classmates who died in the War in Vietnam. He asked if I would sing American the Beautiful when they unveiled the monument on Memorial Day in front of our high school. I told him that I was more of a singer-songwriter than a singer, and I suggested a bunch of our fellow classmates who were much better singers than I. He thanked me and hung up. About 20 minutes later he called back and asked if I would write a song for the occasion. I told him there were a number of problems. First, I confessed, I was out protesting against the war while he was serving, so I probably wasn't the right man for the job. "That's no big deal," he replied. "When I was there, our favorite song was the Animals', 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place.'"

Second, I told him that I didn't think I could do it in the short time before Memorial Day. In the interim, I had to drive from Portland to the Bay Area (driving because I had our two dogs in tow), to be with my parents on Mother's Day. My mother was dying of multiple myeloma and I had written (and was still trying to practice) a song to sing to her for the occasion. I doubted that, with my travels, time constraints, and my unresolved feelings about the War in Vietnam, I could write something, let alone boil it down to a 3-minute song. "No worries," he replied, "I'm sure you'll come up with something."

So, for the only time ever, I wrote a song —lyrics and melody—totally in my head while driving the 600 miles from San Francisco to Portland. I pulled off the freeway at Lake Siskiyou (about halfway home) to let the dogs run around and jump into the lake. I grabbed a piece of paper and a pen, to write down what I had in my head before I forgot it. As I was scribbling lyrics as fast as I could, the dogs were running in and out of the lake, repeatedly shaking off next to me and erasing my lyrics faster than I could write them down.

But I did it, and I sang it at the memorial the following day. I recently recorded it on my latest CD. Here's a video of the song.

The following year, despite my age (and I won't comment on my wife's age) we adopted a baby from an orphanage in Vietnam (now she's 12 years old and will join us at the Harvard Reunion). We also helped raise money to enable Room to Read to build a library at a school near Tra Vinh, in the Mekong Delta. And my nephew married a young woman who is Vietnamese and our adopted daughter now has cousins who are also Vietnamese. Now we have numerous permanent connections to Vietnam.



MEMORIAL DAY

Try to remember that time long ago
When we were so young and alive.
We basked in the '50s well into the '60s
At least, till about '65.
All that we hoped for in those tender years
Was that one girl might think we were cool,
And all that Memorial Day meant to us
Was a time we could stay home from school.
Try to remember when our fiercest foes
Were our rivals from North Eugene
A time when it did not yet seem a big deal
To sign up to become a Marine
But that was before our buddies, our classmates,
Were sent to some strange, distant land,
Where, with honor and courage,
They fought and they died
In a war no one could understand.

INSTRUMENTAL

Now the decades have passed,
And our children are asked
To win one more difficult war.
The nation's divided, the battle's unending,
It seems like we've been there before.
So what do we say on Memorial Day
When we'd rather forget what we've seen?
We remember our classmates
Who put love of their country
Ahead of their own hopes and dreams.
Sacrifice was so much more than a word
For eleven friends from South Eugene.

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Start of a Strange Journey

Robert Homans

In the Fall of 1966, while sitting on the couch in our room in Winthrop B-34, I opened a letter from my Draft Board in San Mateo, California, where I lived. I was classified 1-A. This was my first interaction with the War in Vietnam.

California gave student deferments only to those in the top half of their Freshman Class. I was not that fortunate. I appealed and, predictably, I lost my appeal. I knew only one thing – I wasn't going to Canada. I was either going to get into an officer training program or enlist.

I managed to get into a 2-year Navy ROTC (NROTC) Program that was originally designed for junior college transfers, but it was also used by Ivy League students who wanted to put off the decision for as long as possible. I spent the Summer of 1967 at UCLA, taking the first 2 years of ROTC courses, learning close-order drilling, and taking cross-country runs through the streets of Bel Air with an M-1 rifle. That same Summer, I was called for my draft physical. It was stayed, because I was in an officer training program.

I spent the Summer of 1968 on my midshipman cruise in the USS Newport News (CA-148), based in Norfolk. Newport News had just gotten back from Vietnam, and the crew was not thrilled by having to go back out to sea, to ferry around a bunch of midshipmen. We went down to San Juan, Puerto Rico, via Culebra Island, then a gunnery range and now a resort, where we lobbed 8-inch projectiles into the island. We then went to New York City for July 4th.

Senior Year saw rising opposition to the War, along with the requirement of wearing our uniforms around campus on Mondays. During the Strike, the rule about wearing uniforms was ended so many of us, including me, grew our hair. In the 1969 Edition of "Bravo Zulu," the NROTC Yearbook, we all were wearing our Navy hats. With our long hair, we looked like pirates.

I received my Reserve Commission as a Navy Ensign on Class Day, at a ceremony at the Loeb. I was ordered to report to the USS Frank Knox (DDR-742), a destroyer based in San Diego, where I would be Combat Information Center Officer.

As I said in my 25th Reunion Report, the US Navy gave a wise-assed 22-year-old more responsibility than he deserved. The Navy also teaches you how, as a junior officer with authority but no experience, to develop mutually-productive relationships with senior enlisted men, who had great experience but less authority. In other words, how to manage. I grew up around boats, so guiding a ship was easy for me. I was going to become the Navigator. Using present-day vernacular, I was in a "safe space" (relatively speaking).

Things changed abruptly when, on December 16, 1969, I was visited by my detailer, a Navy Lieutenant and a Naval Academy grad, who was responsible for my future assignments. He told me that after leaving Frank Knox, in December 1970, I would be assigned to swift boats in Vietnam. I was not pleased. It was common knowledge how dangerous swift boat duty was. We didn't yet know about Agent Orange. My brother-in-law, also a Naval Academy grad, later told me that detailers looked at ROTC Officers as cannon fodder – assign ROTC guys to swift boats, to keep their Naval Academy classmates out of danger.

The following day my Father, who had been fighting depression for several years, committed suicide. I was an only son. Given what my detailer had told me the day before, I put in for a “humanitarian reassignment,” in order to be closer to my family and, admittedly, to derail any possibility of serving in swift boats. Request granted. When he heard the news of my transfer, my detailer was very unhappy.

I spent the balance of my active duty as an Operation Control Center Watch Officer on Treasure Island, in the middle of San Francisco Bay and near our home. Among other things, I was involved in tracking the first deployment of a Soviet ballistic missile submarine in the Pacific, and I was suspected of leaking, to the San Francisco Chronicle, the plans for removing the Indians from Alcatraz. In a 30-minute interview with 2 people from the Office of Naval Intelligence, I convinced them I was not their man.

In August 1972 I went to Vietnam for 3 weeks, to visit my Mother’s cousin who at the time was our Deputy Ambassador. I went on a combat mission in a helicopter, sitting in the door dressed in Topsiders, slacks and a Brooks Bros. shirt, but with no body armor. South of Danang, I visited a friend who was working with International Volunteer Services. When we were sitting on his front porch, I heard a deep rumble; similar to 100 kettle drums. I asked what it was. “A B-52 strike,” my friend replied. I asked how far away it was. He said, “oh, maybe 25 miles.” One day, in Saigon, we had lunch by the pool at the Circle Sportif. I have never seen more beautiful women, before or since, lying around the pool. I’ve always wondered what happened to them, and to the wonderful Vietnamese who worked for my Mother’s cousin.

In May 1975, I was working in Manila when Saigon fell. Filipino nationals working for the US Gov’t. were evacuated by LST. They arrived at a pier near my office. Many of them had worked in Vietnam for years, and they had Vietnamese families in addition to Filipino families. That day, they were all introduced.

On April 17, 1995 I watched interview with Robert McNamara, on Charlie Rose. He said the War in Vietnam was a mistake. I threw my shoe at the TV. For 25 years I felt guilty about leaving Frank Knox. I was always someone who believed in saying “yes-sir” and carrying out orders. If my Father hadn’t passed away when he did, I might not be sitting here writing this.

In the Winter of 2013/2014, in Kyiv, Ukraine, during the Revolution of Dignity, my experience with the Navy and the War in Vietnam was put into its proper perspective. Many Ukrainians, including some from other countries, died that Winter, in the cause of freedom and the removal of an oppressive kleptocratic regime. On the night of February 18/19, 2014, my stepdaughter’s “significant other” was digging up bricks in front of the main post office on Independence Square in Kyiv, to throw at Interior Ministry police. Had things turned out differently he would have been imprisoned, or killed, as would many of my friends.

In his interview for the movie “Harvard Beats Yale 29-29,” Tommy Lee Jones said about the days during the Strike, “People’s lives were changing by the minute; ideas were flying around like bullets.” During the Revolution of Dignity, I found out what Tommy Lee Jones was really talking about.

Legacy of the Vietnam War

John Hook

The legacy contributed to (1) progress on civil (minority, especially African-American), women's, and LGBTQ rights, all of which later joined with the environmental movement, and (2) progress on world peace (certainly compared to the first half of the 20th century) and economic advancement (large increase in world real income per capita). More progress is needed.

Suspended from Harvard College twice for organizing and participating in demonstrations against the Vietnam War — the Dow and Paine Hall demonstrations and University Hall — I worked midnight shift in a cable factory. I had helped organize other civil rights and anti-war demonstrations, including the March on the Pentagon. I was independent, did not belong to Students for a Democratic Society. After being kicked out the night before graduation, I joined SDS for a week, attended their national convention in Chicago, and then moved away from them. I applied for and received my Harvard College diploma in 1970. The following picture of the roommates of Eliot House O-31 and 32 and O-41 was taken just after the graduation ceremony Harvard Commencement, 1969:



Back row, l to r: Paul Zofnass, Bill Shutzer, Phil O'Shaughnessy, Bill Jewett
Front row: Bill Stern, John Hook, Ron Fischler
(roommates not pictured: Kim Marshall, Parker Jayne, and Andrew Grainger)

The Vietnam Peace opened China's door. The economic advance lifted hundreds of millions into the middle class.

The legacy is veteran heroes, but also the homeless and addicted. The legacy is idealism —what the world can be. We are still idealistic. How important have been the fights and advances for peace, equality, freedom, and democracy!

While at Harvard Business School (putting my classes on three days per week), I organized George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign in southwestern Pennsylvania. McGovern won SW PA. In the 1973 graduate oration at the Harvard University commencement, "if attacks on democracy itself are proved," I called for President Nixon's impeachment.

I am a social progressive. On economics and foreign policy, I have been a swing voter, moving right or left depending on circumstances. I do research and analyze politics, economics, and geopolitics. Strong economics for the middle and working classes and all citizens are critical to liberty.

When I worked for excellent Governor Frank Sargent of Massachusetts in 1970-71, his campaign manager said later that he would not have hired me if he had known I was an anti-war activist.

At U.S. Army advanced infantry training at Fort Polk, Louisiana in 1971, we marched, singing Country Joe and the Fish's "Vietnam Song." Half the unit went home. Half the unit, the poorer and less educated, went to combat in Vietnam. While at HBS, I attended the Massachusetts Military Academy and became an officer. I wrote a letter to the Harvard Crimson stating that I had erred in pushing ROTC off campus. I served six years with the Massachusetts Army National Guard (infantry), the New York National Guard (artillery), and the Pennsylvania Army Reserves (combat engineers).

When I ran for Congress in SW PA in 1976 and '78, I was an idealistic but impractical candidate; and I lost. I learned a lot. Broke, I became, inter alia, an ironworker on a West Virginia coal cleaning plant and on four steel mills near Pittsburgh.

Some relevant memories: Grandad and meema: "The miners were kept in debt to the company store. The camps were patrolled by 'Cossacks' on horseback with shotguns." Dad describing grandad's seminal judicial decision: "The wife is entitled to half her husband's estate." Agreeing with mom as she talked of Betty Friedan and Simone de Bouvier. Under-age, driving to West Virginia for 3.2 beer with Jim Williams (later a Green Beret), Phil, and Glenn Hopes (a night of American Graffiti). Sunlight glints on the Charles, dear friends, we run and strive, azure sky; smart women; running through the Pentagon; marching along Mass. Ave. in a civil rights demonstration; on the steps of University Hall debating Vietnam, face to face the helmeted police, the huge vote in the stadium. Live fire at Fort Polk. Partying with Mike and Frank at Elephant Mountain and Big Blue. Andy Tobias: "Many gays did kill themselves." Man on a table: "KKK!"— me: "Get the f off this property!" Dawn breaks the WV mountain tops, pink and yellow glow, frost gleams on the high scaffold, Ken slips, reaching a hand to save....

After the Vietnam War, my good friends Frank Voycik and Mike Grimes, my cousin, died we think from Agent Orange. During the war, my friend Glenn Hopes had died after a year from burns when his helicopter was shot down in battle. Many friends fought there, and many friends helped the anti-war movement. I have dated Vietnamese women whose families were on the U.S. side and been in loving relationships with Chinese women, who supported the Viet Cong-North Vietnamese side, leftists, some Communists.

The Vietnam War experiences reaffirmed my liberal religion. At Harvard, freshman year Bill Jewett and I debated God, agnosticism, and atheism—first causes, infinity, faith, nothingness, and being. I became less religious. Through the family and personal turmoil of those tumultuous times, I became again more religious, tolerant, open-minded. “Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called the children of God.” Matthew 5:9.

The Vietnam War was a tactical, moral, and strategic mistake in that it continued a fundamentally colonial war inherited from the French. Using overwhelming force to win was not worth it. Ending the war would allow the contradictory interests between China and Russia to emerge, divide the totalitarian world, evolve it toward liberty, and lead to more peace, progress, and freedom—which have occurred. But now there is trouble.

The Vietnam War legacy is contra “world’s policeman.” Yet I believe in defense of freedom. The decisions are complex pragmatics and ethics. The United States is a critical part of the world balance of power and, as appropriate, the advancement of democracy and freedom.

The Gulf War was just. The Afghan War was justified but has lasted too long. The Iraq War was a large mistake. Libya was a mistake. The Iran deal was a mistake, imho.

Climate change and the risk of being overtaken by totalitarians, especially China, are two large challenges. Both must be solved! Economics are critical.

Rapid climate change would be +8 degrees centigrade by 2100, very bad. The 2000 to date rate projected would be +2.2 degrees C., bad but perhaps manageable—still too much. Parabolic increase is a risk. China consumes 4.6 times as much coal as the U.S. produces. China burns 3.55 billion tons of coal per year; the U.S. .77 bt/yr. China increased coal consumption 5.2% in 2018. The U.S. decreased coal production again, by 3.1%. The U.S. burns more oil and gas, but China is catching up as are India et al. China is increasing renewables faster than the U.S., but the U. S. too is increasing renewables quickly. North America, arguably, has the world’s largest oil and gas reserves, non-faulted including shale. To 2050, the largest energy increases will be in renewables and natural gas. Artificial intelligence, batteries, autonomous vehicles and other advances have great promise. Current costs (\$/MMBTY) are residential natural gas \$10.31, electricity \$36.63; industry nat. gas \$3.93, electricity \$20.94; transportation gasoline \$24.06, nat. gas \$14.39, electricity \$33.29.

<https://www.eia.gov/outlooks/aeo/data/browser/#/?id=3-AEO2019&cases=ref2019&sourcekey=0>

China is a totalitarian Communist police state which uses slave labor, has concentration camps, sells organs, steals huge amounts of intellectual and military property, engages in vast mercantilism opposed by all economists from the 19th century forward, and illegally seized the South China Sea. China and Xi, dictator for life, assert Communism is superior; and they want to replace the U.S. as world leader.

If China continues to grow 5-6% real GDP and the U.S. 2-3%, China surpasses the U.S. in economic and military power in about 15-20 years. U. S. cyber defense and offense are increasing rapidly. China has the many problems set forth in George Magnus, Red Flags, Why Xi’s China Is in Jeopardy: high debt, widespread Ponzis, fraud and false accounting, capital flight, lack of sufficient water and economic energy, deadly pollution, aging, less innovation and technological invention than free large nations, and stage of development obstacles. China’s debt leverage is probably 4 or 6+ to 1 versus 3.6 in the U.S. High leverage is risky. China’s real growth, net of fraud and Ponzis,

is probably only about 2-4%. Central banking has evolved and changed the mix of risks and opportunities. We must make sure that democracy and freedom are protected and strengthened.

In conclusion, the Vietnam anti-war campaign linked with the civil rights, women's rights, and gay rights movements to help produce a more just society. These efforts must vigorously continue. Critical are economic and social opportunities for all to build a freer, more just and more equal country and world. Experience and research confirm the importance of democracy, investment, education, training, productivity, rule of law, ethics, and liberty—built on economic strength.

Vietnam's Waves: Kiss to Tongues Untied and Generativity

Robert Hughes

Vietnam's waves: Kiss on the ear or glancing blow from a billy club across the forehead in 1969? Which would you choose? My Vietnam vet boyfriend in Pittsburgh, Pa. in the mid - 1970's came out in Vietnam while we were at Harvard when his Army buddy kissed him on the ear. He was serving in Vietnam and I was marching in the streets of Cambridge and Boston vs. the war, and being trained by BDRG (Boston Draft Resistance Group) on how to resist the draft, and visited Toronto with H-R/U. of Toronto exchange Program. I received the billy club swipe while standing on the steps of U. Hall in April 1969. And a mild concussion. At least my Vietnam vet boyfriend learned how to be a great kisser in Vietnam from his Army buddy. I am grateful for that: he was actually the best kisser of all my boyfriends. Would have preferred a kiss on the ear to a kiss from a billy club. Alas. (The vet and I met at a film at Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh., Pa. when my Women Studies colleague couldn't attend at the last minute.) (My granddad fought in WW I; My dad trained pilots in how to use radar in WWII and the Korean War, so as a child my brothers and I lived on Army Air Force bases in Florida and Texas; my brother served as a Green Beret during Vietnam; and my much more nuanced, sane and balanced roommate of 3 yrs. at Harvard was in Navy ROTC. They all had different perspectives than mine. My dad & brother had a particularly difficult time hearing my views about the War in Vietnam and then a few yrs. later my dad couldn't discuss my gayness even with my mom; the only issue in all their years of marriage that he couldn't talk to my mom about.) For some it was easier to come out in Vietnam than at Harvard.

