

Journey Planet '76:

The American War in Vietnam

Hành Trình Hành Tinh '76:

Chiến Tranh Hoa Kỳ tại Việt Nam



Journey Planet 76 - November 2023

The American War in Vietnam

Editors

Allison Hartman Adams, James Bacon, Chris Garcia

Table of Contents

Pg. 3 - Editors' Note
Pg. 4 - The Jolly Green Jungle Introduction by Chris Garcia
Pg. 5 - Tales From the Jolly Green Jungle by Joe Haldeman
Pg. 11 - How Vietnam Touched My Life by Sara Felix
Pg. 12 - A Vietnam Imagined by Errick Nunnally
Pg. 13 - "The Smile of Victory": The Women of the American War in Vietnam by Allison Hartman Adams
Pg. 17 - The Horrors of War and Other Morbid Cliches by David Thayer
Pg. 19 - No Capacity for More by Brenda Noiseux
Pg. 20 - Snoopy: A Metaphor, Mascot, or Comfort Puppy by James Bacon
Pg. 25 - Apocalypse: The Eyes of Doom by Jim O'Brien
Pg. 27 - Truyện Tranh: Piracy, Crowdfunding, and the Growth of Vietnamese Comics by Allison Hartman Adams
Pg. 29 - Hunter S. Thompson: Too Much Tension and Too Little News, by James Bacon
Pg. 32 - Lê Minh Khuê's Postwar Fiction by Allison Hartman Adams
Pg. 34 - The Forever War and Coming Home by Chuck Serface
Pg. 36 - Little Saigon: How the Vietnam War transformed San Jose Cuisine by Chris Garcia
Pg. 38 - The Kubert Connection by James Bacon
Pg. 41 - To a Brighter Future by Brenda Noiseux
Pg. 42 - Star Wars: Is It an Allegory for the Vietnam War? by James Bacon
Pg. 46 - (Re)discovered loss by Brenda Noiseux
Pg. 47 - What the War Left Behind by David Ferguson
Pg. 49 - A Not So Private Little War: *Star Trek's* Muddled Vietnam War Protest Episode by Ryan Britt
Pg. 51 - I love the smell of burning flesh in the morning. It tastes like cooked breakfast: Teddy Bears' Picnic and Britain's Vietnam War by Jim O'Brien
Pg. 52 - It's Not a War Story: Filmmaking and rebirth in modern Vietnam by Allison Hartman Adams
Pg. 55 - Advertising for Vietnam by James Bacon
Pg. 57 - Martha Rosler - Bringing the War Home by Chris Garcia
Pg. 58 - The American War in Vietnam in Marvel Comics During the Vietnam War up to 1975 by James Bacon
Pg. 63 - Dương Thu Hương's *A Novel Without A Name* by Allison Hartman Adams
Pg. 65 - Box me up and ship me home: Tim O'Brien's Vietnam by Jim O'Brien
Pg. 67 - DC Comics and the American War in Vietnam by James Bacon
Pg. 74 - The Vietnam Veterans Memorial by Chris Garcia

Pg. 76 - Comics of the Vietnamese Diaspora by Allison Hartman Adams
Pg. 78 - Curse You Red Baron! by Dick Eney
Pg. 87 - Vietnam Comics Recommendations by James Bacon
Pg. 88 - Introduction to *Vietnam* by Julian Bond and T.G. Lewis by James Bacon
Pg. 89 - *Vietnam* by Julian Bond and T.G. Lewis (illustrator)
Pg. 94 - War Fiction, A True Story by David Thayer
Pg. 96 - Garth Ennis talks about Vietnam with James Bacon
Pg. 98 - Gordon, Haldeman, Band and the *Robot Jox* by Peppard Saltine
Pg. 100 - My Cousin Jimmy by Guy H. Lillian III
Pg. 101 - In the End by Allison Hartman Adams
Pg. 101 - A Brief Note from Chris
Pg. 102 - Editorial by James Bacon
Pg. 103 - JP 72: Operation Motorman Letters of Comment

Art Credits

COVER BY JOE HALDEMAN (originally appeared as an interior illustration in *ODD* #20)

Col Art - 24
James Bacon - 74, 75, 76
Keith Burns (<https://www.keithburns.co.uk/about>) - Back Cover (top)
Sara Felix (<https://www.sarafelix.com/wp/>) - Back Cover (bottom)
Arnie Fenner - 51
David Ferguson - 47, 48
Chris Garcia - 57,
Juan Gimenez - 25, 26
Joe Haldeman - Cover, 5, 6, 7
Võ Hùng Kiệt - 27
Joe Kubert - 38, 39, 40
TG Lewis - 89-93
Huy Oánh - 14
Guillermo Ortego (willortego.com) - 96
Nguyễn Thanh Phong and Khánh Dương - 28
Marcia Rosler - Pg. 57
Bill Rosler - 10
Charles Schultz - 21, 22
Rick Swan - 23
Neal Ulevich - 30

Editors' Note

"Writing about war...Those words do not simply mean a matter of literature, do they?...There is one's own flesh and blood. The living and the dead. There are one's memories, one's fellow fighters, one's comrades. There is one's personal life and the life of the nation." –Novelist Nguyễn Minh Châu

Writing about war shouldn't be easy. This issue of *JP* is no exception. *Journey Planet 76* "The American War in Vietnam" has taken a long time, and despite an approach dedicated to being right about what we wrote, it feels like there are no "rights" about Vietnam. So when you think we are wrong, we understand that.

We have tried to share reactions, memories, and interpretations of the War. Several contributors to this issue are fans of both recent and contemporary works that address the complexity of the War. Other contributors were actually in Vietnam and lend crucial insight into the realities of this oft-mythologized time in history. Many articles are about the interconnectivity between the War and the media we love. This is not meant to be a comprehensive chronicle.

Naming the issue was a challenge. James, an outsider heard Vietnamese refer to the war as *Chiến Tranh Hoa Kỳ tại Việt Nam*, or the American War in Vietnam. Since then, we learned much. The Vietnamese government calls it the Resistance War against America to Save the Nation, or *Kháng chiến chống Mỹ*. Some historians refer to it as the Second Indochina War or the Vietnam Conflict. Americans and many in the Vietnamese diaspora refer to it simply as the Vietnam War, *Chiến Tranh Việt Nam*.

Our editorial team settled on *Chiến Tranh Hoa Kỳ tại Việt Nam*, The American War in Vietnam.

Even the name of the fanzine carries with it an emotional weight invisible to us. Each of these terms challenges deeply-held beliefs and values. The content here relates to the influence (both good and bad) of the American presence in Vietnam during the conflict, as that was what we could have people speak to. For some Vietnamese, it was the 30-Years War. For some, the U.S. fought *with* South Vietnam against the Communists. For others, it is complex. Each per-

son's desire for a united country differs. We as lay persons, in an amateur way, try to be competent and professional, and share stories, articles, and history as best we can, in this, a fanzine. Jeepers. Over 2 million people died, so many innocents. We can't ever contend with that, comprehend it, explain it...

We are grateful to David and Diana Thayer for inspiration, Joe and Gay Haldeman for amazing content, Mrs. Eney for permission to use Richard Eney's writing, Garth Ennis, Keith Burns, Col Art, Sara Felix, Larry Hama, Aufa Richardson, Luca Vannini, Simon Adams, Guillermo Ortego, James O'Brien, Chuck Serface, David Ferguson, Senja Trinh, Eirene Tran Donohue, Ryan Britt, Phuc Tran, Brenda Noiseux, Errick Nunnally, John Vaughan, Mark Slater, Pat M. Yulo, Monkey, Erin Underwood, Micheal Walsh, Richard Lynch, Stuart Vandal, Rob Hansen, Will Howard, Iain Hine, David Hine, Rick Swan, James Mason, Kenneth Marsden, Peppard Saltine, and Craig Miller.

Errors. Mistakes. Anything wrong we accept as our own error, as our responsibility, James, Allison, and Chris, as editors. It's been a hard one, has taken many years, and we know it is not perfect. We hope it is good, good enough. Thank you for your understanding and patience.

As Nguyễn Minh Châu reminds us, writing about the War is not simply a matter of literature. These stories are "one's own flesh and blood...one's memories, one's fellow fighters, one's comrades...the life of the nation."

Always, we hope to hear from you. Send stories and thoughts to journeyplanet@gmail.com.

Introduction to the Jolly Green Jungle

by Chris Garcia

Joe Haldeman found himself drafted into Vietnam in 1967. He'd graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in astronomy, and like many graduates at the time, was immediately snatched up in the draft.