Despite the all-pervasive homophobia/heterosexism of the culture during our yrs. at Harvard, opposition to the Vietnam war opened me to the possibility of other interpretations besides the "mainstream" belief system. Then the Stonewall Riots (June 1969) and new Cornell Gay Student Group (Fall 1969) saved my life and allowed me to finally come out. Marching against the war in Boston and Cambridge, listening in-person to the lies of Sec. of Defense Robert McNamara at Harvard, supporting Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, attending SDS meetings, Soc. Rel. 148/149, concussion from police billy club in April 1969 prepared me for new perspectives: joining the LGBT movement in Pittsburgh (cofounding Gay Students at Pitt and Gay Alternatives-Pittsburgh), San Francisco, Berkeley Gay Liberation Front, NYC, London, co-chairing the First Pennsylvania Gay Rights Conference at the U. of Pittsburgh, and aligning with the Women's movement at the U. of Pitt to co-teach GLBT as social movement courses in the Women Studies Program. The Women's Cultural Festival brought many of the eminent feminists to Pitt (Rita Mae Brown, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Florynce Kennedy, Mary Daly, et al). Is the personal political as the Women's Movement suggested? At Pitt, the Gay Student Group shared office space with the UWU, Undergraduate Women's Union (we often collaborated to bring speakers to Pitt). There I met and became friends with a woman who was the niece of one the founders of Ms. Magazine. Gay groups copied Consciousness-Raising Group ideas from them. As undergrads, Bill Jewett's tongue and mine were tied on the orientation/ attraction issue. We couldn't communicate what we wanted to say. In 1990, I heard Marlon Riggs '78 at the Harvard gay studies conference and watched his film, Tongues Untied. I jumped into The Cornell Gay Group and gave up my tuition scholarship at Cornell Law to enroll in those gay cathedrals, San Francisco and London. Marching in gay pride parades was healing for me. Openly gay, I hoped to see Bill at our fifth reunion. Instead, came news he was dead. The exploding gay movement saved me from the kind of implosion/explosion that

took Bill's life. In the movie *Cross of Fire*, a KKK politician is tried and convicted for induced murder in the suicide of a black woman he raped. If it was an induced murder, who should we indict for Bill's death? For anti-gay emotional terrorism? For psychological torturing of gay kids? Recall Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "Without memory...no healing"; or Elie Wiesel: "The only way...is to remember."

We studied Keynesian economics without hearing anything about Keynes' gayness; took classes from the phenomenal Roger Brown, the power in Wm. James Hall, and from a certain great legal scholar (Paul Freund), without knowing they were allegedly gay (Roger has since come forcefully out & marched with us in Boston gay pride with the Harvard contingent or see his book, "Against My Better Judgement: An Intimate Memoir of an Eminent Gay Psychologist"). How bleak must it have appeared to Bill, our magnificent class marshal? I still remember seeing him for the first time: striding radiantly toward me in the summer of 1965 in Mt. Lebanon, Pa. and smiling peacefully as he came towards me. What happened to him during the next 8 years he spent at Harvard? What happened to push him ever more deeply into the closet probably sometime between the second semester of our freshman year and finishing med school? Perhaps he read the books by the two misguided homophobic shrinks that I secretly read in my junior year which scared and devastated me. Or something else? Regardless, something changed in our interactions after Freshman Council et al in the spring of 1966. What choices did ho-ho-homophobia offer him? IF gay, why didn't Bill come out at Harvard—even if discretely? Recall the homophobia of that period. It appears that we were trapped by our homophobic culture: short-circuited by fear of parental dismay and peer ostracism, or by teenage ineptness inundated by tidal waves of heterosexism. In the late 1980's my mom told me and the family that she considered suicide around the time of Bill's death when my father refused to talk to her about my gayness. I had sent a letter to my parents after I was outed by the Pittsburgh Press for co-founding the Gay Student Group at Pitt and was fired from my swim coach position in Pittsburgh. How powerful was homophobia? Mom planned to put my three younger sisters in the back of our station wagon and drive it in front of an oncoming train (1 mile away). She felt she couldn't talk to anyone about what she was going through. My dad stubbornly refused to talk to her about it. She couldn't talk to her friends or any priests. In her despair she worried about who would protect her young girls. Fortunately, she persisted, found the strength to go on and came through that difficult period and in the 1990's talked with P-FLAG in my GLBT counseling classes. (For 17 yrs. until his death, however, my dad couldn't talk to me or mom about my gayness.) (And for the first time in the late 1980's mom told us that a former seminarian and also her dad's best friend had abused or attempted to molest her as a young girl; my mom told her grown children about this after I told her about my abuse by a former seminarian after I finished a year of counseling at the U. of Memphis and, therefore, to be vigilant with her grandchildren.) Tongues become untied; we develop a voice. (see *Women's Way of Knowing, The Development of Self, Voice and Mind*, 1986.) If Silence = Death, talking may = life.

At the University of Memphis five times I've co-taught "Counseling and Psychotherapy with Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Clients" (the first such graduate level course in the nation) and presented in panels on such efforts at the APA National Conventions. I'm grateful again for the demonstrations against the war we experienced as undergrads, the Cornell Gay Student Group, and my Vietnam vet's ability to come out in Vietnam with his buddy. I'm grateful that my German boyfriend at Wimbledon School of Art in London had been kicked out of U.s in Berlin, Saarbrucken and Geneva for demonstrating against the war et al. (Both of his parents worked at high levels on the V-2 rockets at Pennemunde and were killed by unknown agents in the yrs. after WWII; he was raised by his aunt on Wagner at Bayreuth and sent to some boarding schools in England, bullied and probably

molested by the older anti-German British boys.) I'm grateful that I met him in a travel agency in London and for meeting his radical gay friends in Hamburg. I'm grateful that I met Sir Frederick Ashton my first night in London at a party and after sharing our respective life stories of survival in challenging situations and my opposition to the war, he gave me the keys (no strings attached) to Margot Fonteyn's place (Keith Money was in the other wing of the house working on his latest photo book on Nureyev and Fonteyn) and my first tickets to a ballet (one of his) and I was able to take my German boyfriend. Sir Fred took me to sit-down dinner parties at Tony Richardson's where we hit it off talking about his 1968 film, "The Charge of the Light Brigade", Pete Seeger's anti-war "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" and censorship issues (Vanessa Redgrave was not there; Tony's boyfriend & mistress were). (In going through London customs around 10 am, I had met a very wealthy Philadelphia gay, anti-war businessman who invited me to lunch and a party later that night where I met Sir Fred, initially not knowing who he was: just a "Fred Ashton".) I'm grateful for the Women Studies Program and the Women's Cultural Festivals at the University of Pittsburgh: and especially their ideas about Consciousness-Raising Groups. The personal can be political.

Although my Vietnam Vet boyfriend for 2 yrs. during U. of Pitt days in mid 70's was a challenge during challenging times, he was listening to Mozart, Cherubini and Operas as I began intensive yoga and meditation. He demonstrated some symptoms of PTSD from Vietnam and/or his family's anti-gay influence (he had self-inflicted wrist scars when I met him; later his Los Angeles Marine lover, Jesus Alejandro, and he appreciated and used the bumper sticker "Real Men Love Jesus.") Another Vietnam vet friend who was African-American and our mutual African-American lesbian friend (both founding members with me of the Pittsburgh Gay Living Theater) led me with them to become founding members of the Western Pa. Alliance vs. Racist and Political Repression, and meeting Charlene Mitchell and later Angela Davis (Co-Chairs of the National Alliance vs. Racist and Political Repression). The personal can be political. I'm glad that many vets from the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf Wars have told me that my yoga and meditation classes had helped them with their PTSD over the past 40 yrs.

Now that we are "waist deep" in Trumpism and in memory of Erik Erikson's wonderful class and his last two stages of "generativity" and "integrity" and contributing for our children, grandchildren and future generations: Wondering if our class or at least a significant number of us would be interested in some statement on addressing Climate Change and/or the hateful, racist, sexist, misogynistic and dangerous policies coming out of the pathological liar in the White House? The national emergency is the incompetent, clueless, unprepared, undisciplined, corrupt, willfully ignorant, malignant narcissist Trump and his cabinet. I hope some are already drafting such statements. What would Erik Erikson or Pete Seeger say or do in the light of our current situation? Regardless, Waves of peace and happiness, harmony, health and joy to all. We survived the late '60's and so much thereafter. May we survive Trumpism and find peaceful solutions to clean up Trump's disastrous policies. May we escape V-2 rockets, and anything like them and air and water pollution. May more tongues be untied to save the other Bill Jewetts still out there & the vets in our midst (I recently counseled a gorgeous, athletic, young gay man who still had part of a bullet in his head because he decided at the last second not to go ahead with his suicide & tried to yank the gun away and, therefore, somehow miraculously survived——albeit with frequent headaches). When will be the appropriate time to ACT/UP? Speak up and speak out? The personal is political. IF we were to be in better harmony with the symphony of the universe, what would we be saying or doing differently? Waves of Peace and Harmony.

Shell Craters and Epistemic Holes: What Vietnam Did and Didn't Teach Me

Nick Humez

By the summer of 1965, the summer before our freshman year, I already knew there was something fishy about the War in Vietnam. I didn't know much about French Indochina before partition but it was already clear to me that we were backing an unpopular dictatorship. (For one thing, I had already read Lederer's and Burdick's *The Ugly American*, which would soon seem to me a prophetic blueprint for everything we were doing wrong in Vietnam.) One of my dorm mates in Stoughton, already a veteran of that war, had brought back a trophy machete improvised from a filed-down jeep spring, with a bamboo handle held together by baling wire. This eye-opening artifact seemed to me evidence of the Viet Cong's determination to fight with even the most primitive weapons a war we would be unlikely to win.

Unlike many of our classmates I did not buy into either a Marxist interpretation of the struggle nor a version of Domino Theory regional communist takeover programs. But it was clear to me that there was a growing disparity between what we were hearing from mainstream media and left-wing reporting – the former fed by a mendacious Pentagon (see Sam Adams, *War of Numbers*, published by Steerforth Press in 1994) and that this was not a war I felt we ought to be waging, nor one into which I could allow myself to be drafted to fight with a clear conscience.

The draft was part of what made it so personal: Thanks to the fraudulent Gulf of Tonkin resolution, by our later undergraduate years all of us were at risk. There were, of course, the gung-ho students – the ROTC helmets of polished steel, the unscratchable itch to graduate right into the officers' corps. But even the moderates among us who eschewed extremes of communist and capitalist analysis alike felt that we were being trundled along an unstoppable conveyor belt to Southeast Asia, and to no noble purpose. Our parents' generation had fought in Korea and against the Axis before that, and both conflicts seemed to me for good causes in which I would have served, if not readily then at least without serious disagreement. Vietnam seemed to me a horse of another color.

So, one significant effect of the war for me was in forcing me to rethink my views on war in general. The long-term result has been that I moved in the direction of pacifism, and now believe that while I would still probably have served in Korea and the second World War, knowing what I do today about the inhumanities of fascism and totalitarian communism alike, I would still have problems in taking other human lives as of no intrinsically greater or lesser value than my own, so served in a noncombatant capacity as, e.g., a chaplain's assistant or a medic.

The other important effect of the war for me was the development of a counterculture generally. The beatniks of my aunt's circle in Greenwich Village certainly held some fascination for me. But they had been purposefully eccentric, deliberately out of the mainstream, while the hip counterculture I came to embrace at college constituted a movement that if not a majority constituted a sizable minority, and we knew it; moreover, in the process our consciousness was raised in respect of other social causes, notably race relations and second-wave feminism.

The Watergate hearings that began just a little after we graduated revealed a rogue White House subverting of American ideals about honesty and fair play. But we had already been prepared for it by the press finally beginning to take its investigative role seriously and not just reprinting whatever

the Defense Department fed it, together with stories we heard from friends who had actually served in the Vietnam theater, increasingly at odds with what we were being officially told. I have remained skeptical about what White House press secretaries have been saying ever since, of whichever party.

What I think few of us reckoned with was the degree to which the dichotomy between pro-and anti-war views at that time was already sowing the seeds of the polarization we see in American politics today. We liberals fondly assumed that since we managed to pry Nixon out of the White House and bring our involvement in the war to a conclusion, together with a few less conspicuous victories such as lowering the voting age to 18, ending the draft, and the War Powers Act, arch-conservatism would simply wither away. The more fools we; the forces of reaction, it turned out, wasted no time in preparing for a culture war of which the first serious sign was the election of Reagan as president.

Perhaps we liberals could have helped, by taking them seriously, to empower the paleoconservatives so that they would retain primacy on the Right when the various putsches began. The one serious lesson I failed to learn from the war is the overriding need for consensus in settling on policies that affect an entire society. A corollary is the epistemic peril implicit in “us vs. them” binary oppositions, of which the War in Vietnam was a classic example.

Aside from the hardening of positions participants tend to stake out along such lines, they rarely “save the phenomenon.” There are, of course, conspicuous exceptions (global climate change, overpopulation, the absurdity of limitless economic growth) rooted in verifiable fact, in which there overwhelming factual evidence compels us to see that a thing is so and we should act accordingly. But most of the world now seems to me to come in various shades of grey, a lesson which the Vietnam was ill-suited by its nature to teach; I do not know whether some sort of compromise, if any, could have headed that war off.

In short, the War in Vietnam showed me a great deal, much of it going on beyond the walls of the Yard; but it didn't teach me everything, and I have come to question my feelings about it in the intervening years.

Coast Guard to the Rescue

Jack Humphreville

My Vietnam experience was life changing, but in a way that was different from many of our classmates.

In February of our sophomore year, my connections with the College were severed because of poor grades. Shortly thereafter, I was classified 1-A and was scared shitless as the last thing I wanted to do was take an all-expense paid trip to Southeast Asia.

To avoid the draft, I found a job at Electric Boat, a Groton, Connecticut shipyard that built nuclear submarines. I then applied for a 1-D deferment since I was undoubtedly vital to the national defense. But the local draft board did not appreciate my contribution to the war effort.

When I visited the Coast Guard recruiting office in my home town of New London in early March, the recruiter said there was a three-year waiting list and not to bother signing up. But I took the required test and was placed on the waiting list.

In early April, the recruiter called and asked if I could commit to joining the reserves in early May. "Can you give me an answer in 48 hours?"

"Are you kidding, how about 4.8 seconds. Yes."

From what I gathered, several of his previous recruits had health issues or could not commit on a timely basis.

On May 3, 1967, I was sworn into the United States Coast Guard Reserve. Now I was a seven-digit draft dodger since reservists had a seven-digit ID number versus six for regular Coast Guard.

On May 8, I reported for duty in Cape May, New Jersey. They immediately shaved my blond locks. After three months of boot camp (where I lost thirty pounds and learned that my company commander was the supreme being) and two months of active duty on the cruiser Unimak, I was placed on reserve duty for the next five and a half years. This required a weekend a month and two weeks during the summer.

Reserve meetings were a pain, especially on football weekends. But I managed to attend the Harvard 29-29 victory where I sat on the 49-yard line. Short hair was required, certainly not the fashion of the day. But it sure beat the alternative.

Because I was a reservist and the threat of being drafted was not a concern, the war was not a major worry for me. My objection to the war was that we were fighting it with one hand tied behind our back, endangering our troops. Rather, I supported what was later called the Powell Doctrine: overwhelming force with clear objectives and then get the hell out.

I was also opposed to the budget deficits, especially when LBJ incorporated the Social Security Trust Fund into the budget to help finance the war.

As for Harvard, I opted to take my exams in both 1969 and 1970 as a matter of principle and as a protest to all the protests.

My severance from Harvard was (and still is) a very real embarrassment, not only to me, but to my parents. But boot camp was a true kick in the ass where you followed orders ASAP without any lip service, but a SIR, YES, SIR.

My six months of work at Electric Boat (both before and after active duty) was another life lesson because it showed me a different slice of life from my privileged upbringing where my fellow workers were just scraping by, coping with kids, family issues, car payments, and rent and mortgage payments.

I applied to Harvard Business School right out of college. Given my spotty academic record, I referred to my brief stint in the military as a wake-up call, a learning opportunity, and a chance to clean up my act. My application was deferred, fortunately, since the three subsequent years working at a bank in Hartford allowed me to get some real-world experience.

I enjoyed boot camp, the regimen, the discipline, my ship mates, and the opportunity to be a leader in my Coast Guard company of 80 recruits. I was grateful that it allowed me to avoid rather than evade the draft by using some trumped up physical defect such as bad feet. But most importantly, it changed my life and was important to my readmission to Harvard College and later Harvard Business School.

By the way, my draft number in 1970 was 29.

Semper Paratus.

John Hutchinson

I grew up in a Quaker family, so I guess it was natural for me to apply for conscientious objector status during the War in Vietnam. When I took my application to my draft board (in a small coal mining town in Pennsylvania) the woman at the desk said, "What's this?" When I explained it was my application and essay for CO status, she replied, "We don't take those here" and proceeded to rip it up and throw it in the waste basket. So, began my education on this subject. I eventually was granted CO status, though my draft number was so high I was never called. So, I spent my time going to antiwar protests and helping others get out of the draft with the support of sympathetic medical personnel in Boston. I had other friends who with equal thought, joined the army. One became a fighter pilot and another became a ranger and was wounded and decorated several times in Vietnam. We have remained friends over the years, and they rarely talk of the horrific experiences they went through in Vietnam. But the war affected them greatly and they both came out changed and anxious to make the world a better place. The pilot became a lawyer and sympathetic judge. The army ranger became a plastic surgeon specializing in burns. Was I hiding? Did I take the easy way out? I don't know, but I suspect my experience during those remarkable times contributed to my becoming a physician.

David Kaiser

What follows was the first draft of the last few pages of my book, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War*(2000). Although I wrote them 20 years ago I don't think I could improve upon them for our purposes now.

On July 28, 1965--as President Johnson announced, officially and for the first time, that the United States was fighting the war in Vietnam to victory--an eighteen-year old boy in the midst of a cross-country vacation trip hiked to the top of Angels Landing in Zion National Park, in the red rock country of southern Utah. Surrounded by massive red and gray mountains and dazzled by the sun, he was deeply thrilled by his first encounter with his country's landscape, which he almost consciously associated with the greatness of his nation and its government. The United States had saved the world from Nazism in the Second World War and from Communism in the 1940s and 1950s. The government had moved to wipe out segregation, the great national shame that he had despised all his life, and was working to end poverty. The Cuban missile crisis had tamed the Soviet Union, and standing firm in Vietnam would tame Chinese Communism. While he had not read President Johnson's April 7 speech at Johns Hopkins carefully, none of it would have struck him as excessively ambitious or grandiose. In short, like so many of his contemporaries, he was very proud to be a citizen of the greatest nation on earth, and glad to assume the burden of defending freedom around the globe.

The boy who climbed that mountain did not know that the world of his childhood had really come to an end seven weeks earlier, on his eighteenth birthday, when General Westmoreland had asked for 44 battalions to fight the war. And he had no idea that the gods who inhabited this great American Olympus had already seduced his parents' generation into a catastrophic mistake.

Throughout their lives, those Americans born roughly in the first quarter of the twentieth century--whose ages at this moment ranged from 40 to 64--had learned to trust the federal government to solve enormous foreign and domestic problems, and now that they dominated the government themselves, they persisted down this path wherever it might lead. Since earliest adulthood, the government had provided them both with tasks to accomplish and with appropriate rewards. In the Civilian Conservation Corps that cleared forests and built parks, in the PWA and WPA that built bridges and buildings and schools, and in the Second World War, of course, American men and women had decisively tipped the material and military balance in favor of freedom. After the war, this GI generation had received unprecedented but well-deserved rewards: the GI Bill of Rights, which turned college into a normal middle-class experience; mortgages at 4% interest; an expanding economy; and taxes that bore most heavily on the next-oldest generation. They willingly assumed the burden of defending freedom from Communism all over the world. The next-younger Silent generation had never dared emerge from their shadow. Meanwhile, the GIs had given birth to a new, very numerous generation, confident that their offspring would follow in the path they had laid out--and only a tiny few of those offspring had thus far thought to question that assumption.

All that, now, was about to change, because of the war upon which the GIs had decided to embark--a challenge which they lacked the wisdom to understand, or the tactical expertise to tackle successfully, or the perspective to appreciate in its true significance. And the gods had played another cruel trick on their favored child the United States, by striking down the man who combined the characteristic energy and courage of his contemporaries with the wisdom to recognize tasks

whose costs would inevitably outweigh any possible benefits, and who refused to make that mistake again and again.

Physically and materially, the young man who climbed the mountain that day never suffered from the War in Vietnam. While he eventually became one of the eight million of his contemporaries who did military service during the conflict, he was not one of the two million who actually served in Vietnam, much less one of the 1.6 million who experienced combat, or the hundreds of thousands of wounded, or the 59,000 who died. Yet the war irrevocably reshaped how he saw the world for the rest of his life. He was destined to be a chronicler and a teacher, and the war was the experience that began to show him the world and his nation as it really was: not a new and unique civilization marching ever forward down the road to progress, but a great nation like every other, driven, at bottom, more by emotion than reason, cursed at the moment by an excess of certainty, and liable to make mistakes on the same scale as its triumphs--quite similar, in all these respects, to Periclean Athens, or late eighteenth-century France, or imperial Germany, or the many other nations that had overreached their greatness and left behind stories that could inspire pity and terror for centuries to come.

All this, and much more, gradually revealed itself to him, and to millions of others, during the next ten years. And although in the fall of 1965 he began a long detour into the history of Europe, he planned by the time he began his professional career in 1976 eventually to return to the history of his own country and try to unravel the mystery of the war that had dominated his youth, following in the wake of Thucydides the Athenian and Luigi Albertini and Fritz Fischer and all the other historians who had dared to look clearly at their countries' greatest mistakes, realizing as they did so that they were doing no more and no less than to try to see their fellow citizens and their leaders in all their humanity, and thus to understand those who had done wrong. Meanwhile, he might also try to honor those who had shown the particular kinds of heroism needed in such a time: those who had tried and failed to avert national catastrophe, or opposed it at real personal risk, or dared to reveal what they knew of the truth, or stood up to restate the great principles on which their nation was based, or simply bore the burden of their countrymen's mistakes and did what they could in the situation in which they found themselves.

Thirty-two years later, having reached the end of his task, the same man journeyed once more to Zion Canyon, hiked to the top of Angels Landing again, and found that the same magnificent landscape now inspired very different feelings. He still missed the proud, confident patriotism of his youth, but he now saw it as the effect of a particular moment in history, the reflection of a special national consensus that could not in any event have endured for very much longer. Not only were the certainties by which his parents' generation lived too simple to have endured much longer, but the facile national consensus of the postwar era had created an emotional and spiritual hunger that was beginning to burst forth uncontrollably and shatter the nation's social and political consensus. A season of civic achievement was giving way to a season of individual awakening, and political certainty was making way for political skepticism. Had the War in Vietnam not opened the eyes of himself and his countrymen, something else surely would have. And thus, thirty-two years later, he no longer regretted the passing of the illusions of his childhood, but to the end of his life he would always wish that he and his fellow citizens might have learned what they had to learn without paying such a price.

The massive rock mountains that surrounded him now inspired more humility than pride. Carved by the Virgin River over many millions of years, they had loomed over the whole of human history, and would undoubtedly remain as they were for thousands of generations to come. And meanwhile,

in just three decades, the War in Vietnam, horrible and tragic though it was, had definitely retreated into the background of American life. Having brought one era of American history suddenly and dramatically to an end, it had begun another that was probably less than halfway through even as the century drew to a close. The disintegration of the civic order that the war had begun continued, and seemed to be leading inexorably to some new and unforeseeable crisis. In that crisis his own questioning, idealistic generation would finally discover its true destiny, while their children faced it wherever the front lines turned out to be. The outcome of that crisis would probably create some new civic consensus, a new set of certainties, and new social roles. And these new institutions and beliefs would prevail for perhaps two decades more, only to be rejected by still younger Americans in a seasonal cycle destined to persist through the whole of American and human history.

Carl Died Young

Leslie Krebs

Harvard, for me, was heartbreak. During the fall of 1967, at the start of my junior year, the young man I loved was killed in an ambush in Vietnam. His name was Carl Thorne-Thomsen; he had dropped out of Harvard exactly one year earlier. He opposed the war, but he was resolved on principle not to exercise his privilege as a college student to avoid the draft.

In the spring of '67, after one month at boot camp in Fort Knox, Ky., Carl wrote me to say, "I was stupid." After two months, he wrote: "I can't believe I have gotten into all this. Trying to do right, I ended up a part of something that is absolutely wrong. It is really too late to do anything about it."

It was not too late. Hundreds of thousands of young men went AWOL during the war, making a moral choice not to take part in the slaughter. But resistance was not in Carl's vocabulary or mine.

Carl paid the ultimate price. And I learned a bitter truth: if you keep silent while your government commits crimes in your name, you can lose everything you hold most dear.

Carl not only refused a safe house that his father had found for him in Canada, he also turned down a desk job at the Pentagon, a post that an insider had gone out on a limb to arrange for him. Once he'd made friends in boot camp, Carl may have been ashamed to pull strings in order to save himself. He was only 20, and being a "deserter" didn't jibe with his idea of what it was to be a man.

It was so easy for old men like Johnson and McNamara to send young men off to war. Women were complicit, too. For 50 years, I have lived with the knowledge that I never said the words, "Don't go." I thought it was my role to "support" Carl in his decision. I thought it was his "duty" to serve. I believed whatever my brilliant father believed, and he was a Cold War Democrat who designed and built jet engines for military aircraft, including – I now know – fighter jets that were bombing Vietnam.

Of course, I wasn't in danger of being drafted myself.

So, while Johnson was sharply escalating the U.S. invasion, I was immersed in my studies. I didn't see the scenes of Napalmed children on television. I didn't hear the reports of American atrocities or think about the mounting casualties. I didn't follow Sen. J. William Fulbright's hearings in February, 1966, a full year before Carl enlisted in the infantry. I didn't know that the Establishment itself was deeply divided over whether U.S. intervention in Vietnam was justified.

In April, 1967, while Carl was in boot camp, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous speech condemning the war, declaring, "A time comes when silence is betrayal." Did I hear his urgent message? That spring, a young SDS activist – I wish I could remember his name – visited me twice, imploring me to join the growing anti-war demonstrations. Out of some misplaced loyalty to Carl, I stubbornly refused. Anyway, I was getting ready to go to Europe that summer.

In short, I was careless, self-absorbed, ignorant and – say it! – cowardly. When I finally joined my first protest, the massive march on Washington of Oct. 21, 1967, Carl had been in Vietnam for eight weeks. He was killed in a Viet Cong ambush on Oct. 25 when a grenade exploded above his head.

Reflecting on the war at 94, my father now says, "I knew nothing. I understood nothing." And neither did I. As an English major at Harvard, I wrote my senior thesis on one of Joseph Conrad's

novels, in which the hero, embroiled in a colonialist adventure in Latin America, undergoes a severe moral test. I graduated with magna cum laude honors, but I feel that I failed the most crucial test of my life. Yes, our own government was lying to us, but by the spring of '67, when Carl was still alive, the truth was out, and hundreds of thousands of young men and women were in the streets.

Why did Carl throw it all away? All my life, I've wondered what compelled him to leave the safety of Harvard. His teammates on Harvard Crew, where he was a rising star, went on to compete in the 1968 Olympics. But being a superb athlete wasn't enough for Carl; he wanted to make his mark as a humanitarian. Given just a little more time, I believe he – we – would have realized that there was honor, humanity and heroism in resisting the draft. But we felt helpless and star-crossed amid the drift and chaos of '67, and our time ran out.

Carl's death shattered my happiness, my expectations, my belief in God, my innocence, my dreams of marriage and success. It awakened me to the scourge of U.S. imperialism. The scales fell from my eyes, and I was uneasy in the world.

After graduation, I left the country for eight years; I didn't want to be an American. Yet in the run-up to a brutal civil war in El Salvador, and during the CIA-backed military coup in Chile, I witnessed the same murderous U.S. intervention in sovereign nations, the same fixation on chimerical "Communist plots" that the Fulbright hearings had exposed to public scrutiny in 1966.

Today, I'm profoundly alarmed that our government is lying to us again and half the country seemingly believes those lies. It's not what I expected, 50 years after going through the crucible of Vietnam. I'm doing what I can to help set things right. But I believe it's the young, once again, who will save us.

(I wrote about Carl Thorne-Thomsen and his letters to me from boot camp and Vietnam in the 50th Anniversary Report for the Class of '68. That essay follows below.)

Carl Thorne-Thomsen, killed in action in Vietnam, Oct. 25, 1967

More than 50 years later, I'm still trying to understand why Carl dropped out of Harvard in the fall of 1966. I read and re-read his letters for clues. He was courting disaster.

Carl and I fell for each other in a history class in the fall of 1965, when he was a sophomore and I was a freshman. He was tall, handsome and unassuming, a rising star in Harvard Crew and a democrat with a small d in his approach to people. He blushed easily and teased me a lot. He was mature beyond his years and hated hypocrisy. If I acted like a flirt, he called me on it.

I was a serious student, so I was shocked when Carl rashly left school at the start of his junior year. *I can't write another paper*, he said. He was only 19, but he was a man of conscience, and he was put off by Harvard's elitism. Adrift in his studies, he believed it was wrong to stay in college solely to avoid the draft. He opposed the Vietnam War, but he didn't want a poor white or a person of color to be called up in his place.

Carl ricocheted around the country for a few months, sending out signals of loneliness and frustration. He said he'd decided not to be a writer. He said he wanted to be a lawyer but was not ready to take another exam. He applied for factory jobs. Then, in early February, 1967, from his hometown of Lake Forest, Ill., he wrote:

Yesterday I gave up and volunteered for the draft; now it is out of my hands. I suppose I could still flunk the physical, but I would just as soon go in, now that I am so resolved.

It has been good for me to get out of school, to get out of the tide of events that was pulling me towards nothing. If I had known what I wanted to do two and a half years ago, I could have graduated this year and been on my way. It is too bad that you knew me at this time in my life, for it has been without a doubt, the worst time (I don't repudiate it, because I have learned a lot).

Carl was headed for the infantry. He told me he did not want to be an officer. Much later, I learned that he not only declined a desk job at the Pentagon, but also turned down a safe house his father had arranged for him in Canada.

Basic training was grueling. From Fort Knox, Ky., in April, Carl wrote:

I seldom have a moment free from some ridiculous duty or another, and when I do sit down to write, there is so much noise and screaming around that I go crazy trying to think at all... I regret that things turned out the way they have. I was stupid. I hope things are going well at school. It must be spring. The river must be beautiful and the crews training for the first race at Columbia. I wish I were there.

In May, he described his final test on the firing range, which took place in a downpour:

I was doing very well until I fired my last ten rounds at the targets of the man next to me who was on the verge of failing. (One really catches hell for failing rifle qualification – you understand). Anyway, the guy passed (he was a member of my squad) and I came out only slightly above average.

Then, later that month from Fort Polk, La. came this self-reckoning:

Fort Polk is as bad or worse than it is said to be. They train strictly for Vietnam, and the training is long & unpleasant. They had us frightened to death for the first few days, but things have eased up a little since then. We are learning to fire all sorts of weapons, operate radios, navigate with a compass. Our company area is called "Tigerland" and everyone is gung-ho, rah-rah – there are signs everywhere saying "Kill the Cong" "Fight Win" and so forth – it's like a goddamned college homecoming game – except that it is deadly serious. Myself, I find it hard to take it seriously. I can't believe I have gotten into all this. Trying to do right, I ended up a part of something that is absolutely wrong. It is really too late to do anything about it.

And this, in June:

We had the afternoon off yesterday and I spent the time swimming and drinking beer. I heard some great songs – some of them brought back memories of the good old days of you and me and my car and school. My mind resides in the past and tries to make the present-past the future present ("Son, don't wish your life away.")

Yet on arriving in South Vietnam in late August, Carl seemed almost glad to be there. From Cu Chi base camp, 40 miles northwest of Saigon, he wrote:

The country is beautiful from the air but on the ground it is so muddy and dirty that it isn't attractive at all – especially to an infantryman. Still I am in good spirits and ready for anything – Ha!

And later, from a base camp in southeastern Vietnam:

It is nice here at Dau Tieng – base camp for the 2nd Battalion – where I will be situated for the year. The camp is set up right in the middle of an old French rubber plantation. The rubber trees are planted in wide graceful rows that put the ground entirely in shade.

Outside our perimeter is semi-jungle where we conduct our operations. The land is basically flat, but in the distance are a few lumps of mountains I am anxious to explore. At night, there is constant firing on the perimeter (mostly our men firing at spooks) but it seems safe, almost peaceful in the orchard.

In September, the tone of his letters darkened:

We are very busy – constantly on the move. We have to sleep in our boots – ready to jump up and go out to set up an ambush or bring in a convoy. When the monsoon season ends and the big operations begin life will be less hectic but probably more unpleasant. Tomorrow we go on a 7-day operation – where I don't know. I won't be able to write, but don't worry – as long as you hear nothing I am all right. My parents will notify you if anything happens and incidentally nothing will – I am very careful.

This is a fucked-up war, but a lot of the people are good. Everyone is going through hell and most of them without any belief in the principles behind what they do – it's not for the people back home, but for each other.

You want to know details of my life here. What can I say about trudging through the jungle, being mortared, snipered at, keeping watch around our perimeter at night – my mind is so full of hope, despair, fear, misery, confidence, sadness that it is hard to put anything straight. There will be a time to tell it all. Don't imagine it is anything too horrible. It is mostly a pain in the neck to carry all your gear, the heat is unbearable, the jungle tears you up; although the new boots are good your feet are always wet. We travel in daylight – set up perimeter at night – look for Charley and seldom find him.

Meanwhile, Carl's leadership ability was not going unnoticed. In mid-September, just three weeks after arriving in Vietnam, he was made radioman for his platoon. A month later, he wrote:

I am in charge of platoon communications, nothing much yet but if I keep at it I may make it into the commo shack back at base camp – a really soft job. More likely, I will be kept in the field for the entire 12 months ... I miss you like crazy. I hate to think of school beginning without me and of being a year without you. There is a chance that I can get out of the army in September in time for school, but I will have to play it cool and use all the influence I can muster.

Time is passing. I can see the end of it all. This whole bit won't hurt me – in fact I am learning a lot – I will be much wiser when I get out. I am becoming less vain and more certain of my ideas & ambitions. I am unconditionally in love with you and foresee a beautiful future if we are somehow together.