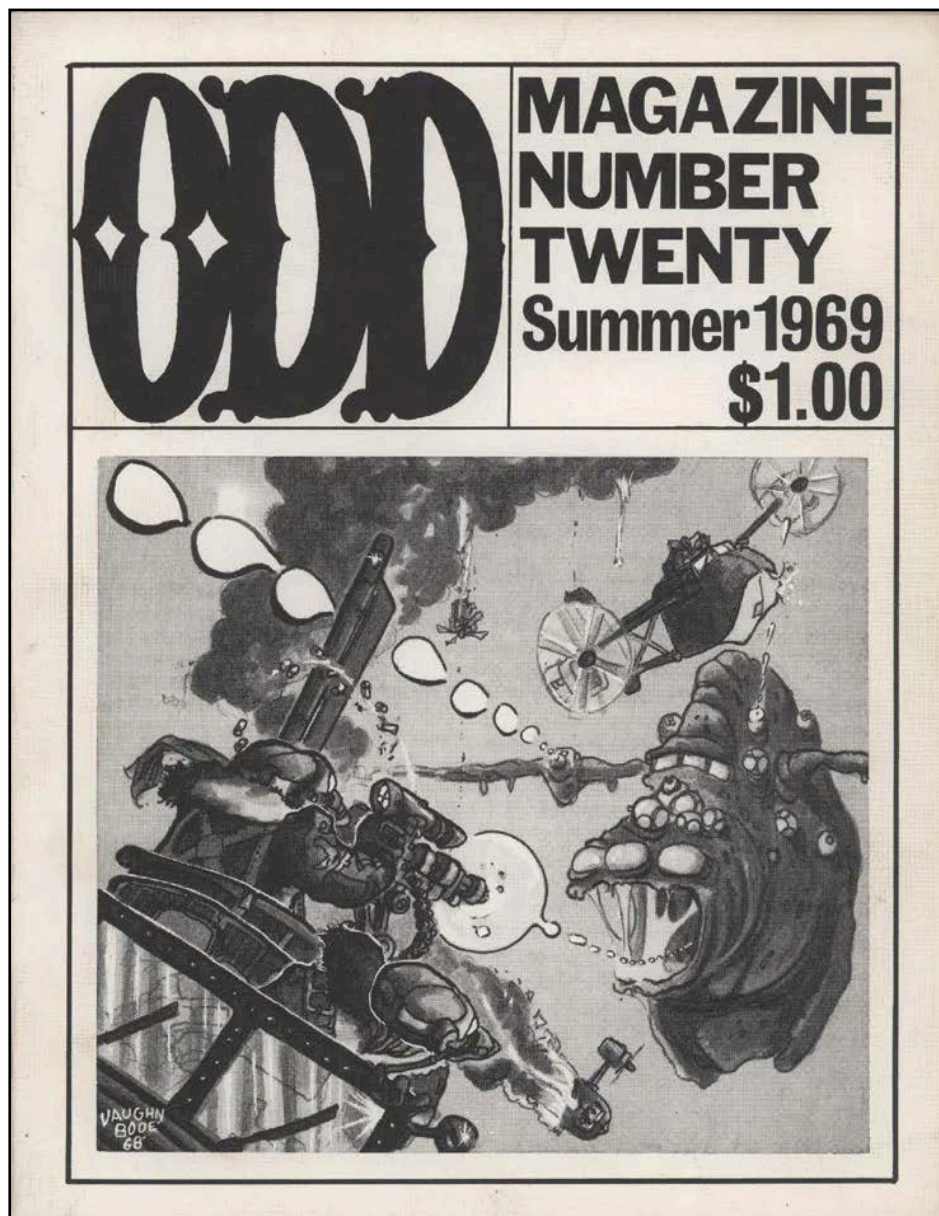
But he'd found fandom even prior to that.

Haldeman, and his brother Jay, had moved around as kids, but found fandom in the Washington D.C. area. Haldeman had written for zines prior to heading off to 'Nam, but it was the impressive material he published in Ray & Joyce Fisher's *ODD* that brought him attention as one of the best writers in fandom.

Haldeman wrote pieces titled "Tales from the Jolly Green Jungle" and "Notes from the Jolly Green Jungle." *ODD* was an incredible zine, and seen today serves as a document of a fascinating period in American history. It is steeped in counter-cultural imagery and fiery writing from the likes of Arnie Katz, Roger Zelazny, Ted White, Robert Bloch, Joyce Fisher (later Joyce Worley-Katz) and many more of the leading names in science fiction fandom. The art by the likes of Jack Gaughan, Jay Kinney, Don Simpson, and Kelly Freas anchors almost every page with graphics that speak of the time. The comics of Vaughn Bode, though, have turned several of these issues into absolute collector's items.

The Jolly Green Jungle pieces are a nuts-and-bolts piece of writing about what went on in Haldeman's day-to-day life in-country. You can see the sense of realism that would infuse his later works staring at you here, as well as his ability to leave you with a phrase that sings at the same time as stinging.

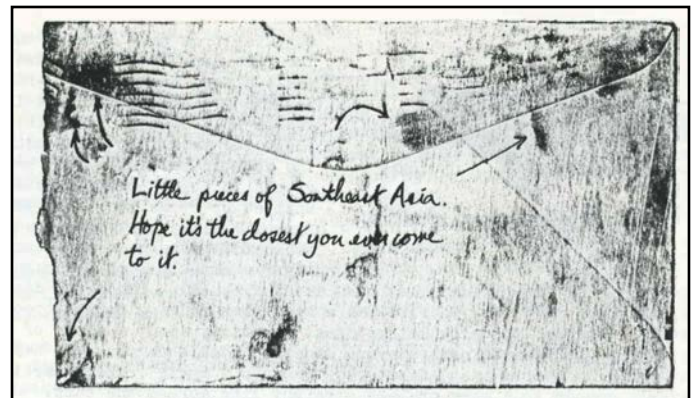
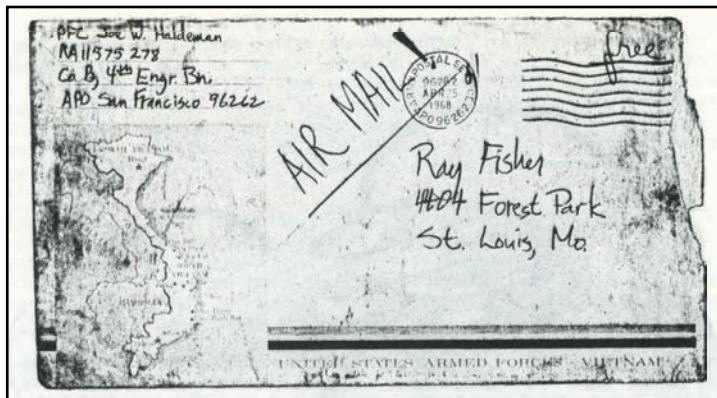
We are pleased to be able to present this remarkable piece of fan writing as it appeared originally in the pages of *ODD*. We'd like to thank Joe and Gay Haldeman for their permission to reprint it here for a new generation of fans to experience.



Tales from the Jolly Green Jungle

by Joe Haldeman

First appeared in *ODD* #19



March, 1968

Came to Viet Nam by way of Seattle and Tokyo. Slept from Tokyo almost to Cam Ranh Bay, my point of disembarkation, troubled by dreams of running down the landing ramp, M-16 in hand, bombs bursting, bullets flying...turns out the dreaming was fairly accurate, but about a week early—was in Pleiku when Cam Ranh airfield was attacked.

Woke up in the dark airplane about a half hour from Cam Ranh, looking out the port at a totally unfamiliar sky. To an astronomer, this is rather dislocating, like waking up in a strange bedroom, squared.

Was still trying to sort out my surroundings—found a Magellanic Cloud, Crux, and what I think was Alpha Centauri—when my night vision was destroyed by a bright flame. As cabin pressure was increasing, I assumed the flare was to guide the aircraft to the landing field. I assumed wrongly—the field was lit up like any stateside airport.

Cam Ranh used to be one of the safest places in Viet Nam—never been attacked. But that first night in Cam Ranh, I found out what the flare was for—the horizon from south to west glowed with napalm and tracer fire. Charlie was out there. And the flares made night into day for the door gunners of American 'Huey' helicopters.

After a couple of days at Cam Ranh, filling sandbags for bunkers, I was called out of a formation as one of the group scheduled for Pleiku. My comrades offered me condolences in the form of shrinking from me as if I were a leper. Not the most desirable of assignments.

Left Cam Ranh with a hundred or so others, stuffed into the cargo hold of a freight-carrying airplane (C-122 or something.) We were to report to the 4th AG Administration Battalion, outside of Pleiku. Driving through Pleiku on the way to 4th AG, noticed about a third of the buildings were in a poor state of repair—blasted to splinters, as a matter of fact. Found out Charlie owned more of the town three weeks ago—we bought it back for 48 Americans, and the incredible total of 3,000 North Vietnamese regulars. That same three weeks ago, Charlie attacked this base—Camp Enari—for the first time. He didn't succeed.

We received a pep-talk from the company commander—this is the safest place in the central highlands; Charlie better not try to attack again or we'll kick the shit out of him again; sleep well, my lovelies...

And our sleep was broken by the manic wail of a siren and we spent four hours trembling in a two-foot trench as Chinese rockets and mortars shook the ground and sent shrapnel skittering over our heads...

This is the safest place in the central highlands. And I'm headed out. Wish me luck.

April 1968

As a background, let me fill you in on the organizational structure of the war, the hierarchy of relative discomfort and danger.

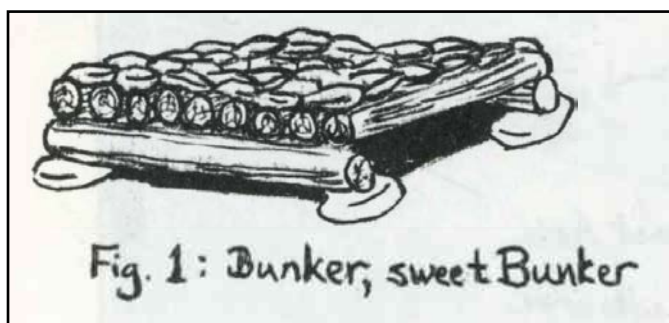
At the top are the huge bases, like Cam Ranh Bay and Saigon—oases of comfort and safety; three hot meals a day; big PX's; game rooms; WACs; usually near some large metropolitan area; seldom (until recently, never) attacked. Most GI's see these bases only when they come in-country, when they go on R & R, and when they check out to go "back to the world". Permanent duty at these stations is hard to come by, jobs going to people with seniority and people who extend their tour beyond twelve months.

Next down the list is the base camp; a large permanent post in a secure area. Base camp has a hospital, clubs for enlisted men, NCO's and officers, showers, hot meals, and lots of artillery banging out support for the surrounding areas. It serves as a supply depot and a place where soldiers can get a few days rest every couple of months. Base camps are attacked very infrequently, by mortars and rockets rather than ground troops. It would take thousands of troops for a successful ground attack, and the enemy doesn't try it. Because of the relative lack of danger, we rough-and-ready combat troops sneer at the 'base camp commandos', people on permanent duty there, and passionately wish we could trade places with them.