On Oct. 25, 1967, the day of his death, Carl wrote that he'd been promoted again:

No time to write much. I have been made the company commander's radio-man and have a lot to do. I'll get an official promotion in a few days and maybe in a few months will no longer go out in the field.

I love to hear from you, Leslie. A letter from you makes everything bearable. You have a mystical effect on me and sometimes just the memory of you will keep me high for hours.

I love you,

Carl

In my dorm at Cabot Hall, I got a call from Carl's mother: Carl had been killed by a grenade during a Viet Cong ambush near the Cambodian border. Posthumously, he was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism. The citation stated that as the commander's radio man, he had repeatedly exposed himself to enemy fire "with total disregard for his own personal safety" in order to relay messages to his company. He was 20 years old.

Just days before Carl died, I had joined the historic march of Oct. 21, 1967, on the Lincoln Memorial and the Pentagon. It was my first act of protest against the Vietnam War.

In October, 2017, Harvard Magazine carried an article about Carl; the author, Bonnie Docherty, was the daughter of one of his high school classmates. For his friends in the Class of '68, for those who suffered in the war, and for all those who yearn for peace, I offer a glimpse of Carl's hopes and fears through his letters.

Ron Kwon

I was the first, and possibly only, conscientious objector to the Draft from Maui. The local draft board there consisted of people known to my family and myself and they were initially shocked that I had become "radicalized" from my Ivy League education. One of my high school teachers called me a traitor. However, I was eventually granted 1AO status as an objector able to serve as a noncombatant. I envisioned myself serving as a medic, and was ready to serve if called--however, when the draft lottery was instituted, I had a very high number, essentially keeping me from being drafted.

Friends of mine from high school were drafted and some of them served in combat. One of them was killed and years later I paid homage to him at the Vietnam Veterans memorial in DC. Another friend served in the Army special forces, and returned home permanently traumatized and psychically damaged from his experiences there.

I sided with the protestors and the University Hall occupation and was still angry and felt betrayed for a long time about how Pusey let the police in to break up the demonstration. It was not until our 25th class reunion that I was finally able to let go of the bitterness and anger I had.

I still feel strongly, even more now, that our government has not served the rest of the world fairly and that we have committed, and continue to commit, crimes in the name of our national security interests.

Wars in Vietnam and at Home

Ron Lare

Personal Background of a Conscientious Objector

My unusual work history and politics are detailed further below. A classmate suggested that I begin with my personal life.

I received a completely “free ride” scholarship to Harvard. For personal needs I took on debt, small by today’s standards and paid off over several years.

At Harvard I received the high privilege of a good education (some valid curriculum critiques aside).

The Vietnam war was bound to have a contradictory effect on me, starting at Harvard. That effect escalated with service as a Conscientious Objector (CO).

Unlike many others who joined SDS, I have no leftist family history. My mother was an undeclared working-class feminist and intellectual but was otherwise conservative. My father was undereducated and often lacked the self-confidence to confront authority but was also a working class intellectual. My parents met in the Navy in Texas, a war-time aviator from New Mexico and Colorado, a WAVE from Michigan. They saw WWII as a patriotic duty. They voted for Barry Goldwater in 1964 (much later they became progressive).

I saw the social class lines at Harvard. My intellectual embarrassments as a student from semi-rural East San Diego County as well as my socially submissive family upbringing made me overly cautious even as an anti-war activist. I tended to isolate myself in the libraries to excel academically—which I did. Feeling out of place became one reason for my opposition to the War in Vietnam. Even this was contradictory, as many SDS comrades were from very privileged backgrounds.

Although I’d acquired anti-war principles at Harvard, I was also unwilling to risk my life in a war I opposed. My parents seemed to find this cowardly. Later I would face a few death threats as an activist, but dying in Vietnam without a cause of my own had been a frightening prospect.

My father flew to our graduation ceremony. As a “real worker” he was lavished with a Progressive Labor Party leader’s attention. I didn’t join the walkout from the ceremony. I accepted SDS’s selection of me as a speaker permitted on stage by Harvard (more on speakers below). My father’s presence meant I certainly wouldn’t walk out anyway.

I had a long relationship with a woman who remains my closest co-organizer for UAW reform. I have been married 24 years to a woman I met because of an injury from the years I worked on a Ford assembly line. In 2000 my wife began the work of arranging adoption of a daughter from Asia in 2002. One of my activist arrests almost stopped the adoption, the most important event of my life. Our daughter is 55 years my junior and now in college.

In 2008, I retired as a Ford hourly UAW member. I occasionally teach part-time ESL/EFL and German in Detroit. At Harvard I had majored in German until mid-junior year. Vietnam moved me to switch to Government. In summer 1967, I had a scholarship to join Oberlin students studying German in Vienna. There, I read a headline translating, “Paratroopers in Detroit.” The National

Guard and Army Airborne were occupying Detroit in response to a rebellion usually called a riot. I thought the headline meant the US had literally dropped those troops from the sky onto Detroit streets. Three years later, I would work in Detroit as a Conscientious Objector (CO) and am still here.

A Radical Proposition from My Time at Harvard

One radical Vietnam era anti-war slogan was “Bring the war home,” meaning fight injustice right here in the US. That war has always been here, between classes, and for and against those scapegoated or excluded from safety and opportunity.

Many 1960s US college leftists attempted militant working class organizing. This was inspired partly by events including 1968 in France, the Civil Rights Movement, and rising US labor activity. I used my CO job to begin union reform organizing. This led me toward a life commitment to socialist politics.

After Harvard, I held a variety of manual jobs including a terribly difficult one making Mustangs on the Ford Rouge Plant assembly line, 1978-1989. I next became a die maker there, 1989-2008. (Die making is a type of machine construction and repair. During one layoff from Ford, I worked at UAW Legal Services but returned to Ford.)

I’ve held local elected office in AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) at the hospital, the UE (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America) in Cambridge, and the UAW in Dearborn, next to Detroit. I was elected to the UAW-Ford Local 600 Executive Board for one term.

My chief UAW Local 600 reform organizing partner and sometimes a Tool and Die Unit official is a woman I met while in the UE in Cambridge. Since hiring at Ford near Detroit, we have been central to progressive organizing critical of the union’s bureaucracy. We have participated in national UAW reform movements and continue in retirement. Other oppositions in the local have been more successful in their own terms. Reform organizing in the UAW has been most successful when African-American and white unity is prominent. Immigrants have been proportionately the most militant component of the local.

Ivy League Class Ceiling Cracks a Bit

Harvard’s admission of the son of a US Post Office letter carrier and a mother of seven now seems part of a token breaking of the “class ceiling” at universities meant for the upper and upper-middle classes. Why this change?

I now believe that the Civil Rights Movement cracked that ceiling for me. Admitting some African-American students at elite universities entailed some white working-class admissions as well. That perception spurs my social justice activism.

Anti-War Participation at Harvard

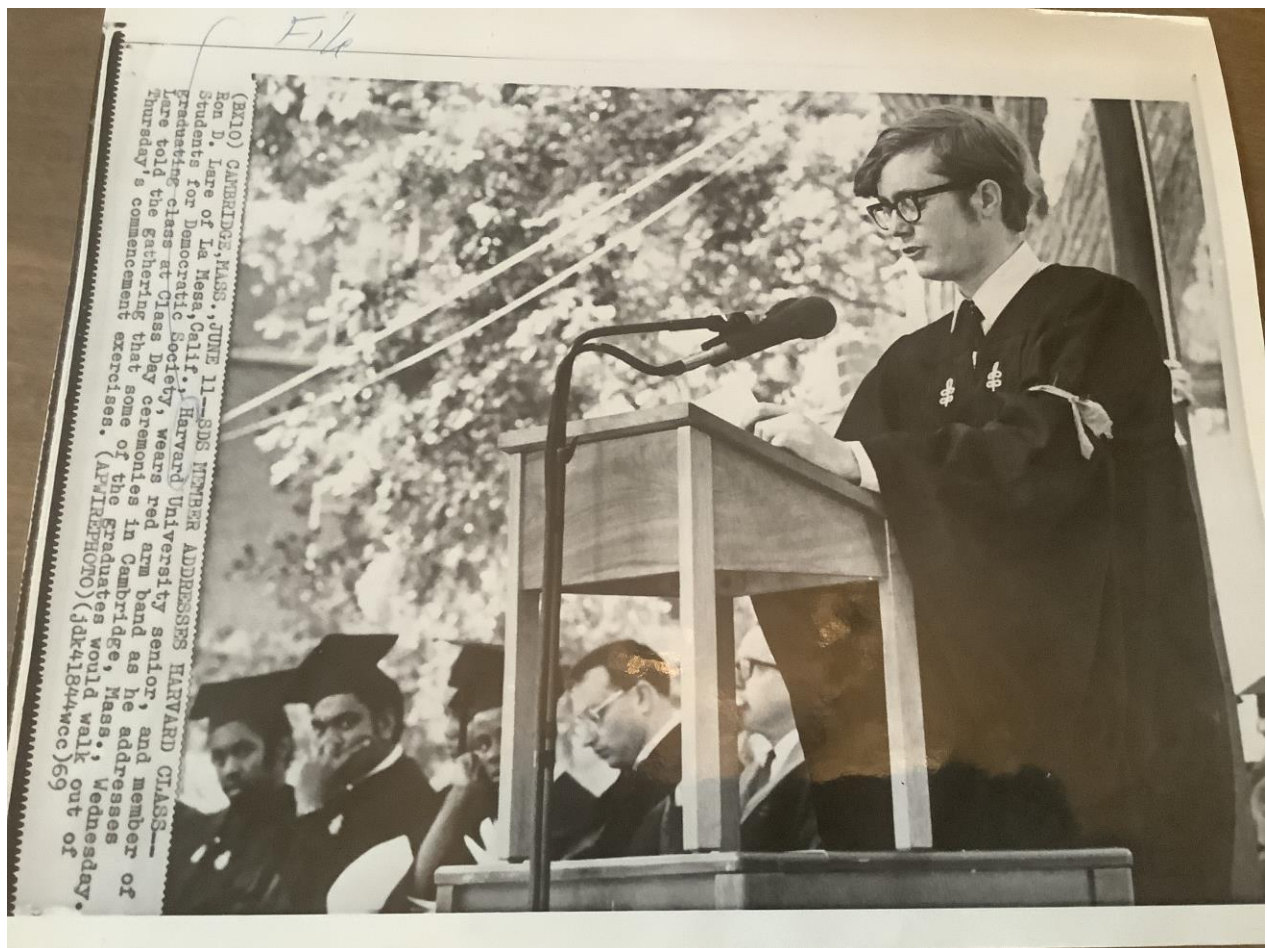
I joined SDS in my sophomore year. I was quietly shocked when a speaker said he opposed the army as an institution. I kept attending meetings. I was in the anti-Dow/napalm occupation of Mallinkrodt Hall, but anxious about my scholarship, I declined to turn my bursar’s card over to SDS. I participated in anti-war mobilizations in Washington, DC and New York. I was elected

Lowell House rep to the Student Faculty Advisory Council established in response to the student movement.

In 1969, I was marching outside University Hall when the bust came. During the police riot in Harvard Yard, I worried that the police would attack a student in a wheel chair. A student near me picked up a Billy club broken in two and shouted at the police, "Was this necessary?" "On strike, shut it down" turned to more radical chants.

I rather passively favored the "new left" faction of SDS over the Progressive Labor Party. SDS was my introduction to factions on the left.

A classmate mailed me a chapter of a useful but anti-SDS history dated 1970, "The Harvard Strike." The chapter does not mention my speech on Class Day. I do recall the poorly received SDS speaker at a graduation event described in the book. Perhaps it was a different ceremony, or he just took the stage. Anyone who can clarify could contact me.



As far as I can tell, I was the SDS speaker that Harvard allowed for the 1969 Class Day ceremony along with the official speakers. Our classmate Wesley Profit was an official speaker on the same stage. He was more active in concrete anti-war activity than I was. The other official speaker was anti-war congressperson Allard Lowenstein.

My selection as an SDS speaker (or a faction of it?) could have wrongly suggested I was an SDS leader. A leading SDSer told me I was selected because an Irish Southern Californian did not fit

Harvard's Jewish and New York stereotype of SDS. In my speech, I tried to bridge the Progressive Labor and New Left SDS divide by calling for a worker-student alliance. I was vaguely aware that some students and faculty might walk out of graduation. I did not join that partial walkout. I wonder whether granting SDS a speaker was an attempt to avert it. I received some guarded compliments on my speech.

Odder than myself as SDS speaker was an instructor on our rebellious campus chanting at students entering the graduation event, "Contemplate the verities, gentlemen, contemplate the verities."

I drove from Detroit to an SDS convention in Chicago. The Progressive Labor Party seemed to complete its takeover of SDS. They laughably overestimated themselves ("Let's bring 10,000 auto workers to the General Motors Building").

A Conscientious Objector Reconnects with the Working Class

I did not expect my San Diego draft board to classify me as a Conscientious Objector (CO). But fewer San Diegans than San Franciscans or New Yorkers resisted the draft. Perhaps the board didn't want to bother the military with me. I cited Quaker Norman Morrison's self-immolation outside the White House, partly to make myself undesirable. As a Catholic I made a poor religious argument.

My lottery number made induction unlikely. However, with CO status I hired as an operating room orderly at Children's Hospital of Michigan in Detroit as my "alternative service." I met with Detroit Trotskyists I'd known at Harvard. I began hospital shop floor union reform organizing.

A doctor told me that the hospital had earlier won court approval to deviate from a donor's will that demanded separation of races in children's wards. I have not verified this story. But like teaching at East Cambridge housing project summer camps while in Cambridge, living in Detroit is an education about racism.

My union reform organizing is intended in the service of socialist revolution someday. Yet my union work has always primarily stressed reformist democratic and militant trade unionism. The union movement began to abandon those traditions in the 1980s. Now there are some new openings.

Wars at Home

For many in the US, life has always been a forced daily war. The privileged like myself can volunteer.

I don't claim that I "did the right thing" in response to Vietnam. The camaraderie of socialized production inspires me. Romanticizing it is bullshit. My assembly line work was physically, psychologically, and politically debilitating. When I got off the Ford assembly line and into skilled trades, I was mentally addicted to painkillers, in relationship crises, and offering little resistance to left sectarianism. Trades were less difficult, ending the painkiller dependence but not the damage.

A few high school classmates died in the war. Those who went to Vietnam impelled me to find causes worth living for. I was physically attacked at the Ford Rouge Plant for my politics. My life was threatened by white co-workers and supervisors, sometimes to my face, sometimes in anonymous flyers, including after an incident that received attention in local media and Jet Magazine. My co-organizers were also threatened. African American and some white co-workers protected us. But all this was put in a different perspective by letters I had received from my high school friend about the war. (The story of militant GI rebellion against military authority inside Vietnam is not adequately told.)

Youth now hired at Ford make much lower real wages than I did. They have no UAW pension. We have betrayed the children in the US, economically and educationally. A third grader I tutor couldn't read first grade sight words. Poverty is war by other means.

In many US towns everyone knows someone killed or maimed in Iraq or Afghanistan—their Vietnams. The imperialist “poverty draft” leads them to enlist as “volunteers.” The death toll is far smaller than in Vietnam. The wars are more limited but longer. Improved medical science keeps more alive. In greater proportions, the maimed live on among us. Yet the fog of “peace” keeps them remote from the most privileged. The number of veteran suicides is outrageous—the wrong way to “bring the war home.”

For a socialist like myself, industrial organizing is central to the economy. But today in the US, teaching might be a better course for leftists who oppose wars and who are interested in union reform—recently Chicago teachers and the Harvard and University of California instructors inspire me.

I see no fundamental way forward for the oppressed, the climate, or many other causes without ending capitalism. I continue the efforts that my Harvard years and Vietnam began in me. I write for socialist and labor publications. I still reject Democratic and Republican Party candidates. I vote and campaign for some Greens and independents. Today I'm as angry about class, race, and nationalist injustice as in 1969 and as active as I can be, slower and more cautious at 72.

Thanks to Classmates

I thank Marty Chalfie for this project. A classmate wrote of and provided her own photos of Vietnam “collateral damage;” her caution to activists reminded me that one of my activist arrests almost derailed the adoption of my daughter mentioned above. Another classmate reminds me of the debt to lesbian and gay movement comrades owed by us all. I recall a classmate's role in SDS and learned that she had reasons like mine for staying outside the building during the University Hall occupation. The Black former Quaker classmate's essay and those of others move me. I cried over Leslie Krebs' tribute to her Harvard boyfriend killed in Vietnam. She inspired me to write this recollection.

My Own Story

Hugh Law

The War had a deeper effect on many of us than we may even have realized at the time. Samuel Johnson said “Every man thinks meanly of himself who has not been a soldier.” I was in Army ROTC and came very near to serving and likely going overseas. I dodged a bullet literally, at the cost of a crisis of conscience and a long running unease.

Today, many things seem different. I have been to the dress blues wedding of a young cousin, an accomplished Washington lawyer, in a colonial church in Alexandria, to her Marine bridegroom -- one who was moved to enlist at age 34 after 9/11. Two years later, she having been left pregnant with twins, we went to his funeral in nearby Arlington, the most moving ceremony I have ever been privileged to witness.

When we traveled as a family to Vietnam eight years ago, capitalism was rampant. Everyone has a little business. Clearly communism did not fit the genius of the culture. The grand French villas housing government ministries in Hanoi stood wholly untouched. We visited the Turtle Pagoda in the old city, which extends on a small peninsula into the lake into which McCain parachuted, and I saw the few old veterans in that park playing Mah Jong and checkers. Strange to think that those old men and I might well have once been at each other's throats. Though the streets were crowded, men of our age were rarely seen. Our kill ratio was close to 50 to 1. We did the opposite of General Sherman, largely sparing the infrastructure and killing off most of a generation of men who were then of military age. I could only shake my head and ask wonder we ever did that. A folly as severe as the Athenians' expedition to Syracuse.

Two of my friends who were Army infantry officers during the war (one is Harry Wilson, '67) returned to Vietnam, traveled to Hanoi, and sought a meeting with the elderly North Vietnamese retired general who had been the colonel commanding an enemy regiment at a major battle in which they had fought. They made their request through a Vietnamese diplomat, and the word came back that the general was indisposed and regretting that he could not join them. My friends then wrote a short message on a piece of paper – a date and coordinates of longitude and latitude – and asked the diplomat please to transmit those numbers to the general. Shortly after, word came back “The general will see you at 2:00 this afternoon.” At the meeting, the general said to them, “Your media accused your army of inflating our casualty figures. Actually, the truth is that you underestimated our losses. Our combat deaths numbered somewhere between one million and two million. We will never know the exact number.” What a waste!

Gen. H.R. McMaster's book *Dereliction of Duty* excoriates the Joint Chiefs of Staff for indulging inter-service rivalries and letting McNamara manipulate them, so as to fail to get sound military advice to President Johnson. McNamara had a keen sense of what LBJ wanted to hear and made sure that that was the advice he received. Much of what we suspected about LBJ's machinations is uncovered and confirmed in this book, including his futile attempts to avoid commitment by limiting our armed forces to half measures, based on a sham pretended fear of China and the Soviet Union, so as to get the Great Society bills through an unperturbed Congress, and yet with LBJ ending up buried in what became his war. A Pentagon study of 1965 forecast that we would kill a very great of people in Vietnam and ourselves suffer significant casualties but in the end lose the war because the Vietnamese enemies were in their own country and determined to prevail. The

study also forecast that the armed forces would become quite unpopular – they weren't stupid in the Pentagon – the arrogant stupidity was in the too-clever-by-half whiz kids in the EOB, McNamara, the Bundys, etc. At least we are now giving some consideration to our Vietnam veterans.

What have these experiences meant to me? – a question that I often ask myself. The War had a real impact on all our age cohort. At 72, I am at peace with the choices that I made and the life that I have lived. I have been blessed with good health, educational opportunities, and fortunate in my spouse, daughter, in-laws, friends, counselors, and professional associates. My business opportunities have been more than sufficient, and I continue to practice law.

My educational formation at Harvard College was a high privilege. It provided much more than a ticket; it opened my eyes to the world around me. Having the occasion to revisit Cambridge as a parent of a member of the class of 2005, I saw how many of the things that were wonderful about Harvard in our day were wonderful still, notwithstanding changing demographics and cityscape. Harvard equipped me to educate myself, to dig in to a problem, to use disinterested judgment, and to so make contributions as I ascended (and now descend) the course of life.

I taught high school in northern Vermont for the years 1969 to 1971, first an alternate service to the draft and then from commitment to the mission. The Stowe School (no longer existing) was a boarding school for boys with troubled educational backgrounds and had a focus on outdoor education after the philosophy and approach of Outward Bound. We made a difference in some of those young lives, which gave me comfort when in doubt about my path. I also continued to develop my love of the mountains, which I had begun with the Harvard Outing Club and in the company of Henry Doerr.

Then I went to law school, back home at the University of Missouri. That experience, a complement to the Ivy League, served me well, at several levels. There was still, as Professor May said in a lecture to classmates at our 40th reunion, “a moral divide in the country” over the War in Vietnam. Perhaps more than other College classmates, I straddled that divide. In the summer of 1968, I attended the funeral of the son of family friends, lost with the Army infantry in Vietnam. His father, an accomplished and conservative structural engineer, asked the questions to which there was no answer: “Why does a man want to fight? What did he die for?” The later collapse of Saigon, the reeducation camps, the killing fields of Cambodia, and the exodus of boat people all cast a shadow of ambiguity over perceptions of the War, but ambiguity had always been its defining characteristic.

At law school, I did not have to defend my position, although many classmates were veterans, and I settled in to building my career. I have long been active, professionally and charitably, in the conservation of natural resources, especially with reference to the Southern Missouri Ozark region and our free-flowing streams that are designated National Scenic Riverways. We brought our daughter up to know and love the outdoors, both canoeing in the Ozarks and (from age 8) hiking in the White Mountains. (It was gratifying that Henry Doerr in New Zealand gave our daughter Sarah hospitality, including the loan of “tramping” gear to hike Kepler Track in the NZ mountains.) With good clients and challenging work, I have loved the law and continue to participate in its development.

The War in Vietnam set us back as a country many years. I would rather have had my college studies completed by 1967 and been spared the following turmoil; but the trials that we experienced then were, I now reflect, something that we as a country had to go through. At the distance of 50 years, it is clear to me that my choices were, even if viewed most stringently, within the bounds of

discerning judgment at that moment and that I have so lived my later life, and history has so unfolded, as to validate those choices.

Peter Lazarus

We of a certain age have stories to tell...stories about the impact Vietnam had on our psyches and on our lives. We were witness to blood and treasure squandered on an ill-fated civil war. We watched as bellicose politicians escalated U.S. involvement, revealing (in hindsight) a tragic deficit of understanding about Indochina...its history and culture, its national aspirations. We watched as friends and families took sides in a discourse that grew increasingly vitriolic and violent. Schoolmates who answered the call, or were drafted, were subjected to a life-altering -- if not life-ending -- calamity. Those of us who lived through it...whether we fought in the war or against it...may all be considered, in a sense, survivors.

The first two years in Cambridge flew by for me with little concern that I might actually have to face induction. Surely the war would be over by graduation. But late in my junior year the letter arrived from my Midwest draft board instructing me to report for a physical. I was not about to take up arms in support of this fiasco, nor was I up for becoming an expat in Canada. So, the only question was which of the remaining avoidance strategies under consideration would be best: Medical exemption, conscientious objector, or Peace Corps deferment. I opted for all three.

A draft counselor directed me to a Beacon Hill psychiatrist and war opponent who was writing letters for target draftees. His psychological assessments spelled out at least one major mental disorder which, in his view, disqualified his patient for military service. Meanwhile I completed all the paperwork and secured the necessary testimonials for conscientious objector status. And lastly, I submitted an application for the Peace Corps.

When it came time for the physical, I was asked if I had any maladies which would preclude military service. I offered up the psychiatrist's assessment to the interviewing doctor. He glanced at it, and without comment, pounded it with a rubber stamp used to reject 4-F claims, shouting "Next!" (Evidently mental disorders weren't a deal breaker). As luck would have it, however, my application for conscientious objector status was approved. This still meant serving as a medic or in some other non-combat roll, but luckily the Peace Corps, having invited me to training upon graduation, would buy me a deferment before having to report for CO duty.

The summer following graduation, I watched Neil Armstrong walk on the moon from the Peace Corp training camp in Escondido CA. About the same time, I learned that a boyhood friend who had gone directly into the service after high school had lost his life piloting a Huey in Vietnam. As I embarked on assignment to Venezuela, the first faint pangs of survivor guilt poked at my subconscious.

My Peace Corp experience turned out to be as rough as it was rewarding. I was charged with teaching horticulture to Campesino children in the southern plains region of Venezuela. The isolation and culture shock were, at first, debilitating. I spent many a hot lonely night in a string hammock listening to war coverage on a battery-powered shortwave radio, fighting depression and questioning if I had made the right decision.

But as my language skills improved, things started looking up. I was able to develop friendships and alliances within the community, and these I brokered into acceptance of a structured gardening program deployed throughout the many tin-roofed schools that dotted the countryside. I bought an enduro motorcycle so I could get to the isolated school locations. After watering and weeding the school gardens with my students, I would break out some equipment from a duffle bag I carried

with me and show them how to play baseball and volleyball. They had never met an American before, so the cultural exchange was as nourishing as the veggies we harvested from the gardens. My hope was these kids would take their newly acquired gardening skills home to their parents' mud huts and small plots...that they would show them how to augment a diet of maiz and beans and queso de mano.



Ultimately, a high number in the draft lottery ended my angst, relative to impending military duty. It did not end the survivor guilt...guilt I still, to some degree, carry even today...but I was able to complete my Peace Corps Service in relative serenity and travel throughout the rest of South America before returning home. I returned to a USA that I appreciated so much more for having witnessed first-hand the living conditions elsewhere in the hemisphere. I'm left wondering...had there not been a Vietnam, had I not chosen the path I did, would I have survived? Would I be who I am today?

Judy Lieberman

To set the stage...I was a red diaper baby. My parents were radical Jewish socialists with a strong humanistic bent who both worked in the Labor Department under FDR. My father had to resign his government job because of loyalty hearings in the McCarthy period, which had a profound effect on our family and my childhood. I recently read the transcripts and the main evidence of his unAmericanism was that he tried to integrate the Veterans of Foreign Wars post in segregated Washington after WWII. My mother was an early feminist – she went on the radio during the war to urge women to work because of the labor shortage and set up a racially integrated day care center in Washington during the war. My sisters and I were raised with the idea that we could do anything (which had a lot to do with my becoming a theoretical physicist and my sister, who was in the class behind us at Radcliffe, becoming the Director of the New York Civil Liberties Union) and we were expected to do something meaningful and socially worthwhile with our lives. My parents were frightened by the McCarthy period. Although I was largely unaware of what was going on (I was 5 and younger when my father was being investigated), it colored my childhood. My parents moved to the New Jersey suburbs so my father could take a job in a liberal company. I grew up profoundly aware about how different we were from everyone else and was also cautioned not to reveal our political leanings (a heavy burden on a small child). My parents shifted a lot of their attention and aspirations from politics to their children, which was both a blessing (we were very well loved) and a bit of a burden. Our family was very intellectually and culturally engaged with a lot of family discussion about political events around the dinner table. I spent a lot of time immersed in modernist culture with a lot of exposure to protest literature and art. We went to Pete Seeger and other folk song concerts, listened to Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson, and went to see Second City skits. We also participated in early civil rights demonstrations and protested against the nuclear arms race. I grew up terrified of nuclear war – the Bay of Pigs, nuclear defense drills in school, and movies and plays about Nazism, racial lynchings, etc.

So, for me the Vietnam war was one of many unjust wars that the US had engaged in (previously mostly in the Americas) and a culmination of anti-communist Cold War politics. The Gulf of Tonkin just a manufactured excuse...Before I came to Radcliffe in 1965, in high school I participated in small demonstrations against the war which grew out of the anti-nuclear weapons movement. In particular I remember a vigil on Hiroshima Day during the summer at Cornell, where I spent a few summers learning math and physics and painting. The anti-war movement was very small. When I arrived at Radcliffe, I naturally gravitated to the small Harvard SDS chapter, where I found a group of like-minded students, many of whom had come from radical families like mine. I found it exhilarating to be part of a close community where I really fit in and could share values and interests. The SDS crew all got together at Lehman Hall at lunchtime, which became our informal social center, and we had a lot of great weekend parties, sometimes with live bands, dancing to soul music, the Beatles and the Stones. Growing up I had always felt like an outsider, was very shy and introverted, looking out on a society of strangers to which I didn't really belong. There were a lot of Harvard students at that time whose parents had been "progressives" radicalized by the Depression. Perhaps others, like me, had been encouraged to be super-overachievers that got us into Harvard - so as to be able to overcome any political prejudices that might befall us. Somehow – perhaps not only because of shared values but also shared psychologies - we all found each other – even those who shied away from politics. I participated in the McNamara demonstration outside Kirkland House near the river where we surrounded his car, which prompted McNamara to get out

of his car and argue with us. Remarkably this demonstration, as he later recounted in the Fog of War documentary, caused McNamara to begin to face his growing misgivings about the war. We drove down to Washington to participate in marches against the war and in 1967 a few of us organized the Dow sit in in Mallinckrodt to protest the Dow recruiter because Dow Chemical made napalm (invented by a Harvard chemistry professor Louis Fieser). In the summer of 1968, I was one of the founders of the Old Mole, an innovative underground newspaper, named after a quote



Bston, 1968

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from Karl Marx ("We recognize our old friend, our old mole, who knows so well how to work underground, suddenly to appear: the revolution."), which discussed both new politics and counter-cultural developments and later became an important chronicler of the Harvard strike. (Jerry Berndt, the Boston Globe and Old Mole photographer, took a picture of me from afar, dreamy eyed and idealistic, at an anti-war demonstration on Boston Common carrying the Old Mole. I think the photo was published in the Globe.)

As the war progressed with the draft looming after graduation and the countercultural movement flourishing, the small minority of students against the war in Vietnam gradually increased and suddenly became a majority. The Harvard sit in University Hall (I was at the SDS meeting beforehand but stayed outside in the yard because I thought the decision to take over University Hall was manipulated by the Maoist faction and not reached in a democratic manner) and the brutal attack on students by the police galvanized many who had been on the fence. The strike that followed was a time of celebration and a festival as we forced Harvard to seriously consider our demands – to end ROTC, set up an Afro-American studies

department, respect the neighborhoods into which they were expanding. Harvard and the country have never been the same since.

Although I was a hard-core member of SDS and participant in most of its events and meetings, I wasn't a leader and was content to man the tables, lay out the newspaper, and discuss strategy in the background. Still shy, I didn't really like the work of trying to convince others to change their beliefs. Unlike most of the other SDS core, at the same time I was protesting, I was also deeply engaged and excited by learning as I grappled with esoteric mathematics and physics and was stunned by the beauty of it all (usually the only girl in my classes). My undergraduate years in SDS and in the physics department were some of the best years of my life. They were communities in which I really felt I belonged. I think I was the only one of the hard-core politicians to go on to graduate school immediately after graduating (to study high energy physics - my thesis work was on the Higgs boson). Although I was very successful as a young physicist (and became a member of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, at the time the mecca of physics), I soon became restless and wanted to do something that was more socially engaged than solving equations alone

in my office, which began to seem like abstract puzzle solving. So, when I was thirty I went to medical school to become a practicing doctor and do work that was more useful. I became a hematologist, but also was drawn more and more to doing research to understand the immune response to infection and cancer and to develop ways to harness new scientific understanding to develop new therapies. I have found my work to be stimulating and satisfy my need to do something socially useful. My political beliefs have remained largely unchanged (perhaps with more appreciation about the need to couple democratic institutions with socialist ideals). However, I am an intellectual rather than an ideologue and instinctively believe that all ideas need to be critically evaluated. I do not believe in being politically correct. I still occasionally go to demonstrations (especially in the Trump era) and support left-liberal political causes, but my real love is doing science.

Vietnam War Memories While at Harvard

Michael A. Matthay

My memories of the War in Vietnam while at Harvard have hardly faded, it feels like yesterday as it was traumatic and upsetting almost every day especially from 1967-1969. I was so ashamed and unhappy with the prosecution of the War by the Johnson administration and of course its further escalation by the Nixon administration. We all felt relatively powerless even though we joined protests and there was a growing number of American citizens against the war. But note that Nixon still won in 1968 with a clear mandate to keep the war going. Of course, very few of us in our class thought that it was a war worth fighting and we all felt so terrible about the loss of so many American and Vietnamese lives.

Also, like many of our classmates, I thought Harvard was complicit in supporting the war in their investments and failure to stop ROTC. The over-reaction to occupying University Hall by Pusey calling in the Cambridge police shifted faculty and students alike to a strong anti-administration frenzy. I did wear a red armband on our graduation day (to my father's chagrin) but I was not a member of SDS. I was going to medical school so the threat of being drafted was never real for me but for many of my close friends it was a terrible and unacceptable possibility.

With the perspective of 50 years, I am still very unhappy with the US government for prosecuting the War in Vietnam. We know that eventually Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara admitted it was wrong, but he came to this realization way too late. And then it feels like we repeated our prior mistakes by going into the War in Iraq led by the second Bush. That war was also not justified. I think we have a very immature nation, we are too materialistic, too violent, and we elect politicians who have the wrong values much of the time. So, I wish that I could conclude that the US learned from the mistakes of the War in Vietnam, but I think that we did not.

Nevertheless, I am proud that most of our class of 1969 opposed the War in Vietnam and that we put pressure on the Harvard administration to be more enlightened. We should have a few minutes of silence for all who died in Vietnam at our reunion.

On Vietnam and Harvard

Frank L. McNamara, Jr.

Vietnam visited road kill upon an entire generation of Americans who came of age during the 60s and early 70s. It strained the civic fabric of the country on a scale not experienced since the Civil War. As with that earlier conflict, it caused the disintegration of family relationships, friendships, and even love affairs.

Looking back, I can offer no more trenchant or concise formulation of the War than that provided by Henry Kissinger in a lecture given during the spring of 1968 in a course entitled “Government 180 - International Relations”:

“The War in Vietnam has now reached a point where any criticism one makes of it, from either the Left or the Right, has validity.”

Kissinger’s observation proved to be not merely incisive but prophetic, as well as particularly apt for the year when made: 1968 was the bloodiest of the War, with the TET Offensive, the siege at Khe Sanh, and the return of 16,899 young Americans in body bags. That level of carnage translates to 325 casualties per week, a body count that makes the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, awful as they were and are, seem like Radcliffe Jolly Ups. 1968 was tumultuous in other ways as well: it was a year of invasions (Soviets troops and tanks into Czechoslovakia), of assassinations (Dr. King and Robert F. Kennedy), and of riots (Paris, Columbia, Berkeley, Miami and the Siege of Chicago). But it seemed that all these dramas were played out against the backdrop of events in Southeast Asia.