Next to the bottom of the list is the fire base. This is a kinda portable camp that rarely stays in one place more than a week or two. It exists mainly to provide artillery for the troops in the field, and to relay supplies from base camp to the field. The fire base usually has two hot meals a day, one meal of C-rations. Showers are improvised, but in the dry season it's next to impossible to keep clean for more than a few minutes—the area is bulldozed flat and so the ground is mostly dust, constantly whipped up by helicopters, trucks, and tanks. Still, most people would rather be in fire base than base camp—there's little enough work, discipline is very re-

laxed, attacks are infrequent. Since you don't stay in one place very long Charlie has a hard time massing enough troops for an attack. Most of the attacks are 'just' mortars, about a dozen of the enemy sitting a few hundred meters away, dropping shells on you. We had one such attack night before last (first time in over a month), when Charlie 'walked' seventy rounds in a more-or-less straight line across the camp. We moved the next day.

At the bottom of the heap, where I usually reside, is the field, or 'humping'. In the field, you hump (verb meaning to try and walk with an incredibly heavy pack on your back) for six or seven hours a day, and then stop and dig a bunker for the night. This means digging a waist deep hole the size of a large grave, hacking down a dozen or so 8-to-12 inch trees to put on top, and filling about fifty sandbags to put on top of the logs. This little mausoleum-in-the-rough gives you a position to fight from and protection from shrapnel. Figure 1 shows a typical bunker, rendered with a government-issue 19¢ ball-point pen (blue). Look at the dark blotch under the logs—this is the hole, and it's usually filled with ants, termites, spiders, centipedes—legitimate citizens of the rain forest. I guess you should sleep in it—the first round could hit anywhere—but nobody wants to put up with the arthropod tenants for the small margin of safety. We construct crude tents around the bunker, called 'hooches' and sleep in relative comfort.



My MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) is 'combat engineer', meaning infantryman with a pick and shovel. Of course, we consider ourselves to be an elite, head and shoulders above the grunts (or 'crunchies', ie, anyone not smart enough or quick enough or lucky enough to get out of the army's least popular MOS: bullet-stopper), but our day-to-day activities are just about identical. We wander through the jungle in three roughly parallel lines (engineers in the middle, surrounded by crunches, thank the great green Ghul!) Schizophrenically looking for Charlie and hoping he doesn't find us.

If we find Charlie, he'll usually fire a few shot and try to disappear into the brush (the brush is usually thick enough so you can disappear by taking a few steps in any direction.) We generally travel in company strength or greater (over a hundred men) and, logically enough, Charlie

doesn't want to stand and fight unless he is as strong or stronger.

Charlie, incidentally, is a generic term for the enemy. (After you've been in-country for a while, you can call him Chuck.) Here in the central highlands, he is usually a NVA (North Vietnamese regular) a crunchie just like me and thee. Occasionally we run into Viet Song, the popular forces (who seem to grow less popular as the war wears on.) Typically the Viet Song soldiers as a weekend and evening hobby; the NVA are glad to use him for dirty work and to harass us, but he's not a good soldier in the conventional sense. He's comparatively undisciplined and untrained, a poor marksman who would rather run than fight (wouldn't you?) —but he's an effective psychological and social weapon. For one thing, it doesn't help the GI's morale to know the guy taking in his laundry or gouging him for soft drinks might be back tonight with black pajamas and bullets. And the horror stories about hideously clever booby traps—rare in this area—make the jungle seem even more alien and malevolent.

Actually, the VC aren't quite the undisciplined rabble we often represent them as—they have a complex paramilitary infrastructure - squads, platoons, companies, battalions—but included in the classification 'VC' are people disillusioned enough with us to take an occasional pot-shot and free-lance hell-raisers just following their natural instincts.

There's a mythos but up around Charlie, half-truths and legitimate observations, figments of our guilty conscience and ego building exaggerations—we make the enemy into a superman: what great soldiers we must be to kill four or five of them for each man we lose! They say Charlie is all but unkillable ("head blown clean off and My God he kept coming..."); he cares nothing for his own life and laughs at pain because he is doped to the gills on pot and betel nut and mescaline; his weapons are better than ours and he never runs out of ammunition...

It goes on and on, a grain of truth in every tall tale, a little padding in what passes for the truth. What makes Charlie run? I have a pretty garbled picture of him myself. It's hard to reconcile the gentle, smiling Vietnamese I've met with the Superkiller image. But, but admitting that both can exist is foolish. It's not as if Charlie was made by mass production, every individual interchangeable with every other. Charlie can be the gentle Buddhist of the leering sadist. It's tempting and dangerous to try and pigeonhole these people because they present a more-or-less uniform face or mask to us behind barriers of language and culture. Racial typing might always be risky in a philosophical sense, but here you can get seriously killed by it.

It's Easter Sunday here at the fire base outside of Ban Me Thout. This morning I walked round trying to scrounge materials for a shower and ran across a group of people receiving Mass—twenty people on the side of a bulldozed hill, oblivious to the clamor of choppers and earth-movers and the big guns, a priest in fatigues droning familiar words at them. The ceremony was just ending; I was out of earshot, but it seems to me they close with a benediction like "Arise and go in peace and the peace of God go with you."

"Boom!" Remarks the howitzer.

Business as usual, here in the jolly green jungle.

PFC Joe W. Haldman

RA 1157278

Co. B, 4th Engr. Bn,

APO San Francisco 96262

Notes from the Jolly Green Jungle

by Joe Haldeman

First appeared in *ODD* #20

From April to June, we were dug in on the top of a big mud-ball we named Brillo Pad. A couple of thousand feet high, it gave us a beautiful view of the rolling Highlands between Kontus and Pleiku. Our job was just to sit there and deprive Charlie of that view. We built up a strong defensive position and waited for company.

After all the barbed wire and mines were set out, there wasn't much work for the engineers. I had several hours a day for writing and reading, and for weeks I built up a goodly-sized rough draft to send you.

Then ol' Chuck started to make his presence known. Not much at first; just a few mortar rounds (all of which missed) and some sporadic rifle fire. Then, one fine foggy midnight, it started to rain mortar shells. Most of the rounds went long or fell short, and there were no casualties from them. But, under cover of the mortar fire and fog, a suicide squad of NVA sappers (demolition men) slipped through the perimeter. This took some doing, as we were pretty well fortified: in total darkness, and without making a sound, they had to pick their way through a network of trip wires (connected to brilliant flares), snip a hole through six layers of barbed wire entanglements and disarm several anti-personnel mines. Once inside, they dropped "Satchel charges" of high explosives in several bunkers. They snuck back the way they came, without drawing a single shot.

Our people in the blown-up bunkers came out miraculously alive—a satchel charge has about a pound of high-explosive but no shrapnel—but the bunkers were collapsed and the perimeter had been breached. More work for the engineers.

We spent the next morning wrestling chain saws on the slippery, muddy hillside, trying to peel the jungle back far enough to extend the barbed-wire network out even further. Out platoon sergeant and officer-in-residence tried to convince the brass of the futility of the job—there's no sense in laying out an obstacle where it can't be observed and covered by fire—and of the occupational hazard in operating a chain saw without adequate footing. They probably had to agree as to the hazard, after a man slipped and his saw chewed halfway through his leg before stalling.

I wasn't there at the time, though; and that turned out to be about the luckiest happening in my generally well-starred career as a "combat-ready" troop.

A nearby hill, imaginatively named "Alamo", put out a call for engineers. Perhaps upset by Brillo Pad's experience, they decided that their hill also needed clearing. So, along with several others, I grabbed a chain saw and gas can, hopped on a chopper and flew over. It was supposed to be only a day's work, so I didn't take anything but helmet, weapon, cigarette and body armor (called a flak jacket; usually the mark of a "pussy", but some real hard-core troops were wearing them that day.) Left behind my shirt, which contained more of the things one needs to make life tolerable in the boonies—pipe and tobacco, watch, pen and stationery, camera, money and cards, multi-purpose highly expensive birthday present pocket knife from Hoffritz Cutlery...it was the last I ever saw of them.

Because Brillo Pad got hit, in a big way. We got word to dig in at Alamo, and not plan on coming back for a while.



We found an unoccupied bunker, had a little rural renewal program and settled down.

Brillio Pad had been softened by mortar fire before the first ground attack. The first mortar round struck in the middle of a bunch of engineers who were engaged in putting out (useless?) barbed wire. Killed my platoon sergeant (who had been in the field for five days) and wounded everyone else.

We on Alamo counted our blessings and girded for an attack that never came. We could see Brillo Pad getting hit almost every night but we only received fire twice in the month I was there. The only fatality was from a "friendly" artillery round, improperly placed right into a perimeter fox-hole. Helped our morale a lot.

We were clearing jungle with demolition and chain saws—some jobs you do with one, some with the other—had plenty of explosives, but our chain saws eventually gave out. I went back to Brillo Pad to get parts and replacements.

The destruction was appalling. Craters everywhere. Half the bunkers torn down to provide materials for the other half. As per instructions, I jumped off the helicopter at a dead run and scrambled over the hill to the engineer area in record time. I hadn't been in the bunker ten seconds when a recoilless-rifle (weapon similar to a bazooka) round zipped by and plowed into the side of the hill.

We were down from five bunkers to two. Found out my trip was wasted, as the engineers had received a 122mm. rocket round the night before, which had destroyed all the reserve chain saws. Got roundly cussed out by my superiors for having come over at all, ordered to get on the next chopper and not come back until the place cooled down.

My old bunker had taken a direct hit. My amenity-ridden shirt was gone, as were manuscripts, books, and supply of food. The remains of the bunker had been scavenged to reinforce the two that still stood. I left without any reluctance.