By the autumn of that year, our last at the College, the battle lines had been clearly drawn. As in the case of America’s political culture today, there seemed to be no middle ground. One either supported the War or opposed it. The dogmatic certitudes that each side spouted while contending against the other were incapable of imparting the lesson that gray is the color of truth. There were no agnostics. Everyone was a moralist and ideologue. And we were all very naïve.

I joined the Navy soon after graduation. By the summer of 1970 I was a commissioned officer serving aboard a guided missile destroyer, the USS Lynde McCormick (DDG-8). I would make two deployments with the McCormick to the theater of combat operations known as “WESPAC”. There we supported carrier flight ops on “Yankee Station” in the South China Sea and provided naval gunfire support for U. S. and South Vietnamese troops (“ARVN”) engaged in combat ashore. During the frequent firing of the ship’s two 5”-54 guns, none but the gunners’ mates manning the mounts wore ear protection. As a consequence, I am in the market for two hearing aids; I am simply incapable of hearing anything that my wife and children shout at me across the dinner table. Life does have its compensations. But I digress.

My personal support of the War derived neither from the propaganda of government nor from the manipulations of the American ruling class whose interests the War and the government served. Rather, it sprang from a very simple belief that, in a world of realpolitik, South Vietnam had the right to exist as a separate geopolitical entity. That outlook was nourished by a loathing of Communism, whose soul-destroying tyranny in pursuit of a secular Utopia had caused the deaths of tens of millions before Vietnam, and would claim the lives of many millions afterwards - from the “Boat People” of South Vietnam, to those caught up in the “Killing Fields” of Cambodia, to many other victims in many other places around the globe.

In those days, hostility towards Communism struck many in academia as simplistic, insufficiently nuanced, and retrograde. Yet it is a view that seems to have been thoroughly vindicated by history. Certainly, it has been corroborated by the smoking guns unearthed in the archives of the former Soviet Union, made available to scholars following the fall of the Berlin Wall. So too by the testimony of the Soviet Union's most eloquent eyewitness and critic, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whose Commencement Address at Harvard in June, 1978 (that I witnessed) should be required reading for anyone interested to know the signs by which one determines that one is slipping into a dark age.

Looking back upon it all, had I known then what I know now, I might have sought conscientious objector status during the War. Yet, paradoxically, I have no regrets that during a four-year interval as a young man, I wore the uniform of my country, and that a significant chunk of that time was spent in a combat environment. Among other things, that experience taught me what some of my more discerning classmates may have understood intuitively all along: that war wastes much and solves little; that it is the offspring of the poor and the working classes, rather than those privileged sons and daughters of the elites, who bear disproportionately and (usually) uncomplainingly the burdens that war imposes (separation, loneliness, disruption, anxiety, fighting, maiming, and dying); that despite the honor of their arms, generals and admirals are bureaucrats too; that too many Tribunes of the People (i.e., our elected political leaders) are lazy but ambitious second-raters, desirous of fame yet fearful of failure; and, most critically, that when a culture's materialistic lust for pleasure, power, comfort, and self-service eclipses a love of truth and service to others, when Vanitas triumphs over Veritas, then that culture is in decline.

If I have come round to some of the points of view held by my more radical anti-War classmates on the Left a half-century ago, then I suspect that they, by some queer trick of historical symmetry, may have come round to certain points of view traditionally associated with the Right.

In this vein, it would be interesting to have answers to the following questions:

How many members of the Class of 1969, formerly sympathetic to the goals of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and mistrustful of anyone over thirty, went on to pursue successful careers in investment banking, or to secure lofty, comfortable, and lucrative positions in the establishment they formerly despised?

How many classmates, in their earnest undergraduate assault upon the status quo, were firmly dedicated to the proposition that freedom of expression must remain unfettered, but now favor suppressing forms of speech that traduce politically correct norms, or that affront certain cherished sacred cows, or that are characterized, and hence stigmatized, as "hate speech"?

How many, formerly sympathetic to all things Soviet, now embrace a fetishistic neo-McCarthyism that imagines a Commie (or at least a Russian agent of Putin) hiding (and undoubtedly colluding) under every bed in Trump Tower?

Or how many, having displayed as undergraduates a healthy civil libertarian suspicion of the FBI, the CIA, and other potentially intrusive apparatuses of government, now rush to defend those institutions from what they perceive as an assault upon them by the current administration?

And how many classmates who may have participated in (or supported) the takeover of University Hall in 1969, or demanded the abolition of ROTC from campus, now experience some frisson of regret for their actions? And, if they do, does that regret ever extend to the point where they might say "Thank you for your service" when encountering men and women in uniform? Or does it ever

incline them to agree with former Harvard President Drew Faust when, in 2012, she wrote the following on the occasion of ROTC's reinstatement at Harvard:

"This is a welcome step in the long and distinguished history of military service by members of the Harvard community"?

But why go on? Have I not contributed enough to the general keening?

As Tacitus observed, "Viewed from a distance, everything is beautiful."

I know that in 1969, when viewed from the deck of the USS Lynde McCormick a mile offshore, the coastline of Vietnam was beautiful.

And I am reliably informed that today, fifty years distant, the coastline of America's sixteenth largest trading partner (\$54B annually) is still beautiful.

But I also know that fifty years and 58,220 military casualties later, the War in Vietnam still is not beautiful, will never be beautiful, and that any criticism one makes of it, from either the Left or the Right, then as now, has validity.

Legacy of the War in Vietnam

Jim McTigue

My perspective on the Vietnam War probably differs considerably from that of most of the class because exactly two years after graduation, I was living in a town named Tan An in Long An province, about 40 miles south of Saigon. I arrived in Saigon in mid-May 1971 and was sent into the field as a Naval Intelligence Liaison Officer (NILO) attached to an Army advisory team. While I had been aware for some time that an assignment to Vietnam was a possibility, I was also reasonably sure that, if I did have to serve there, it would be on a ship conducting operations at sea and providing support to troops ashore. Instead, I unexpectedly ended up actually serving “in country.”

In 1965, I was somewhat aware that in a distant Asian country named Vietnam, the U.S. was becoming increasingly involved in a controversial conflict that was appearing with ever greater regularity on the evening news. The stated goal of the war was to contain the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. I was not concerned at that point, however, because my next four years were already scripted. I had been accepted at Harvard and was going to receive a full tuition scholarship. Near the end of my junior year in high school, I heard about the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarship program and applied for it in the fall of 1964. Because my parents did not have the means to cover all my college expenses on their own, I had to depend on some form of financial aid. My father was a WWII veteran (drafted at age 34!) and my parents were very supportive of my NROTC application. I was very pleased when I received a congratulatory telegram from Senator Leverett Saltonstall saying that I had been accepted as a member of the class of 1969 and awarded this scholarship. I was also offered a need-based scholarship from the university, but the amount provided by Harvard would have resulted in my being a commuter, while the Navy scholarship enabled me to live on campus. In return for a commitment to serve four years upon graduation, I chose the Navy scholarship, not knowing that it would form the basis of my professional life over the next 47 years. Accordingly, I was sworn in as a Naval Reserve midshipman in September 1965, and in an interesting technicality, since I was only seventeen, I never had to register for the draft. So, I had nothing to worry about (or so I thought) – I had a scholarship, I would not be drafted, and I had a guaranteed job upon graduation.

As a government concentrator, my courses included many intriguing aspects, ranging from international law to American government. A real shock to my perception of Washington politics, though, came from Prof. Richard Neustadt when he spoke of his time in the Kennedy administration and the effects in Vietnam of what he called “that damned assassination telegram.” As I recall his explanation, a telegram sent by a State Department functionary during a weekend in 1963 basically said that the U.S. would not interfere with a coup in Saigon and proximately resulted in the Diem assassination in the wake of the Buddhist crisis. Revelations like that did little to increase confidence in the handling of the war. With both the war and the resistance to it increasing in intensity, I was well aware of how so many of our classmates felt and knew that they opposed a military presence on campus. Nevertheless, I can honestly say that I never personally experienced any form of hostility or resentment from classmates. We maintained a low profile as we became upperclassmen, and were just two months shy of graduation and commissioning when the occupation of University Hall and the Strike occurred. I still vividly remember that later in the morning, following the arrests in University Hall, the university sent a representative to each house

to explain Harvard's position and actions. In Quincy House, it was Paul Nitze, who had just served as Secretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Johnson administration (and now has a Navy ship named after him). A few days later, I went to the assembly in the Stadium and knew that things were going to change. The university withdrew academic standing from the ROTC units and Washington said they would not remain on campus as extracurricular activities. Those of us in the program would be allowed to finish, but ROTC as we knew it was gone from Harvard (until NROTC returned in 2011). Amusingly, my most consistent class attendance senior year was during the Strike, as my token counterpoint to the anti-establishment wave that swept the campus.

So, after graduation I went to my first ship and deployed to the exotic Middle East (before it was militarily fashionable). The Persian Gulf was a backwater then with a minimal U.S. presence, and we even went ashore in Iran as guests of the Shah's military. Returning home in the fall of 1970, I was due for reassignment and a wedding in December as well. My assignment officer in D.C. told me I would be assigned to a newer ship for another tour at sea. He also casually mentioned that there was a remote possibility of an assignment to Vietnam, but it was unlikely. Our wedding was scheduled for December 20th and on the 8th, I received a call to let me know where I was going. First, I was going to receive reassignment leave that began around our wedding date – great timing! Second (and this is really the way he said it), I would be going to shore duty instead of back to sea (I'm thinking, great for newlyweds), the duty was in intelligence (I'm thinking, that's actually pretty exciting), and it would be in the capital (I'm thinking, D.C., even more exciting!) – OF VIETNAM (my balloon burst). When I told my fiancé, I asked if she wanted to postpone the wedding until after I got back. Her answer was that I wasn't getting out of it that easily.

We married, went to California where I trained for a few months, and parted at the San Francisco airport. She went east (back to Boston) and I went west. In Vietnam, I was fortunate to not have to experience what so many did in terms of fighting in rice paddies and jungles under constant threat from the enemy. I lived in an old, dilapidated French hotel turned barracks, had my own jeep, and most of the combat I did see was from the air when I flew as an observer to collect intelligence for the local Navy SEAL platoon. I didn't realize how dangerous what I did was until many years later when I found out that 575 airplanes of the type I flew in were lost during the war.

The follow on to all this is that when I was returning from Vietnam in the early spring of 1972 (my one year tour was cut to ten months because of the drawdown leading to the end of U.S. involvement), my assignment officer (not the same one who sent me) offered me the choice of returning to sea to finish my obligation or having the Navy send me to get a Master's before returning to sea, in return for a two-year extension. I had enjoyed my time at sea, but having some time to live like a real married couple before I went back to sea was appealing, and Monterey is a pretty nice place to go to grad school.

So, instead of serving four years on active duty after graduation, I continued my career and ended up serving 30 years, which included the professional epitome of commanding two Navy warships. After retiring from active duty in 1999, I served another 13 years as a civilian working for the Navy in Washington until my second (and final) retirement in 2012. It's really rather amazing that today, people express what seems to be genuine gratitude to those of us who served in Vietnam. The prevailing attitude has completely changed. I never would have thought it possible, but I even have a "Vietnam Vet" ball cap that I wear once in a while and when I do, I always receive warm greetings. I think because I continued to serve in the military community, I was isolated from the criticism that many contemporaries faced as a result of their service when they returned to their civilian lives.

I wasn't overjoyed at having to go to Vietnam, but it was just one element in a career that I found to be, otherwise, extremely satisfying.

Harvard and Vietnam

Andrew Mellman

I went to Harvard in the fall of 1965 with a college deferment, as did most other men of our generation.

I did talk to my draft board before going, just to verify the conditions of the deferment, and it was not a happy meeting. In my local suburb (which had its own draft board) 99+% of high school graduates went on to college, so taking a gap year, having any problems (ranging from conduct to grades), even looking at them cross-eyed meant that I would immediately be reclassified.

The net result of this conversation/meeting was that I entered Harvard with a feeling of paranoia that periodically cropped up throughout my college career and afterwards:

I joined both Young Democrats and Young Republicans, trying to keep up-to-date on what each party was planning regarding Vietnam, but kept on being politically active.

I stayed away from everything from panty raids to sit-ins, knowing that if any disturbance ended up on my record my local draft board would re-classify me as 1-A, and still rarely volunteer for anything.

I remember a lecture given by Timothy Leary, where I went but did not sign in, and sat in a back corner of the room. A man came in just before the lecture started, wearing the FBI uniform (black suit, white shirt, narrow tie, sun glasses he took off when sitting, brown shoes) who took detailed notes throughout. I left early, totally panicking! And while my work revolves around research, I sit at a computer for much of it rather than giving or even attending lectures.

Harvard was of little help; I don't blame them, as every draft board in the country operated on different rules, but nonetheless I wanted more input from them.

I was active in theater while in college, and still remember overhearing a group of fellow theater participants discussing exactly how many gay experiences each's draft board needed to hear about before taking you out of the draft.

Eventually I applied to Doctoral programs in business to start after graduation and was accepted at Harvard and at the University of Chicago. I then went back to my draft board, acceptances in hand, and asked what would happen were I to go for the PhD at Chicago (or DBA at Harvard) with a goal of possibly teaching afterwards. I was advised to attend business school. When I asked if I would be deferred from the draft, the board said no, but there was a better than even chance I'd get a whole semester in before being called up.

The following week I enlisted in Navy Officer Candidate School. I did not want to go into the military in the Army, as back then first enlistment Army officers were being used as platoon leaders/cannon fodder, I was too conservative to seriously consider moving to Canada or being a conscientious objector, and I was not built for teaching at a private school (and could not do a second education major, as that would subject me for the draft). As a side, my 9-person company at OCS had two Yale grads, one Dartmouth, two U of Pennsylvania, one Brown, and two Columbia grads.

I wrote the two universities, explaining that I felt I had to defer my acceptance until after military service. Harvard wrote back that they understood, and that they hoped I would reapply when the military obligation was over. The University of Chicago wrote back that they understood, and please let them know three months before I got out, as they would of course hold my admission, my scholarship funds, et al.

I attended the University of Chicago, during which time I met my wife, married, and had my first child. I worked in Chicago for many years, and have had a relatively long, productive, and happy life centered in the Midwest and Midsouth.

And, in my three plus years of active duty I did go around the world twice, had more responsibility in my early 20's (Officer of the Deck/Fleet and Combat Information Center Evaluator on an aircraft carrier) than I had again until my 40's, and built close friendships that lasted over a significant period. As stated, I also met my wife, had kids, and then went down a career path different than I had expected or planned. for. , but have had no regrets.

I remember one reunion, where during a symposia regarding the War I discovered that in a class of roughly 1200 people only 12 had actually been in Vietnam; we were asked to rise, and I stood up to unwanted applause... I felt that given the times I had no alternative, that I was being held up as a positive example for doing the only thing that I reasonably could do, and struggled to make the best of a bad situation.

And yes, I still wonder sometimes what would have happened without Vietnam, if I could have taken a gap year, if I had gone to Harvard Business School and finished a DBA (instead of leaving Chicago with an MBA encompassing all but a dissertation), but it's all idle speculation as I don't regret my life!

James L. Merriner

I grew up in Coshocton, Ohio, on the edge of Appalachia. As a kid I entered my town's soapbox derby. I made it to the final race—a dead heat with another kid. We rolled down the hill again and he won, advancing to the nationals in Akron.

He was killed in Vietnam.

One day I borrowed a friend's sky-blue motorbike and somehow managed to strip a gear. He did not get angry. He was the only kid in school who rode a unicycle. We chased girls together.

He was killed in Vietnam.

A few years ago I wrote a poem about him:

I told a stranger on a train
My friend had died in war in vain.
He said, but after nine-eleven
We had to fight them to get even.
No, in a now-forgotten fray
My country threw his life away.
Oh yes, in class they showed us all
I guess his name is on that Wall.
Yes, more than that, a votive stone
Sits on a country courthouse lawn.
We raised the money to erect it
But his death remains neglected.

Leaving Harvard and joining the clerisy, I found that I was an odd duck for actually having known guys who died over there. I asked around; nobody else did. Only then did I fully understand the class fissure in fighting that war.

When Saigon fell in 1975, I thought, "Well, at least we won't be invading any Asian countries again. Ever."

And then just one generation later we did it again. Three times. Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq.

At Harvard I thought the SDS types were nuts. Now I think they were more right than wrong.

I was comfortably safe from the draft with a medical deferment from a skiing accident. Dante had a line about a place in hell for those who keep their neutrality during a time of moral crisis. I was one of Dante's deplorables. I regret not having actively opposed that war.

Nước mắt việt nam (Vietnamese Tears)

John P. Mordes

The War in Vietnam was corrosive for a kid who was from a working-class Catholic family, the first to go to any college, let alone Harvard. Imagine. Father a vet. Uncles all vets. Mother devout. Everyone around with faith in the government and no patience with apostasy. Everyone proud of the kid who made it to Harvard and certain he would not mess up. From the moment I arrived I felt torn between science and literature, family and SDS, not by nature a CO and ignorant then of the deft draft machinations some used. I loved organic chemistry and linguistics. In the end my career choice was not mine, and I went to medical school. I was gently advised by my draft board to decline my Harvard post-graduate fellowship year at the Sorbonne. Winding up as a well-published Professor of Medicine, complaints or regrets would be a travesty. The lives of some patients may be better for it, and that itself is enough. But coming up on 2019 -- parents gone, Vietnam a tourist destination, the rich without conviction, and the worst filled with passionate intensity -- I still wonder about the road not taken. I missed the carnage of the war, but the war is still with me. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*

War and Race

Muriel Morisey

Our Yearbook, 333, reveals that the themes of war and race permeated our undergraduate years. There is a lengthy essay on student activism and a twenty-page section called “Blacks.” There is other evidence of the connection. Twenty years after the April 1969 “bust” of students occupying University Hall the *Crimson* and the *Boston Globe* each published extensive special recollections of what the *Crimson* called “A Spring of Discontent” and the *Globe* called, “Harvard Under Siege: 1969 Revisited.” These resources of fact and perspective free me to focus on memories that reflect my rare dual reality: I was raised as a Quaker pacifist in a politically engaged Black family.

When I was kindergarten age my father served on the “Draft Board” in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He came home from a meeting one night moved to tears by the awesome responsibility of sending young men to war. My brother, who later became a Conscientious Objector to military service, recalls that a member of the Ku Klux Klan threatened to burn a cross on our lawn because his son was being drafted. My father faced risks that whites engaged in the same activity could avoid. My brother and I speculate that the Draft Board experience influenced our parents’ decision to become Quakers after moving to Philadelphia in 1955.

In Philadelphia I attended a Quaker school. Instead of being in a public school where the students and teachers were all Black like me I was part of a tiny racial minority. I was deeply familiar with the arguments against the War in Vietnam. I also knew that Black men were less likely to benefit from college deferments, more likely to serve in combat roles and a disproportionate percentage of those who died in the war. I was deeply troubled by the fact that when Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out against the war many Blacks were among those who said he was out of line.

In college I was always part of a tiny racial minority in class and among my anti-war friends. But I spent many significant hours in all-Black student activist gatherings as a member of the Executive Committee of the organization we called “Afro” – the Association of African and African-American Students.

Many consider opposition to the Vietnam War the dominant theme of student activism during our college years. But the Afro-American Studies Department came into existence in the wake student demands. While “Afro” took the lead in the effort creation of the Department was one of the goals of the broader coalition of student activists.

War and race are linked in my memories of April 9 and 10, 1969. I was in the group stretched out on the pew cushions in Mem Hall awaiting word that the cops were approaching campus. We thought the police would be less harsh if there were lots of witnesses. I watched the police drag students from the building with an activist white friend who was crying that he’d let his friends down by not being part of the occupation. The University had told him that engaging in any further unauthorized activity would lead to his expulsion. I thought my own situation was uncomplicated. I was there to bear witness in the nonviolent manner I’d learned as a Quaker. But a “Statie” grabbed me and pushed me aside with so much force that he ripped the buttons off my sturdy leather coat. Why would a state cop physically assault a slight, non-threatening female student who was merely watching the events at a significant distance from the occupied building? I believe racial animosity enhanced his determination to lash out against me.

I had friends whose parents warned them harshly not to engage in student protests. My father merely said he trusted me to make good decisions about whether and how to participate in the tumultuous events. Being a Quaker pacifist from a politically engaged Black family meant I arrived on campus strengthened by family and community support for my active involvement the intense days that lay ahead.

How did my college experience affect who I am today? I'm astonished and pleased to realize that its primary effect was affirmation. I grew stronger in my commitment to racial and social justice. My paid and volunteer involvements have reflected that at every turn. Though no longer a Quaker I still believe that conflicts in every context should be resolved nonviolently. College had two other major effects on my life: Teachers from elementary through high school had told me I had vocal talent and encouraged me to perform. From the first days on campus singing became a centerpiece of my life, as it continues to be in retirement. Beginning during Freshman Week and in the years since I have made friends for life because of my college ties. If the past 50 years have revealed anything it is how fortunate I was to be part of the Harvard-Radcliffe from 1965 to 1969.

Wars and Regrets

Anil Nayar

This is my reading of the Words of the Buddha for the day...co-incidentally.

Daily Words of the Buddha for January 13, 2018

All tremble at punishment.

Life is dear to all.

Put yourself in the place of others;

kill none nor have another killed.

http://host.pariyatti.org/dwob/dhammapada_10_130.mp3

I came from a time in Indian history after partition when there was one lasting force that resonated with most of India: Gandhiji's call to ahimsa and satyagraha (nonviolence and truth force).

That was my mindset when I arrived in Cambridge in the Fall of 1965 in the midst of a war ordered by the American Government, fought 10,000 miles away by young American men and women. To what end?

And approximately 40 years later, the American Government repeated the decision to send American men and women 6000 miles away to fight in Afghanistan and Iraq. To what end?

Lives lost, families destroyed; to what end?

George W. while at Yale must have noticed despite distractions that the only result of these kind of ideological wars is destruction and deaths; no victors. But he took America to war anyway.

Why?

I could not come up with one reason when I was at Harvard and cannot until this time.

“What It Is, Ain't Exactly Clear”

Wesley Eugene Profit

It's been my experience that speaking truth to power isn't as simple as it sounds. First, the powerful may not be listening. More critically, there may not be a forum in which such discourse can take place even if you're willing. More likely, having something to say, you have to search for a place where, saying it, you might be heard. Such was the lesson I learned from my opposition to the war in Vietnam. In 1968, Nixon had all but ended deferments for college students and the graduating class of that year at Harvard was the first to face the prospect that their next landing spot might be a military base in Vietnam. I saw seniors I knew in the class of '68 scramble to deal with this new reality.

As for me, in the winter of 1969, I put in a request for a deferment with my draft board and was turned down. It had been just my fortune to have registered for the draft using the address of the high school I had attended in San Fernando Valley and so my draft board was in Westwood, nowhere near my home in South Los Angeles. I told the Board, I had a once in a lifetime opportunity to go spend a year in Japan, thanks to being a recipient of the Michael Clarke Rockefeller Memorial Fellowship. One Board member queried me in Japanese and I responded appropriately in Japanese but this was to no avail. The Board denied my request for a deferment and I returned to Harvard like many members of our class with the possibility of being drafted to Vietnam hanging over my head.

I had been one of the few black members of our class that was visibly active in the opposition to the war. I had marched on Washington with friends from Phillips Brooks House (PBH), dutifully burned my draft card on the front lawn of the Pentagon, putting it out and lighting it again for the military photographer with the enormous telescopic lens who had run out of film, participated in activities of the Boston Draft Resistance Group, including helping people figure out ways to fail the induction tests at the Boston Naval station, taken guys from Roxbury to see a Harvard psychiatrist I knew who was willing to write a letter of non-suitability to the local draft board, allowed SOS to use the meeting rooms at PBH since PBH had one of the few gates to the Yard not controlled by the University, sent cookies to anti-ROTC demonstrators from the "cookie fund" at PBH, and finally, in what was the closest I came to real war resistance work, spirited AWOL soldiers secretly to Canada in my car.

Like all of us, I had heard our faculty scions tell us not to give in to a conspiracy theory about the workings of our government. And so, I so fervently believed. But that belief was sorely tested when the very Monday after graduation in my mailbox in what I thought was my rather obscure apartment in a corner of East Cambridge, I found a Notice to report to my local induction center in downtown Los Angeles. Other than the local utility bill, it was one of the few pieces of mail I had ever received. How could they have known? But there was the dreaded Induction Notice in all its simplicity of instruction, "You shall report," and there was no question in my mind that I would report.

I spent the rest of that summer of 1969, giving away the furniture in my apartment, visiting a classmate in New York City in time to observe from a very safe place the Stonewall Riots, and then, returning to Los Angeles, I reported to the Induction Center, passing through a line of anti-war picketers to do so. I knew I would pass the physical and the aptitude test and I knew I wouldn't step forward to be inducted. I thought I was prepared for what would come next, but I wasn't.

To my surprise, there were 3 questions on the induction questionnaire which I thought I could not be compelled to answer, so I left them blank. When I turned in my questionnaire, the sergeant, sitting at the desk, told me I had left these questions blank. Then he looked at me, and said, "You don't look like no druggie, and you probably aren't a criminal, and you sure ain't no queer," so he proceeded to answer in the negative all the questions I had left blank. And then he told me I should report for the mental exam. At which point, I reached over and crossed out my signature on the questionnaire, telling him that "I can't sign under penalty of perjury to questions that he had answered." That was the moment as they say, "the rubber met the road," and I was ordered out of line and taken by four soldiers, including the sergeant, into a little room for interrogation. The upshot of this was I was told that I was not a "civilian without restraint" and that somehow, I was between a civilian and a full-fledged member of the military and that, in any case, if I did not sign the induction document, I would be sent home to await further instructions from the Office of the United States Attorney General. And so, after some discussion (Did those scumbags outside tell you to do this?), I was sent home.

I left for Japan soon thereafter but not before telling my draft board that I thought the opportunity to go to Japan was too good to pass up and that I would be in touch with the Board once I established where I was going to live in Japan for the next year. A month or so later, when I found an apartment in Kyoto, I wrote the draft Board and gave them my address. To my absolute surprise, and after a period of several months, I received a letter telling me that the outstanding order to report to the induction center in Los Angeles was cancelled and now I was to report to the American Naval Base at Yokohama. I wrote back saying that I could not see how the outstanding order could be rescinded, ("Will wonders never cease! I replied.). How could that event be wiped out as if it never happened? I told them that I would await their solution to this quandary, but that I would not be going to the Naval Station at Yokohama. (I had briefly entertained hooking up with a classmate who was in the ROTC at Harvard and who had entered the Navy shortly after graduation.) But otherwise I told them I would see the Draft Board in Los Angeles when I returned to the United States in approximately a year.

At the end of my year in Japan, I had expected to return to Harvard to enter a Ph.D. program in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice. I left Japan, passed through customs at the airport at Hawaii, and was told that "government agents" were waiting to speak to me. I spoke to them and said I would be happy to talk with them with my attorney present but my attorney was in Los Angeles. I boarded the plane for Los Angeles and when I arrived, I contacted one of the few attorneys that I knew that was familiar with the machinations of the war resistance movement. I waited but I didn't hear anything from the government.

Later, I drove to San Francisco to pick up a Japanese friend who had been well-placed in the leadership of the Japanese student left in Kyoto and we drove across country together, stopping in Oakland, Chicago, Harlem, and finally, Cambridge. Due to a pilot strike in the Northwest, I put him on a complicated set of flight connections that ended in Pullman, Washington where he had a fellowship to study at Washington State University. The sky-cap at the airport told me that he had never booked anyone into Pullman, Washington but on that day, there were 3 people, including my friend and two oddly dressed gentlemen he pointed out. We joked that they were probably F.B.I. agents and I told my friend to just follow them as he made the various changes on his flight schedules since they were going to the same place.

I entered the program at Harvard from which I eventually obtained my Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice in 1977. About a year into the program, in yet another obscure mailbox, this

time at Eliot House, I got a letter from the Draft Board that said that I had been in the lottery for a year and my number had not come up and therefore I was no longer eligible to be drafted. Thus, ended my personal confrontation with the machinery of war. I had been willing to speak truth to power but no one seemed to care. It remains a lesson I am still learning over and over again.

Memoir: War in Vietnam - Metamorphosis

M. F. Schmid

Faced with the possibility of being drafted following graduation, I chose, albeit reluctantly, to join Harvard's Naval ROTC program to avoid a land-based assignment in a frontline foxhole. At most, I would be far from the fighting well off shore, I figured, and a privileged officer, to boot. Little did I realize that my decision was to give me a life changing experience of untold benefit.

Like most classmates, I abhorred the war and rejected the pronouncements of justification. I had great respect for those that chose civil disobedience to voice their opposition, though I disagreed with their tactics, particularly those that interdicted the freedom of others to voice opposition, or be intimidated by threats.

Initially, I treated the military experience with disdain and condescension- the Monday marching outside Harvard Stadium, the boring perfunctory classes by well meaning, but inferior military men, so far below the status of Harvard's professors, after all, and the student elite! I applied for, and expected, orders to the navy's Supply Corps, offering a free business education in Athens, Georgia. This tack would be followed by easy pay master duty on ship or shore for the three-year active duty commitment, (no late-night watches, no division to be responsible for). Alas, the orders I drew cast me into the line navy, and "engineering", to boot. I was devastated.

Turns out, my misfortune was to continue shortly after arriving in Long Beach, California. My first duty aboard ship was Casualty Control Officer (CACO), ordered to deal with the hysterical young widow of a sailor who had electrocuted himself only two weeks from discharge.

Shortly thereafter, I was ordered to another ship to relieve the Cargo Officer, suddenly released due to an acute case of ulcers. I soon learned why, as the cargo I was responsible for was over seven million gallons of fuel to be delivered at sea from an 800-foot, 1946 vintage ship to any and all manner of craft from destroyers to aircraft carriers on station off Vietnam. Furthermore, my responsibilities included Damage Control Assistant, (DCA), answering directly to the captain in handling emergency impairments to the ship's function from fire to nuclear attack. Normally requiring a 10-week intensive training session in comfortable San Francisco, the opportunity was denied me, as the ship had orders to Southeast Asia. It did not matter that the just completed expensive repairs by Bethlehem Steel Shipyard failed, or that I had to be given the answers to critical questions about my tasks at a grueling "Refresher Training" week. Orders were Orders, regardless! I had 23 days of steaming to bone up before we arrived in the Gulf of Tonkin.

The unexpected list of life "challenges" was so ridiculously long, I adopted a what-the-hell, I'm-not-going-to-make-this-my-life's-work attitude, so I'll just muddle through. A myriad of duties landed on my plate on the 285-men ship, including directing three divisions of hardened sailors, Repair, Electrical, Internal Communications and Auxiliaries. Fully qualified Officer of the Deck, (OOD), a grueling schedule, in addition to the many daily calls to direct ship refueling underway.

All in all, the trial by fire in eight months off coastal Vietnam transformed this rather insecure twenty-two-year-old into a seasoned adult, ready to take on any task or responsibility life commanded, however foreign. Engaging with individuals from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds, and rank. Familiarizing myself with a wide range of tasks in order to make informed

executive decisions. My Naval Academy captain, ironically, adopted me as a favorite son, and invited me to play squash on courts in Long beach and the Philippines.

Thanks to duty as one of three judges on the Long Beach Naval Station's Administrative Discharge Board, to be followed by numerous shipboard Mast trials, (Yes, three days in the brig on bread and water was still meted out as routine punishment), I learned a lot about the military system of justice. I found myself often taking the minority vote to exonerate the numerous sailors with spotless records, whose only transgression was to be attracted to their same sex. Ironically, the base commander, fellow board member, always voted dishonorable discharge for offenders. He later propositioned me. Go figure...

The myriad of tasks, assignments, rolls, encounters, crisis decisions, only a sampling of which I describe above, set me up for my working and personal life which followed-establishing and running a successful business, serving on boards and committees, dealing with individuals of any nationality, color and creed, even as a husband and a parent.

To my total surprise, a year after my own discharge I received a full grade promotion in the mail and an invitation to join my captain as an attaché at the Embassy in Bonn. Though tempted, I was not willing to let the Navy divert me from my chosen path as a civilian, and respectfully declined.

It is, in many ways, a good thing to be, in essence, conscripted early in one's early adult life, bound by someone else's rules to "serve", be it in the military or an NGO. My views on that era in Vietnam have not changed, though I'm grateful that both governments have buried the hatchet, and that I personally benefitted from the experience.

A Lifelong War

Warren M. “Kip” Schur ‘69

The war in Vietnam and the draft had a more profound and lasting impact on my entire life than anything else.

There’s no way to know what would have happened had there been no draft, but I’m certain that that my life would have been very different. Probably better, possibly worse; no way to tell.

For starters, my experience of Harvard was colored by depression and increasing fear as the draft tightened. Once the deferment for graduate study was limited to medical school and divinity school, the reality and imminence of the draft dominated life as graduation neared.

I still remember a nightmare I had during our junior year in which I found myself face-to-face with a Viet Cong soldier who was lowering his rifle to shoot me while I struggled to get my rifle aimed at him (woke up in terror before either of us fired a shot). There were other combat nightmares, but I don’t remember them. When the US began bombing Baghdad in 2002 I had a nightmare set back in the Vietnam jungle.

Faced with the apparent certainty of the draft following graduation, decision-making consumed our junior and senior years. Flee to Canada or Sweden? Feign homosexuality? Get a corrupt doctor to Trump up a physical problem? Pretend to be a conscientious objector? Or enlist, to avoid the draft? I had to enlist, and chose the Navy.

Fortunately, the Navy recruiter in Boston encouraged me to apply to Officer Candidate School. My career as a Navy officer, both active duty and reserve, has been of inestimable value to me. I was successful as an active duty junior officer serving on destroyers. I had many memorable experiences on active duty and then during a long career as a reserve officer. I loved the Navy. It enriched my life and gave me confidence and leadership skills that I never would have attained otherwise, not to mention many lifelong friends.

However, two consequences of joining the Navy were profoundly negative. One was that, out of fear of the unknown world I was about to enter, I married a girl-next-door I’d known for ten years but had no business marrying. I would never have married anyone at that time, had I not been entering military service. The marriage ended in a bitter divorce. (Yes, it produced three extraordinary children, but if I’d married someone else, when more mature and less needy, I would have had three extraordinary children with her—and at least a chance at the ultimate joy of growing old, and seeing our children and grandchildren growing up, together.)

The second long-term negative impact was that I ended up becoming a lawyer. I didn’t know what I wanted to do when we graduated; all I knew was that that I didn’t want to be a lawyer (like my father, who always recommended against it). I’m sure that had there been no draft in 1969 I would have done something different. But after being released from active duty in 1972, with a dependent wife and a baby on the way, I had to find a way to make a living. I started on an academic track (graduate school in linguistics at the University of Michigan) but gave it up after a year (too long to get the PhD and hard to find an academic job anyway). Law school seemed the only option. My career as a lawyer hasn’t been a complete disaster, but I’ve always wished I’d done something different and more meaningful with my life.