Back at Alamo, without any chain saws, we were relatively inactive for a couple of weeks. I wrote some more. Read everything on the hill. Just received a shipment of books from home, settled down to read, and, naturally, was called out on a mission.

One day, perhaps overnight, search-and-destroy hump. I put a six-pack of beer and two cans of food in my pack, no sleeping gear; slung a bandolier of ammo, demolition bag, and M-16 over various shoulders and set out.

We were gone over three weeks.

It was a relatively inactive hump, in terms of "action". We made contact with the enemy only once—on my birthday—and had one man killed and four wounded. Cheap at twice the price.

It was my 25th birthday, the round number giving rise to all sorts of philosophical thoughts, when we stopped for the night in the middle of a thickly wooded area. As we took positions to dig in, I remarked to my partner what a singularly fucked-up area it would be for fighting. Lots of places for Charlie to hide, no place to bring in helicopters for wounded.

I was fortunate enough to have this hypothesis verified, in short order. Took the axe and strolled out past the perimeter to chop some trees as overhead covers for our hasty bunker.

I took one swing at the first tree, and Charlie opened up. Flopped to the ground and started a frantic low-crawl to my pack, which unfortunately was in a direct line between me and where the AK's and M-16's were crackling and popping (the AK-47 makes a frightening crackle, each close-spaced percussion like the snap of a large stick breaking; the M-16 goes pop-pop-pop like an effeminate toy.) Just before I got to my pack, they started tossing grenades back and forth (a grenade goes CHONK! rustlerustle as the schrapnel meanders through the brush looking for someone to stop in.) I wasn't really that enthusiastic about getting back to my pack; the demo bag inside of it had 250 blasting caps, cuddled next to several pounds of high explosive—one bullet and there would be an explosion equivalent to several grenades.

Anyhow, I got to the pack and moved it to a safe place, behind a largish tree. Then crawled back to the rifle and helmet and tried to make myself one with the ground.

Shooting stopped after about five minutes, in a kind of impasse. They had dropped one man (killed or wounded, we didn't know) and were using him as bait; anyone who tried to approach the clearing to give him aid would have to walk through a solid wall of lead.

We brought artillery from Alamo in on their position (rather close—we had schrapnel singing over our heads and two people were wounded by it), and while Charlie was busy keeping his collective head down, two brave souls scrambled over and retrieved the man. He was dead, a bullet through his throat.

Nothing to be done for him, but we had four wounded who needed evacuation. A Medivac chopper couldn't drop its sling through the dense canopy overhead.

My partner, an artillery lieutenant, and I took the company's lone ax and a couple of machetes, and proceeded to manure a small piece of jungle. Charlie interrupted our work several times, but by nightfall we managed to clear a patch.

We brought in more artillery, to discourage Charlie from interfering with the evacuation, and then called the chopper. We popped serial flares to guide him to our little "drop zone"; as they bobbed down, dangling from little parachutes, they lit our area with a sinister, shifting, flickering greenish light. Just a warm-up for the kaleidoscopic lightshow to come, though. Nearing our area the helicopter switched on a brilliant laser beam of a searchlight. It danced and weaved, hovering twenty feet overhead, splashing a bright pool of white light all over our position. Gale force winds from the bird's propellers kicked up a cloud of dust, leaves and sticks that swam around in the searchlight beam. The throbbing roar of the engine fighting gravity drowned out all else.

One by one, the wounded were strapped into stretchers and reeled up to the hovering helicopter. This tense operation took about five minutes—I was sure that any second Charlie would open up and down would come chopper and wounded and all over flaming gasoline and burning bodies and then a human wave of yellow peril taking no prisoners in the least fastidious way imaginable...

But the chopper rose and thumbed away, all in one piece. There was a minute of unnatural silence before the first volley from Alamo came in with a baleful whistle and a ragged series of ear-splitting explosions. This continues all night only occasionally stopping to let air strikes come in. Six of us spent the night "sleeping" in a grave-sized hole. Get your eye out of my elbow, Jack!

By sunup we had stopped receiving fire, so we evacuated the new wounded and one body, broke camp and moved out. We found two dead Charlies and several blood trails, which we had left alone.

For a couple of weeks, we clambered all over the most ungodly territory—a combination of jungle and mountain; no level ground, forest broken only by an occasional mini-savahhan of elephant grass. Many of us contracted acute gastroenteritis, from drinking unpurified water (which, we agreed, was better than no water whatsoever.) This disease is also known as Uncle Ho's Revenge, and other obscenities.

Replacements were finally flown out to my partner and me. We were easily persuaded to give up our search for action and high adventure, and took the next shipped back to Brillo Pad (which had finally cooled off.)

The next day, we moved off Brillo (the unit were associated with—Ist Battalion, 12th Infantry—is "air-mobile"; when things quiet down, they don't give you a chance to get bored.) We eventually wound up at a place called Plea Djaran ("dj" as in Russian "zh").

The place was a real picnic. Doing a hitch as a "re-supply man", I divided my time between fire base and the base camp at Pleiku, both relatively comfortable areas.

Again, I had a pretty lengthy manuscript built up. Then, nature intervened, in the form of a drenching monsoon.

Maser woodsman that I am, I pitched my hooch in a dry stream bed. Woke up one night in several inches of swiftly running cold water. The next morning I found my gear in a deep mud puddle some ten feet downstream; manuscript was still wrapped in a plastic bag, but the bag was full of water. Paper had reverted to the original pulp.

After several weeks of inactivity at Plei Djaran, we hopped up to a place near Duc Co, half a kilometer; we were told, from the Cambodian border (they didn't say which side.) Things were tense, but, again, nothing happened. My resupply activities degenerated into an unabashed beer run.

Nobody else at the fire base could get any of the “precious bodily fluid”, but we didn’t make anybody pay mover \$10 a case (we’re all heart.)

They pulled us out of Duc Co and brought the whole battalion into base camp for a “stand-down”. I suppose this is meant to be for refitting and a bit of rest for the troops—turned out to be a three-day drunken brawl. They didn’t seem sorry to see us go.

Spent the next couple of weeks on a hill in “VC Valley”—rather inaptly named, it turned out; as we only ran into a small handful of enemy, NVA at that. One of them, a doctor, was carrying several kilos of opium, for what evil purpose it wasn’t clear. Probably just a substitute for morphia.

Next stop was a return to Ban Me Thuot. We carved out a fire base at a grenade’s throw from where I sat, writing that last installment. Most were glad to get back to BMT; the last time we stayed several months with only one major contact. But things had changed.

We were acting as a “blocking force” against two enemy regiments, who were moving into the town of Ban Me Thuot, to liberate it. Sporadic contacts escalated into almost daily firefights. I was ever so glad to be a fire base commando—Charlie was moving in small groups, as a rule, and only rarely blundered into a fire base, to face lots of nice barbed wire and, sometimes, nice big tanks.

As our fourth fire base in Ban Me Thuot (we jumped around a bit), I met my little Waterloo, and got my ticket for four months’ tour of the medical facilities in American Indochina.

Engineers are all demolition men, in fact if not in title. “Combat Demolition Specialists”, so called, rate an extra \$55 a month, for hazardous duty (in my outfit, we take turns getting the demo pay, as only three or four slots are available each month.) But routine demolition work isn’t terribly dangerous. Of course, it pays to be careful—and watch out for jobs that aren’t “routine”.

We had this pile of enemy explosives. Charlie had beaten a hasty retreat from a patrol base, and left a bunch of satchel charges, grenades, and .51 calibre ammunition behind. (Clever little Charlie uses .51 calibre ammunition because we use .50 calibre. The “silly millimeter”—actually about 1/4mm—wider ammunition won’t work in our weapons, but Charlie can use ours without any trouble.) The people who found it loaded it on an APC (armored personnel carrier) and hauled it back to the fire base.

We berated them wildly for bringing it inside the perimeter, and asked for another APC to come and take it back outside, where we could use it to make a big hole. While we were waiting, we inspected the pile.

On top of the heap was an item shaped kind of like a primitive icon. It had a metal ellipsoid (prolate) for a head, a cylindrical wooden shaft for a torso, and legs of flimsy sheet-metal fins. It was covered with carefully inked mandarin characters (no doubt meaning OBSCENITY LYNDON JOHNSON.)

Not knowing what it was, I picked it up (brilliant, brilliant) and handed it to Farmer, our senior demo man, for identification. He taught it looked like a Chinese rifle grenade (it was.)

Not sure what happened next—luckily, I was facing half-away, I understand that Farmer dropped the piece.

If you feel inclined, you could drop a thousand regulation grenades to the ground, and none of them—well, hardly any (hazards of mass production)—would go off. But this was either defective or boobytrapped. It was “Armed”.

There was an incredibly loud noise and something big and invisible kicked me - hard - in the groin. I went down in a heap and yelled for a medic. Felt pains like big bee stings up and down my left side.

My malady was eventually diagnosed as “multiple fragment wounds”; mostly shrapnel from the rifle grenade. Some of the .51 calibre machine gun bullets were set off by the explosion, and one of them may have caused the biggest wound, an exit wound in my thigh nearly three inches wide.

All through basic training, they drum into you the four basic life-saving Principles:

1. STOP THE BLEEDING
2. CLEAR THE AIRWAYS
3. PROTECT THE WOUND
4. TREAT FOR SHOCK

There’s a fifth Principle that they don’t tell you, but ‘most everybody figures it out for himself—

5. KEEP HOLLERING FOR A MEDIC UNTIL ONE SHOWS UP.

The engineer medic as lying a few feet away, with fragment wounds even more multiple than mine. But other medics, from the artillery and infantry units, got to us as quickly as they could.

Refused morphine out of pharmaceutical xenophobia (maybe that was a Good Thing; I learned later that both parents are allergic to it,) but got other first aids: medic cut away the blood-soaked pants and boot, dressed the wounds and gave treatment for shock. Some good Samaritan held up blankets to shade us from the noontime tropical sun. Someone called for a Medivac helicopter, and it eventually showed up.

There was a rather long ride into Ben Me Thuot, where we were deposited at a field aid station to get “second aid”, or whatever. I got oral pain-killers and a typhoid shot. Dressings changed. Lots of reassurances. While a man on the floor screamed his life out.

Farmer and Doc were airlifted immediately to Nha Trang, as they needed immediate extensive surgery (such as amputation.) Evacuated from Nha Trang to Japan.

Sgt. Crowder, the other less serious casualty, and I waited in the aid station for a ride to 91st Evacuation Hospital, at Tuy-Hoa-by-the-sea. Eventually, the plane was ready; they stretched us to an ambulance for a short, fast, bumpy ride to the airstrip (the trip was punctuated by a slight pause—the ever-ready emergency vehicle ran out of gasoline.) At the airstrip, a “flying boxcar” was already straining at the leash, and departed as soon as our stretchers were secured.

It was an hour’s flight, and not terribly pleasant. The plane landed and we were loaded onto another ambulance for another bumpy ride. At the hospital, Vietnamese coolies took our stretchers and hauled us rather roughly into a large, well-lit room with air conditioning and a clean hospital smell. There were other people waiting on benches along the walls; I could feel their mingled fear and revulsion at our wounds—and maybe a little annoyance, that they’d have to wait that much longer before the doctor peered down their throat or whatever.

A real live female cut away my dressings and applied new ones; orderly started to give me a and put it away when I told him I’d just had one for tetanus. I got temperatured and blood-pressured, named and serial numbered; they hooked a bottle to my arm and I found out the table had wheels.

Discovered that being rolled is much more comfortable than being jogged. Felt vaguely guilty being pushed through a door that said NO ADMITTANCE; wound up under a huge, prehistoric-looking X-ray machine and traded eighth-baked jocularities with the attendant as high-energy radiation tore painlessly through my gonads in two orthogonal exposures.

Then I was wheeled into a surgical waiting room and watched Ritter’s Solution drip into my arm while I was

being shaved and cleaned and readied for the blade. A Vietnamese soldier, friendly or maybe otherwise, was getting the same treatment on the bed next to mine, with the difference that he was strapped down and was babbling and screaming and carrying on in a frightful manner—maybe he was having visions of truth serum and a slow painful death on the operating table.

Ritter's made me drowsy but I remember being pushed into the operating room and the kindly old anesthesiologist who put the needle into the tube that went into. My arm and waited hours and hours until the surgeon showed up then told me "Here we go", and the world got smaller and squeezed to a pinpoint and there we went indeed.

Don't remember any great anxiety prior to surgery—maybe I'm kidding myself—but woke up hysterical, with a nurse holding my hand and dabbing at my tears and, I hope, ignoring my colorful language. Snapped out of it in a hurry, probably with the help of a shot; unstrapped myself, saw a NO SMOKING sign and asked for a cigarette.

F. Nightingale came up with a stale pack of Kents and I chainsmoked hungrily, reluctantly sharing my bounty with the Vietnamese who was again in bed to my right. Got a triple Darvon (the army's super-aspirin) and then the nurse gave me an injection of pain-killers. All this psychedelic soup hit my brain at once—you could probably duplicate the feeling by drowning in a vat of Gallo Port. In this state of contracted conscienceless I fell asleep in about three nanoseconds.

Woke up for breakfast. Now, powered eggs could make a perfectly well person throw up, but I locked my jaw, scraped them to one side, and managed to consume some bacon and toast.

About an hour and then wheeled me out of the recovery room; out of the air-conditioning into a ward of disgustingly well people and flies and "cooling tropical breezes" (ambient temperature about 95 F.)

I was uncomfortable lying there, not so much from pain (still juiced to the gills) as from thirst unquenchable and nicotine starvation. A goodly soul gave me three Marlboros; I smoked two in rapid succession and saved the last against Armageddon.

There was a minor miracle in the form of a Puerto Rican who came through the ward with a box of cigarettes, asking if there were anyone there from First Cav—I wasn't, but I said "A-a-ack" or something, and he gave me a pack of Pall Malls. First non-filter cigarette in ages.

Cigarette problem finally solved by a friendly patient who got me a carton from the PX—and then was transferred before I could get my wallet back to reimburse him. Then I got off surgical status, moved to another ward and bid a fond farewell to bedpan and sponge bath.

The Red Cross has just gotten a shipment of 2000 books; they were swamped with work. Having worked in a library "back in the world", and being an incurable bibliophile, I eagerly wheeled myself down there every day and helped them Dewey-Decimate. First enjoyable job I've had since being drafted.

PLEES STOP ME BEFORE
I DO IT AGAIN

Went happily from wheelchair to crutches. Every night, hopped to the EM/NCO club for gin & tonic and reading. Lots of books, since I had first crack at the Red Cross library. Especially remember the Guinness Book of Records, a biography of Einstein, Soldier, Ask Not, and an infuriating book called Science As a Sacred Cow; the author way, I hope, a better science teacher that he was a scientist—I was in emotional agreement with him from the beginning and got unsympathetic and madder and madder at his pomposity, until, at the end, I was scribbling voluminous criticisms all over the margins and chapter end papers. I know that writing in library books is a crime even more serious than moperly or statutory incest—but I couldn't help it!

Went from two crutches to one and got a ticket to the 6th Convalescent Center Cam Rant Bay, for rest and physical therapy, but little enough rest. It was stateside army all over again: formations, details...then the Red Cross found that I could type and letter, and I wound up on "permanent detail" there.

A that's where I am now. Work (if you can call it work) from 8:00 to 5:00—half the time I just read, draw, or practice guitar. Otherwise I type stencils and letters (good practice for re-entry into fandom), make posters or sit in the game room and issue fun an' games to patients in search of diversion...

"What did you do in the war, Daddy?"

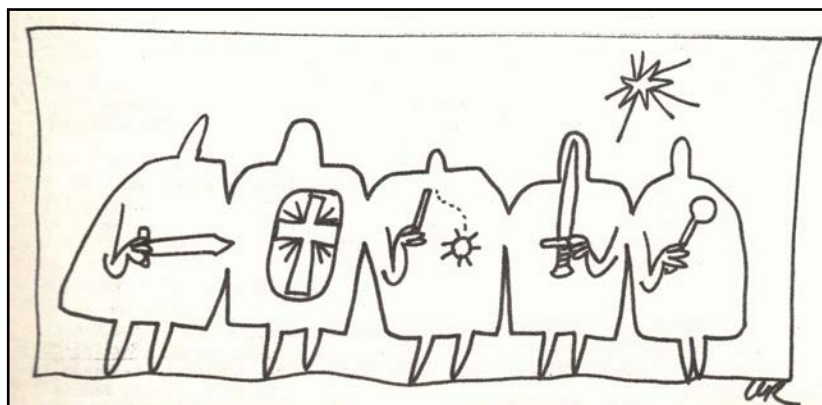
December 7, 1968

PFC Joe W. Haldeman

RA 11575278

6th Convalescent Center (patient)

APO San Francisco 96377



How Vietnam Touched My Life

by Sara Felix

My dad was a hard man to live with growing up. First generation Mexican American, his parents were migrant farmworkers from Mexico who settled in Northern California. They didn't have much; the family worked hard to create a life better from what they came from.

Between my parents, he was the stable influence in my life growing up. He was strict and demanding with school and athletics. He instilled a strong work ethic in me from a young age, and one of the ways he showed he loved me was by attending all my activities... and there were a lot. Tennis, Basketball, Track, Band, award ceremonies - he was at them all. He wasn't very affectionate but he wanted to see me succeed at whatever I did. That meant a lot to me and still does.

He was drafted into the Army for Vietnam later into the war. After he got back he took advantage of the GI Bill and went to college. He enjoyed painting and so he took art classes for the majority of his time there which probably helped a bit to deal with what he saw during the war, although he never stated that to me. He jokingly said it was a waste because he didn't get a real degree, but he was the first to finish any degree that I know of in the family. His interest in art definitely carried on to me and I was always fascinated by the art supplies around the house. He mainly worked in colored pencils, india ink and watercolors.