Although the Navy experience was unexpectedly great for me, it was not without some dark effects. At least for me, a career as a Navy officer (even a reserve officer) necessarily entails a kind of ongoing subconscious low-level trauma. There was always the possibility of something bad happening (a grounding or collision, or the loss of crypto material—there are many ways for things to go wrong, and many ways for an officer to be held responsible for others' mistakes). For weeks after I retired from the Navy after 30 years of commissioned service, I experienced an intense feeling of relief. At first this was mystifying, but I eventually realized that it was due to having made it all the way to the end of my military experience without having had something go horribly wrong.

These ongoing stresses never left me. I have had nightmares where I'm officer of the deck on my destroyer and suddenly realize that I had let my attention wander and look up to see that the ship is heading for a coral reef at 23 knots. I often have anxiety dreams set on a Navy ship to which I have been assigned for duties that are not clearly defined. Military experience left very deeply etched memories, both good and bad, but also a kind of persistent anxiety, still active at some level even after all this time.

On balance, I was extremely lucky. Although I will always regret the ill-fated marriage and the long generally unhappy career as a lawyer, the actual experience of the Navy in all its variations (junior officer on destroyers involved in Vietnam and other operations; reserve officer gaining expertise and respect in several different specialties; many exercises at sea that can only be described as great fun; several meaningful personal military awards; very valuable retirement benefits; great friends) has been and still is extraordinarily gratifying and rewarding. (The photo of my grandson and me was taken a few years ago, as I was heading to an annual ship reunion.)

More generally, my Navy experience gave me insight into the US military establishment (a vast universe of which most civilians are almost totally unaware) and the people who serve in it. Most of the sailors I worked with on active duty were opposed to the war, and everyone was at least conflicted about what we were doing. Over the years I've had many encounters with military members who disagreed with how the government was employing (and endangering) them. Others, to be sure, have been blindly supportive of the civilian leadership, even when its policies are misguided. But my skepticism about US military adventurism generally has been strengthened by seeing it from the inside, even as I gained respect and sympathy for most of the individuals involved. And I believe that my family and close friends think of me differently—and generally more positively, if with a degree of curiosity—as a result of my having served successfully in the Navy.

In fact, another negative aspect of my Navy experience has been a kind of survivor's guilt. So many men and women were killed or permanently damaged in Vietnam (or were harmed by what they had to do to avoid the draft), while I was relatively safe, and actually enjoyed and benefited in many ways from my military experience. That may sound like stretching a point, but it's real. The war in Vietnam, and the draft, were, ultimately and on balance, good to me. The war and the draft were not so good to millions of my peers. The dissonance still resonates.



Vietnam to a Boy from New Hampshire

Bill Sherwood

I felt guilty about successfully avoiding the draft (due to legitimate knee injuries), guilty about not serving my country while friends had done so. As a result, I followed books and movies about the war for the next decades.

I am not sorry that I did not get killed or come back with PTSD from Vietnam. So, in that sense, I am grateful but still conflicted.

I was clearly against an unjust war and participated in demonstrations. But, I felt badly walking around Harvard Square with an old high school friend who was home on leave as a Marine and was upset to see the lack of respect and appreciation for his service.

I had a rift with an aunt who served in the Waves and who was very angry about my generation's lack of loyalty and dedication to our country.

I was very moved by seeing the Vietnam Wall in Washington.

To Change the Future, You Need a New History

Sarah Smith

By the time of the Tet offensive, when I was a senior, I had become a pacifist and was on my way to becoming a Quaker. I reacted to the war in Vietnam by deciding to leave the United States. With no money, I did the academic thing and looked for a scholarship. The Fulbright I got let me leave the U.S. and go to England and France, instead of, as some of my male classmates did, to Vietnam.

This was, let us remember, 1968. What did I find in Europe? My first night in Central London, friends and I wandered around Russell Square. There were still bomb sites left over from the Second World War. In my mind I can see a little miracle, one tiny building standing unharmed in the middle of rubble, a perfect Georgian gatehouse from about 1810.

I discovered history. The living history of places, buildings, names. The connection between history and storytelling. Other people experienced contemporary history; on me, the history fairy sprinkled a different dust.

In Paris that Christmas, the streets still stank with tear gas. Did I experience the sunset of le joli mai? No, I hung out with the very last man who had danced with Raymond Duncan, half a century earlier. (He wasn't hard to spot: in a cold December in Paris, he was walking down the street in a toga and sandals, with his white hair halfway down his back.)

That year I wrote the first draft of what would become my first historical novel.

Back at Harvard, in graduate school, I got involved in the Quaker New Stories movement. To think differently about something—women's history, multiculturalism, war—you need to hear new stories about it. If you have the knack for it, you tell them. At the same time, American history was becoming more and more problematic. What was truth? How was it established, given our ability to delude ourselves and the willingness of villains to lie? My PhD thesis focused on a novelist who had got rid entirely of third person omniscience. I began to be convinced that the highest art of storytelling was to make the reader responsible for deciding what story she reads.

Though I still thought I'd teach, I was realizing I was going to throw it all over for telling new stories.

My first fictional publication was a hypertext: Choose your Own Adventure as a moral imperative. My first novel was published a few years later. It was the beginning of a series that continues to this day, a pre-World War I history of feminism, equality, multiculturalism, and internationalism, all under the shadow of politics about to go disastrously wrong.

I've never shot anyone or been shot at, except in imagination; I've missed what defined the life of so many men and women of our generation. Even now, I've never been to Vietnam. That's probably a shortcoming.

But Vietnam came to me.

Pruning a Jungle: Still Grappling with the War in Vietnam After All These Years

Chip Stewart

Pardon the quagmire

Vietnam is a real place, but also symbolizes enormous, near-eternal, larger-than-life disruption, pain, sorrow, and sadness. It seems a miracle that joy may still occasionally obtain. Perhaps we can learn to forgive all that enormity, to return to some erstwhile semblance of normality. May we overcome resentment, emotional distancing and blockage. Thank you, Vietnam, for helping us question assumptions about the wonderfulness of technology and the good intentions of Americanism. Thank you for showing the intransigence of evil. Thank you for the gifts of self-doubt, contrition, and humility.

The Past—the image of the self-immolating Buddhist monk

“Whenever one suffers, we all suffer.” (I Cor 15)

So many stories to tell, movies to show, sins to forgive, wounds to heal, feelings to process, songs and artefacts to digest. Such a trajectory of convulsion: Graham Greene’s prescient *Quiet American* (1955), Barry McGuire’s *Eve of Destruction* (1965), David Levine’s illustration of Lyndon Johnson’s scar (1966), *While my guitar gently weeps* (1968), *Gimme Shelter* and Jimmy Cliff (1969), the restoration drama of the seating arrangements at the Paris Peace Accords (1973), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Bright Shining Lie*, *My Lai*. You are as embedded in the sixties and seventies as your joyous counterparts: Tom Wolfe, McLuhan, the moon shot, the Right Stuff, Fr. Dan Berrigan, Fr. Robert Drinan. You touched the eighties in Dylan’s *Nighttime Falling*, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall on the Mall. You are another crazy-quilt collage. You birthed protest, the horrors of the American military, the dying cries of *L’Empire Francais*, the fear of the draft, torture, prison, death. What lessons could we draw? How could we stay true to the pursuit of truth in the face of such ever-present misery? How could freedom reside with terror? But don’t we still have the same question? How could beauty relate to such ugliness? The reasonable person in a war zone comes across as an oxymoron. As we return to the great lie, the pretext of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, we wonder how many more lies are we based on, how many more excuses do we need in order to supposedly justify disrespect? You were our diversion to forestall our Civil Rights Movement. There were many who did not want the war to end before a well-defined victory, but we finally accepted leaving in defeat.

Because of you I escaped to Europe, fleeing the drone of negativity. I experienced sadness. I never knew I had so much transforming to do. And our parents and the generation gap? How does our suffering compare with the “great” generation?

And then there were the casualties, the losses, the confoundings, the humiliations. Trauma. You taught me patience. I took refuge in theology and religious studies. This theological turn moved me thru pacifism to Thich Nhat Hanh and Love-ism. I still grope to find the words.

We feel complicit, guilty. What have we done to assuage the pain? To get the big picture, we must include the sorrowful mysteries. Only the staccato rings true to brokenness, our fraughtness, now that we've experienced such a mess.

The Present-- Our Dear Lady of Vietnam, Where Are You?

“At present we see indistinctly.” (I Cor. 13)

And the war it is finished. What kind of breathing room do we allow ourselves? Can we speak of the extraordinary in the same breath? Five women, their large hats, and sampans. Our feelings are askew. There is exasperation. Are we still concerned? Do we still fear our own hawks? What old wounds lie buried? What about all those black POW-MIA flags? And maybe a million tattooed vets? And the rancor that still flies or simmers? After all, the communists are still in charge. Nam, are you still the symbol of rue? Terrorism still lurks. The Adversary still chokes. How might the philosophic turn help today's suffering? Please help us make more loving our current dance with evil.

How a war that never seemed to end is like so many of our challenges now. We lose the ability to gauge time and success. We learn to live with ambiguity, different kinds of nuances. The painful irony of so little time to read, to enjoy, to write, to think, to pray.

The future—wide-open wonder

“But then face to face” (I Cor. 13)

Dear Holy Spirit of Hope and Love, please help us assuage our fears and tears. Please inspire us with positive curiosity for the coming generations along the Mekong.

Because we have learned to ask questions--what might we suggest? Faith? How? What are the current needs for compassion in Vietnam? Which shrines might we learn to love? What are our tolerances for pressure, confusion, new learnings, silence, new juxtapositions: the current state of pacifism and William Blake? Islam in Vietnam? 9/11 and Vietnam? What might be the most loving prayer or formulation we might craft? What about all the children? What sorts of moral development might we imagine? What about a literary review? Your dear language?

What if we could “throw the book” at you? How a passel of citations might present a cornucopia of hope. Five reads for five transformations. As we refer here, there, and everywhere, Joyce and silliness arrive. What a relief. One comprehensive bibliography offers both a promise and an exhaustion. They don't call it exhaustive for nothing. As if we could pretend to achieve a systematic review, closure. Thanksgiving is coming. Let us rejoice and be glad. Imagine a weariness that is sweet, a relief, a good sleep. How can we learn to know you and to love you without rancor? Please feed our appetite for con-jiviality. What sort of map might we want? What sorts of essays, books, works of art, parties, con-celebrations?

How might the serenity of the thirteenth century be an antidote for the twentieth? A refuge? As if we truly have “play-time” to consider the possibilities “at leisure.” While Rome still burns. We keep running away from your Cross. To what degree are we still at odds? Five masses, five sodalities of the Sacred Heart, three nuns, Archbishop Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, and martyrs and saints.

Let's imagine: five melodies for gongs---for our dear fellow-sufferers. Three gentle, slow, transcendent conversations. That we can still imagine sweetness, after such a long trauma. Maybe we can start learning how to stockpile joy. Imagine the internet-of-things encouraging pleasant phrasings. Design venues of forgiveness and co-grieving. Deal with questions such as: was it really all that bad? Now that we are ready for poems of experience, let's have Blake. Let's study Blake with you in mind. Imagining resolution in the form of one bright shining student of promise. Five Vietnamese novelists (Marguerite Duras, Viet Thanh Nguyen et al.).

The dream of the essay

Please help us integrate our thoughts into one coherent ball, that we can toss lightly and lovingly into the air, high into the air. Let our cohort crystallize into one tender gift for one future Vietnamese—one scholar, one rhapsodist, one humble planet-walker. Let one humble act of love cover that multitude of sins. Perhaps we need not chronicle every sin, every sorrow of Ho Chi Minh. Perhaps one song from the paddy fields will do. One lullaby.

Reflections on the Vietnam Era

Rob Whittemore

My father was a WW II veteran, starting as a trainer in mountain warfare with the 10th Mountain Division, then as a combat ranger for the Canadian-American First Special Service Force (described in German battlefield diaries as a “Devil’s Brigade”). Too soon thereafter, corralled once more by the Army Reserves, he responded as a captain and then major in South Korea.

His Bronze Star, earned across Italian hedgerows on the way to Rome (with Panzer tanks in pursuit), remained buried in his top dresser drawer. With such a legacy, all the way back to extended family ties to World War I, it might have been likely that I (and my younger brother) would follow suit. Yet our father rarely spoke of overseas battles; there were no expectations assigned or assumed.

To such an extent that when John F. Kennedy called for a Peace Corps in 1962, speaking (from the steps of the University of Minnesota) of a cold war world revitalized through the intentions of a new generation, I had an inkling that such opportunity would provide an honorable prospect.

Harvard, it seemed, had anticipated that there would be others also thinking that way. Education for Action, tucked away in the Radcliffe Quad, welcomed us with French and Wolof training for collaborative work in post-colonial Senegal, Spanish for those programmed for El Salvador, Botswana for others. A determined if naïve cohort of Harvard and Radcliffe peers banded together toward alternative service.

My Leverett House (F-25) roommates each had his own intentions: two in Air Force and Navy ROTC, financial need being no insignificant incentive; a seafaring third would soon enter the Coast Guard. Our ideals, so various, were bound within the institutional branding (and demands) of our time; our individual aspirations a factionalized profile of a generation that so many of us could not have yet fully understood.

Elizabeth (Radcliffe ’70; boldly taking a leave of absence from her senior year) and I entered the Peace Corps in the Casamance Region of Senegal, only two weeks after our marriage in Memorial Church. I worked as an agricultural engineer with a USAID upland crop and lowland rice project (“the Green Revolution” upon us); she invented a pregnancy and early infant education program as part of a rural dispensary staff. Nevertheless, my New York City draft board, on Morningside Heights, sent me my 1-A classification; delivered to our village post office with a date for duty already long past. Postage then was three to five weeks from the States to our rural location.

Our hay-roofed home (sun-baked red laterite brick construction, sheltered within a grove of five massive mango trees) was so near to what was then Portuguese Guinée, that we often retired at night, beneath our mosquito netting, to the sporadic strafing and explosions of Portugal’s last gasp at colonial control in West Africa. War seemed to be all around us, in spite of our aspirations.

My deferment held, aided by our in-country Peace Corps Director’s argument with Selective Service that well-meaning U.S. taxpayers had already invested enough in our service. After all, we’d been trained and then transported, or as the French would say, “parachuted,” into a rural outpost as lowly workers in the ranks of Senegal’s ministry of “Rural Animation.”

Our village, on first impression little more than an insignificant dot on our Michelin map of West Africa, rapidly became our social and occupational universe. Classificatory kin drew us into

Mandinka ways of speaking and knowing. I joined work parties as we poured tons of hand mixed cement for a diversionary dam soon channeling water through hand dug earthen canals, inundating leveled plots of upland rice paddies, and Elizabeth was embraced as a would-be midwife and infant health worker by her Wolof and Mandinka mentors. Together we witnessed Balanta and Manjako refugees fleeing a brutal liberation struggle, migrating across the border into the refuge of a community of displaced persons.

Such experience of bounty and inevitable blows has become a tragic commonplace in our contemporary world; looking back, those three nuanced years with the Mandinka, obliging us to fine-tune our skills and perceptions, have proved essential in helping us navigate the many choices facing us throughout our long life together.

Having petitioned to be formally classified as a Conscientious Objector to a war that, in a nuclear age, I could never again consider “just” or justified, I conferred with my father who wrote in support of my petition to my draft board, deploying the still keen eye of a combatant. In retrospect, he cringed at the fire power of his own military troops, raining death down upon German youth, themselves dug in atop a ridge, high above his Italian outpost as he and his platoon prepared their uphill assault. My USAID project supervisor, a “good old Texas cowboy” always donning a white cowboy hat, and an avid Nixon supporter to boot, also wrote in support, certain that my petition could never have expressed his own view. But he had come to realize, as he worked alongside me and my neighbors in the rice fields of the Casamance, that our efforts growing corn, and millet, and irrigated rice represented the kind of long-term investment that seemed transformative in comparison to his own past service fighting in the Pacific.

The longer I stayed the clearer it became that I needn’t have travelled to equatorial Africa, to a remote and distant dot on a map, in order to understand that living a life of service was going to be my future.

I have been an educator, first among pre-school four year olds, then in private liberal arts colleges and universities, and now in the state-run public university sector; I’ve been the founder and thirty-year director of a summer residency in writing and thinking for high school aged students, offering, in addition, writing workshop immersion for secondary and university colleagues both in the U.S. and abroad. Throughout all these years of teaching, I have found the lives of those enrolled in these various institutions confirm what social justice needs to be: a habit of mind that provides an aspirational thread inextricably tethered to real world practice.

I have been an anthropologist for decades, working with developmentally disabled adults in Los Angeles, crack house culture in Portland Oregon, and yes, with our Mandinka friends and family in West Africa. I feel like an ethnographer as I collaborate with a majority of first-generation college students, trying to help them understand the ways that culture helps and hinders them as they learn how to study and achieve their goals.

My rewards have never been financial, maybe because such measures of worth don’t inspire me, maybe because I’m not as valuable as my family thinks I am! I don’t know exactly why digging latrines and wells, building shelters, excavating irrigation canals, helping maintain a university-wide permaculture garden and trying to lure college students into writing a decent sentence fulfill me as much as they do. But they do fulfill me.

If John F. Kennedy's words called out to me in 1962, as they surely did, perhaps it was the Viet Nam War that made sure I listened to that call. For so many of us, the war asked us to choose: for or against? Willing to kill and perhaps die while fighting, or to live without ever taking such risks?

There was no right answer for me when facing these questions. The questions I was able to confront were less straightforward. Was I willing to offer my labor and good faith in service towards some goal and, if so, of what would such service consist? My answer was "yes" and so I have spent my lifetime fashioning and exploring what I meant by that "yes." That exploration started with Peace Corps.