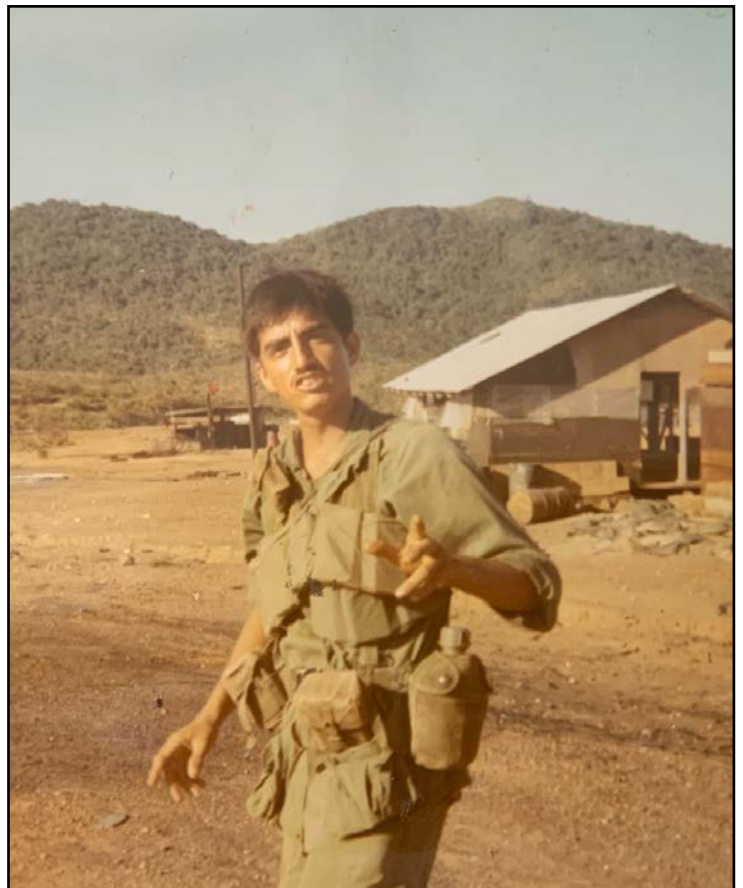
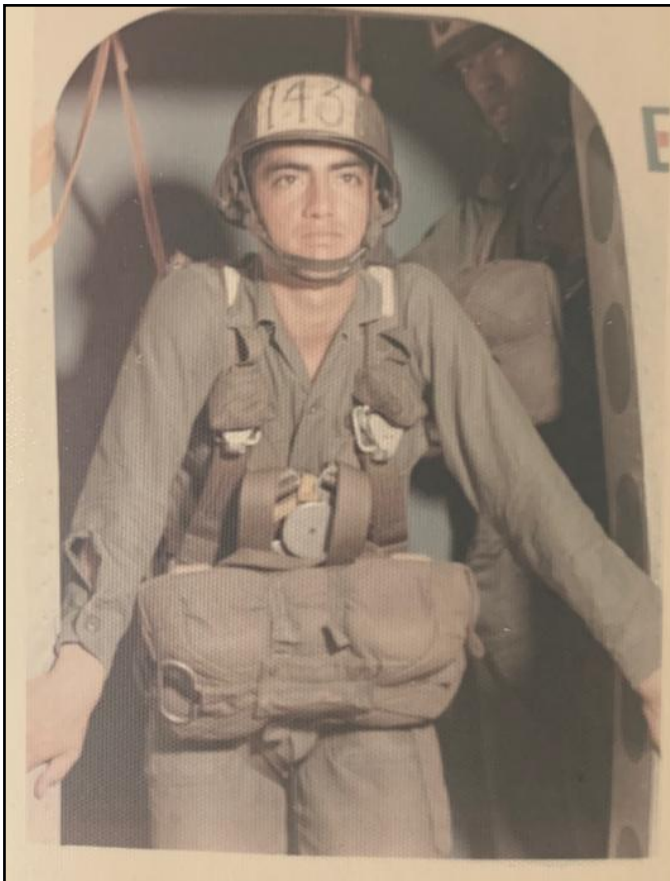
Vietnam was only ever brought up when he was drinking, so a lot of the memories of him talking about the war weren't good. They were hard to listen to and harder for him to share, so I never asked many questions. Stories about war. Seeing people get shot during battle and at camp cleaning their guns. His experiences with getting injured and spending a year in and out of VA hospitals. These were things

that obviously stayed with him that he didn't want to talk about in too much detail. I don't have a first person account of the war but have realized that it has shaped my father into the person he is today, and by doing so has played a big role in shaping me as well.

The most prominent memory of Vietnam for me was that every time I walked into my grandparents house, my dad's Army picture was on the piano next to the TV. I don't know what my grandmother thought, if she was proud of her son or not, but that was the one picture I remembered always being there. I can still see it when I close my eyes.

As hard as the memories are, I was taken by surprise when a few years ago I got a package full of memories from my dad. I have somehow become the family historian with very little context of the images and letters that have been sent to me. In the package from him were the letters he sent to my mother when he left for war. Some of them were from when he was at training, some from when he was in Vietnam itself.

Love letters. Letters from the artist that I got glimpses of as I grew up. Poems, doodles, heartache and love are in those letters. It is a different side of my dad that I rarely saw growing up. He doesn't write many details in the letters, as I am sure they were more of an escape from the reality, which can be seen in how many times he asks for my mom to write to him. But they give me insight to the teenager he once was and the relationship my parents once shared.



A Vietnam Imagined

by Errick Nunnally

The war America unofficially waged against Vietnam from the 1950s into the 1970s eroded American society's trust in its government. When the Pentagon Papers were published by *The New York Times*, it was revealed that the Johnson administration lied to the public and Congress—though that particular political body remained complicit in other ways. The Gulf of Tonkin incident stands as the precipitating lie that set a cascade of prevarications falling for nearly two decades. Not long after the war officially ended, Hollywood took up the cause of depicting the events in Vietnam and setting in cement a number of enduring stereotypes and tropes that have significantly altered the American consciousness—yet again—of its own past. History that should never be repeated must not be forgotten. Yet, forget we have. Hundreds of movies riffing off the conflict itself, rather than the apparently less entertaining political aspects, have dulled American society's ability to avoid historical repetition. It's like a recursive Mandela Effect between filmmakers and their broader audience.

While I served in the Marine Corps during the late 80s, movies about Vietnam were shown on a nearly constant rotation. Not by the Marine Corps, mind you, just other Marines putting on war movies to watch. At the time, the Vietnam War was the last, highly-publicized conflict in the public zeitgeist, and, in fact, the USMC was still using equipment and tactics from that era. What I noticed, generally speaking, is how stressful and gory these movies were. Often they were a radically oblique critique of the war by way of showing how brutal it could be. Films like *Hamburger Hill*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Platoon* were very popular and well made. But it was purely entertaining, emotional thrills, focusing on the violence and its immediate effects. This approach alone has left a strange hole in the public's understanding of war, its fallout, and the ongoing human costs of such things. Despite the existence and celebration of films that take a more realistic look at veterans and the circumstances that brought them to war, the most popular, by far, are films that wade in violence.

Several of my relatives—including my father and father-in-law—served in Vietnam. None of them resemble one of the most troublesome and problematic tropes created to serve movie narratives: the bloodthirsty, hair-trigger veteran who came back from 'Nam with an unquenchable taste for blood. The trope has horribly overshadowed the very real problems that veterans of all conflicts face upon returning home. It's easier to think of combat vets as stricken with warrior-lust rather than provide medical support for mental and physical trauma that causes them to withdraw from family, friends, and society. It's probably *Apocalypse Now* that set Hollywood on this path. Until that film, war movies were either propaganda hyping up American "warriors" (*The Green Berets*, *Missing In Action*, *The Losers*) or sincere efforts of artful critique (*The Boys In Company C*, *The Visitors*).

The stereotype of PTSD killers lasted well into the 1980s and 90s as the hair-trigger, mass-murdering "psycho Vietnam vet" and eventually became the punchline to count-

less, tasteless jokes. Movies like *First Blood*, *The Deer Hunter*, and *Taxi Driver* proved successful in exploring the violent veteran character. They feature withdrawn men who don't have many issues against killing or engaging in self destruction to solve problems real and imaginary. Much like the general public's flawed understanding of drug addiction, thanks in large part to fictionalized narratives, Vietnam vets suffered the same fate. And the cliché lives on deep into the future in sci-fi films like *Avatar* and *Aliens*. Maybe James Cameron should stop carrying water for this trope?

There seem to be few films that deal directly with what politicians and their appointees did leading up to, during, and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War that aren't highly fictionalized or peripheral. American society recoiled at the publication of the Pentagon Papers—definitive proof of the government's malfeasance. The publication of further evidence, such as the Counterintelligence Program papers detailing the FBI's dirty tricks, cemented the broad idea that the government can't be trusted and works against us. Once again, the aspects of this history that proved most entertaining for filmmakers were not the individuals responsible, but the conflict and fallout from the event involving characters who are victims or saviors, but rarely the villains responsible for starting, extending, and expanding the war. I haven't seen every film about the Vietnam War, but the only ones that come to my mind of the type that explore the architects are documentaries *The Fog of War* and *The Trials of Henry Kissinger* and, well, that's it. There are a few fictionalized films such as *Kissinger* and *Nixon* but they don't perform well with broader audiences. Or they don't focus on the folly that led to the war, choosing instead to explore these men's careers and lives.

The onslaught of films about the horrors of the war in Vietnam seems to have convinced the public that "The Government"—a vague, shadowy, barely legitimate organization—works tirelessly to maintain conspiratorial mass illusions while also being bumbling and ineffective. The fact of the matter is that the United States government is composed of us, its citizens, and were there the will to make a collective difference, the situation over the last several decades might have improved. A generally flawed understanding of history—bolstered by the film industry—keeps the republic at loggerheads with itself.

The tidal wave of Vietnam War films has, in my honest opinion, contributed mightily to American misunderstanding and mistrust of foreign aid and various methods of intervention. Certainly, had the war in Vietnam been avoided, we might be in a very different place today. The word *might* is doing quite a heavy lift here because of all the other unnecessary conflicts, underhanded tactics, and racism that defined American history over the two-hundred years prior. I think rather than believing a time machine and massive revision would resolve anything, simply an honest understanding of the scale of history, its ongoing effects, and the people who drove those events would go a much longer way to correcting our current course.

“The Smile of Victory”: The Women of the American War in Vietnam

by Allison Hartman Adams

Note on terminology: Not all women in Vietnam agreed with the political ideology prevalent in their provinces. Many South Vietnam women fought for the Việt Cộng, and many North Vietnam women fought against the Communists. The nuance of political affiliation in this War is vastly complex and deserves more exploration than is possible here. For the purposes of this essay, when “North” or “South” is used, it is in reference to political or ideological allegiance as well as geographical location.

In 1968, National Liberation Front fighter Võ Thị Thắng was sentenced to 20 years of hard labor for the attempted assassination of an alleged spy in Saigon. Upon hearing her sentence read aloud, Võ Thị Thắng smiled at the South Vietnamese jury and said, “Will your government last 20 years to imprison me?”

The North Vietnamese Army marched into Saigon seven years later.



That smile, captured by a Japanese reporter at her sentencing, became the national symbol for women resisting colonialism and occupation. One imagines that Võ Thị Thắng smiled when released just six years later under the Paris Peace Accords, and again as the South Vietnamese government fell in 1975.

Today, women’s role in the War is celebrated in Vietnam, but largely underrepresented in the U.S. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 11,000 American women served in Vietnam, 90% of them as nurses. Women worked as journalists, medics, and humanitarians. We in the U.S. are beginning to tell these stories, slowly, politely, as if worried we might make too much noise, but they are few in comparison to the sea of male-dominated narratives. Is it that these women’s heroism and sacrifice aren’t glamorous enough for Hollywood? Or is it that the culture of the time reinforced a restrictive and familiar message: you are nurse, sister, mother. You are support staff. Stay in your lane. In ongoing U.S. public cultural discussions (research, documentaries, movies, etc.) American and Vietnamese women’s war efforts receive only a fraction of air time. From an American perspective, it’s no wonder. Vietnamese women were crucial to America and South Vietnam’s defeat, a fact that violates the mythologized perception of the War as a macho, male-dominated affair. It’s bad enough that John Rambo came home traumatized and disenchanted. To think that this is in part due to a bunch of girls toting Soviet and Chinese weapons might have been too hard to swallow¹.

In Vietnam, women’s contribution to war and revolution has long been lauded and used as inspiration for future war efforts. The country boasts two museums dedicated solely to Vietnamese women’s contribution to society, and the survivors of the War are celebrated and remembered as modern-day embodiments of the Trưng Sisters’ heroism, who, nearly 2000 years ago, defended their nation against Chinese rule and secured their place in the imagination of generations to come. This is not to say, however, that women did not face extreme prejudice and violence during and after the War. Traditional Vietnamese gender and family roles are structured around Confucian teachings. Father ruled son, husband ruled wife, the older brother ruled the younger. Adherence to this structure was paramount, and Vietnamese women were held up as examples of modesty, subservience, practicality, and resilience. Those values served them well in the war effort, and they fought valiantly alongside the men. But, much like Rosie the Riveter’s generation, when the fighting was over, they were expected to go back home and resume their positions as mothers and wives.

What is notable, however, is that North Vietnamese women enjoyed much broader liberties during wartime than Southerners, both in terms of social mores and the extent to which they were allowed to serve their country in combat.

Women in the South

Vietnamese women who served the Republic of Vietnam appeared to take their cues from their American friends. Most worked as secretaries or nurses, and the Women’s Armed Forces Corps (part of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, created 1968) never saw combat. Propaganda efforts on the part of ARVN also mirrored American tactics, encouraging women to become USO-style entertainers as a means of enticing men into enlisting. In his paper, “When Heroism is Not Enough,” Marc Jason Gilbert contrasts this approach with that of the Northern armies, observing that “armed veteran female Việt Cộng excelled in recruitment, in part by shaming men into joining a fight in which women were already engaged.”

It is crucial to remember, however, that the victors control the message. Given the outcome of the War, it is likely that stories of South Vietnamese women’s heroism do not get the attention afforded to those who fought for the Communist Party, and in fact, may even be downplayed or ignored altogether.

Still, South Vietnamese women did get the chance to serve more actively. After the shock of the Tet Offensive, the People’s Self-Defence Force was created to protect homes and villages from the Việt Cộng, and around 100,000 women fought with their families and ancestral lands at their backs. One of the most famous female combatants of the South is Ho Thi Que, who served with the Vietnamese Rangers. She was known as the “Tiger Lady of the Mekong Delta” to Southern forces. The Việt Cộng called her “Madame Death.”

However, opportunities to show the lengths that these women would go to protect their ideals were few. Instead, opportunities for survival often fell under another unfortunate category, one quietly sanctioned by the South Vietnamese government and the U.S. military.



Scholarship on forced prostitution during the Vietnam War is young, and certainly more research is needed. However, wartime sexual violence is as old as war itself, and the American War in Vietnam was no exception. The disruption of conflict had a disproportionate effect on Vietnamese families. In an attempt to combat the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and U.S. forces relocated villagers to “strategic hamlets,” after which their homes, where many families had lived for generations, were leveled and made into “free-fire zones.” Any person who moved about in these zones was assumed to be an enemy combatant and indiscriminately gunned down by U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) and ARVN soldiers. Concurrently, American helicopters sprayed Agent Orange across wide swaths of Vietnam. This toxic defoliant does not distinguish between jungle cover and farmland. This was by design, with the intention of starving the enemy. Of course, it was the people who suffered, and these military efforts triggered a massive migration to urban areas.

Women who came to the cities were often running from violence, landless and jobless, abandoned or widowed. Some found sustainable work as maids and cooks, but a large portion worked as bar girls and prostitutes. Sources estimate that at least 500,000 Vietnamese women were forced into prostitution during the War. Initially, the U.S. military cautioned soldiers against frequenting brothels by circulating rumors that the sex workers were possibly enemy spies, were carrying incurable diseases, or worse. The bizarre and hateful “vagina dentata” myth sprung out of these cautionary tales. However, according to Madi Gikes, writing for *Trouble & Strife*, in which she interviews several Vietnamese women who experienced sexual violence during the War, “making women’s bodies available keeps soldiers happy.” In order to avoid entanglements that could not be controlled, regulated, or supervised, the U.S. military established sanctioned brothels within the borders of their bases.

Sexual violence was commonplace during the war. Only a handful of incidents have gained international attention, and fewer still have brought consequences for the perpetrators. During the Mỹ Lai massacre (1968), U.S. soldiers in Company C murdered between 347 and 504 Vietnamese civilians. The number of women U.S. soldiers raped is hard to determine, but the Peers Commission Investigation estimated at least 20, ranging in age from 10 years old to 45. In the vaguely-named Incident on Hill 192 (1966), an American

squad kidnapped, raped, and murdered Phan Thi Mao, a young Vietnamese woman². This was done, according to David Lang of *The New Yorker* who reported the story, “for the morale of the squad.” These are the occasions where international outcry forced some repercussions, but the vast majority of sexual violence was unreported or ignored.

This silent avoidance is systemic. In addition to being sidelined and downplayed by those in power (on both sides), these “incidents” do not always appear in popular culture. We are not given the opportunity to feel uncomfortable and examine these embedded complexities that reflect difficult truths about ourselves. Comic books often attempt oblique discussions of it³, but the majority of on-film examinations of the Mỹ Lai massacre are documentaries, not high-visibility feature films. The Incident on Hill 192 is the focal point for the 1989 Brian De Palma film *Casualties of War*, but few films attempt to address this issue as a *structural* issue, covered up and even encouraged by those in leadership positions. In her 2007 essay, “Ideologies of Forgetting,” Gina Marie Weaver argues that Hollywood’s portrayal of war rape during the Vietnam war “[denies] these atrocities occurred or suggest[s] that they were the acts of deviants rather than typical soldiers.” This summation is hardly surprising given how the social and legal systems have marginalized survivors of sexual assault. The brutal and enduring irony is, of course, that the protection of these Vietnamese women, their families, friends, neighbors, was one of the rationales for U.S. presence in the country to begin with. While no side is innocent of such depravity, one liberally practiced by more than just “deviants,” it is no wonder that Northern women fought as bitterly and passionately as they did.

Female Combatants in North Vietnam

“When the war comes, even the women must fight.”

North Vietnam’s rallying cry echoes even today. Admittedly, the North saw women take on similar roles as their Southern sisters. “Comfort women” for NVA soldiers were common, as were nurses and clerical support staff. Sexual assault among the ranks also was common, but what stands out is the sheer number of North Vietnamese women who volunteered with the NVA, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (Việt Cộng), and various militias. The exact number is unknown, but sources estimate at least 1.5 million. In comparison, the number of American women who served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, and Iraq combined is approximately 818,000⁴.

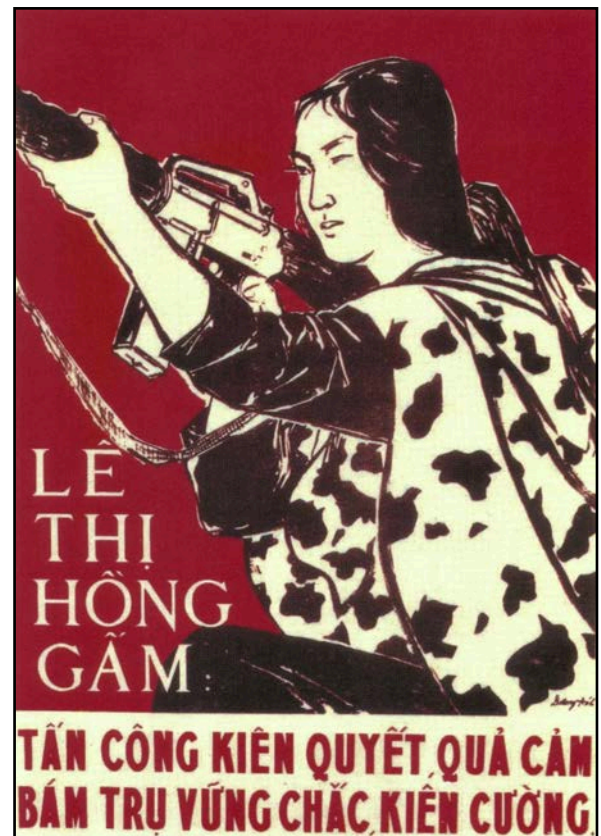
Much of the enthusiasm the North Vietnamese women felt was inspired by the Communist government’s outreach. At the beginning of the 20th century, Vietnamese society, media, and literature began questioning traditional women’s roles, as dictated by Confucian teachings. As non-Marxist attitudes became more restrictive in response to these conversations, the Vietnamese Communist Party saw an opportunity to recruit women with promises of social and political equality. During the War, Hồ Chí Minh encouraged women’s participation in fighting for their country. “If we don’t liberate women,” he said, “we won’t liberate half the human race.”

Legislation, too, began to shift in women’s favor. Resolution 153 passed in 1967, establishing formal job quotas. 35% of all jobs were to go to women, along with 50%-70% of all education jobs. Of course, old habits die hard, and Northern women were still expected to fulfill familial obligations. They embraced the Communist Party’s *Ba đảm đang* policy (“The Three Undertakings”), in which they promised to continue in their domestic duties, step in and work on farms in the place of their brothers, fathers, and

sons, and take up arms themselves if necessary, all to support the men who had already left for the front. The painting created by Phạm Văn Đôn depicts the balance women maintained during this time. Similar efforts were seen in America during WWII, and both contributed to the long-term advancement of women's rights in their respective countries.

While there are doubtlessly stories of South Vietnamese women's heroism on the battlefield, the vast majority come from the ranks of the NVA and Việt Cộng. The selection below is in no way meant to minimize the sacrifice and valor of the millions of women who answered the call in defense of their country. Instead, it is meant to shine a light on a facet of the War not commonly seen or understood.

- Inspired by their Communist leaders, young and unmarried women quickly signed up for the Youth Shock Brigades, which helped create and maintain the Hồ Chí Minh Trail. Authors Lê Minh Khuê and Dương Thu Hương (both profiled in this issue) were two of these women. After the Americans bombed her village, Lê Minh Khuê lied about her age in order to join the Brigade. "The village was unrecognizable," she recalls. "From then on, I knew that war had arrived." Similarly, Dương Thu Hương was driven to volunteer after the U.S. Marines landed in Da Nang. Her goal was to "sing louder than the bombs" falling on the Central Highlands where she was stationed.
- Notable stories of everyday valor include that of Vo Thi Mo, who was second in command of a Việt Cộng battalion, and whose clever tactics allowed her to carry out some of the riskiest operations of the War. In 2016, on behalf of the BBC, photographer Lee Karen Stow met with several North Vietnamese war heroes. Her profiles are portraits of dedication to family and country above all else. Nguyen Thi Tien, responsible for shuttling fuel through pipelines across the Truong Son Mountains, puts it this way: "We always had some threat: enemy, disease, dangerous animals. Our hair fell out from malaria and we did not have enough to eat. But the strength of the mind became a physical strength. We would never give up."
- Nguyễn Thị Định, longtime revolutionary and insurrectionist during the French occupation, was a founding member of the National Liberation Front. In an interview with *Vietnam: A Television History* (1981), she recalls that they, as "women under a feudal, colonial regime, [...] never had any rights at all. We only served as child bearing machines and instruments of pleasure for the ruling class and the imperialists who trampled our dignity. Therefore, I joined the revolution." She commanded an all-female group of soldiers known as the Long-Haired Army. National Assembly Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan described Nguyễn Thị Định's Long-Haired Army like this: "[They are] a vivid symbol of the tradition of the whole national unity in fighting against the invaders – women also fight back when the enemy comes to their house." Nguyễn Thị Định's momentum helped her become the first female general in the Vietnam People's Army, serve on the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party, and eventually become Vice President of Vietnam (1987 to 1992). After the War, Nguyễn Thị Định campaigned for the preservation of women's contributions to society across Vietnam.
- Nguyen Thanh Tung, interviewed for Ken Burns' series *The Vietnam War*, fought for the Việt Cộng dur-



ing the 1968 Battle of Saigon. Her family had a history of resisting the occupiers. Four of her eight brothers died fighting the French, and the other four died before the end of the American War. Like many of her Vietnamese sisters, becoming a soldier did not allow her to escape society's expectations. "I hadn't wanted to get married," she recalls. But her superiors convinced her by telling her, "if you focus only on fighting, without reproducing, where will our future fighters come from?" Nguyen Thanh Tung married and had two sons who eventually enlisted in the North Vietnamese army. On February 1st, just a few months before the end of the War, both were killed in combat.

- Lê Thị Hồng Gấm, sniper and platoon leader, was posthumously named Hero of the People's Armed Forces for her bravery in the field. When procuring food for her troops, she was spotted by three American helicopters. She saved her fellow soldiers by drawing the helicopters away. She fired on one helicopter and was able to bring it down, but was soon overcome. In what might be an apocryphal addition to the story, Lê Thị Hồng Gấm, mortally wounded, destroyed her own weapon so that it would not fall into enemy hands.

One must acknowledge here the famous legend of the Việt Cộng sniper, Apache. This tale certainly captures the imagination but might not be based in truth. While there are substantial first-hand accounts that indicate that this woman actually existed, some scholars believe Apache to be a cartoonish fiction that was used to dehumanize the opposition. The story goes that the so-called Apache (name unknown) was a ruthless sniper who led a platoon near Da Nang. Her thirst for American blood was matched only by her delight in torturing U.S. Marines within earshot of their compatriots. Real or not, the mythologizing of this person telegraphs cultural anxiety around the role of female combatants, their

victory in the War, and the blow that dealt to the American psyche.

These are only a few of the myriad stories of women's contributions to the War—and there are *millions*, most of which will go unheard, especially those of the South Vietnamese. Many speak to women's valor and heroism, regardless of nationality or allegiance. Almost all of these tales have a deep and unyielding ugliness woven throughout, which is often glossed over in the retelling. The American War spanned a decade (and longer, depending on the metric used), and no population was spared. Women fought to defend home and country. They fought to defend ideology. They fought to defend *themselves*. They fought as Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services volunteers. They fought as journalists and radio personalities like Trịnh Thị Ngọc, also known as

Hanoi Hannah. They fought as peace protesters, putting themselves in front of troops to convince them to lay down their arms. And they fought to survive in the face of unspeakable sexual violence.

Since the end of the War, Vietnamese women on both sides have continued to serve their country. They have worked to advance peace with neighboring nations. They have continued to push for women's rights in society. Examining their participation in the American War can only serve to deepen our understanding of the polarizing nature of one of history's greatest military disasters.

Ultimately, these were women who answered the call of duty and patriotism. They were leaders, warriors, students, businesswomen, teachers, daughters, mothers. They are a testament to love of family and country. They are us, really, as we would like to be: lionhearted, iron-willed, and resilient.

Endnotes:

1. Many American Vietnam War films indirectly grapple with this issue. In *Full Metal Jacket*, for example, director Stanley Kubrick relies on gender to deepen the shock of the characters' death. At the end of the Battle of Huế, Privates Eightball, Doc, and Cowboy all die at the hands of a *female* Việt Cộng sniper. She is the only enemy combatant Kubrick features for any significant length of time, and she, along with two prostitutes, account for the only female characters in the film.
2. Sergeant David Edward Gervase, Private First Class Steven Cabbot Thomas, PFC Robert M. Storeby, PFC Cipriano S. Garcia, PFC Joseph C. Garcia, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division
3. For example, Robert Kanigher and Joe Kubert's 1971 *Our Army at War* #233
4. This number is based on in-country service only. Notably, the 300,000 women who served in Iraq are still called the "invisible veterans."

References and Further Reading

- "The Forgotten Sexual and Gender-Based Violence of the Vietnam-American War: Is Justice too Late for Vietnamese Victims and Survivors?" by Madison P. Bingle
<https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/vol26/iss2/1/>
- "The Women Who Won the Vietnam War" by Sherry Buchanan
<https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/181623>
- "Not Just a Pretty Face: The Exploitation and Disregard of Vietnamese Women During the Vietnam War" by Ariel Cowger
<https://ycphistopolisci.com/not-just-a-pretty-face-the-exploitation-and-disregard-of-vietnamese-women-during-the-vietnam-war/>
- "The Women Who Fought for Hanoi" by Elizabeth D. Herman
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/06/opinion/vietnam-war-women-soldiers.html>
- "Missing from history: the other prisoners of war" by Madi Gikes
<http://www.troubleandstrife.org/articles/issue-41/missing-from-history-the-other-prisoners-of-war/>
- Women in the Vietnam War, History.com Editors
<https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/women-in-the-vietnam-war>
- "The Women Who Defeated America: The Victors" by David Jiménez, translated by Andrea Rosenberg
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/abs/13469760.0022.109/--women-who-defeated-america-the-victors?rgn=main;view=fulltext>
- "Portraits of Vietnamese Women At War" Progressive International
<https://progressive.international/wire/2021-03-09-portraits-of-vietnamese-women-at-war/en>
- The life and legacy of Nguyễn Thị Định, Vietnam's female war hero by Govi Snell
<https://southeastasiaglobe.com/nguyen-thi-dinh-vietnam/>
- "The Vietnamese Women Who Fought For Their Country" by Lee Karen Stow
<https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-37986986>
- "Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution" by Sandra C. Taylor
<https://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/vietnamese-women-war-fighting-ho-chi-minh-and-revolution>
- Vietnam: A Television History; Interview with Nguyen Thi Dinh, 1981
https://openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_FFE679CC583A4C0DBE2EB15057EC5FCE

The Horrors of War and Other Morbid Cliches

by David Thayer

I've never killed anyone, at least no one I know of. In Vietnam though, I came close several times, the closest one night when I briefly confused fantasy with reality. But that was months after I arrived, months after my initial fear had turned into a blasé attitude toward life and death, at least that of others. It was an accepted survival technique.

Unlike the beloved GIs of earlier eras and the characters in war fictions, few of the soldiers I knew in Vietnam had endearing nicknames (Rock, Killer, Animal, Goldbrick) that succinctly captured their personalities. With staggered tours of duty of only a year, we weren't with each other long enough to bestow many nicknames. Most went simply by their last name (Nolan, Dietz, Padilla) or rank (Spec-4, Sarge, LT). We did have a few nicknames though, like Broadway Beak, Marvin the ARVN Killer, and Snow White.

Broadway Beak was the company RTO (radio/telephone operator), a slight New York Jets fan from New Jersey. He had a large nose and one of those unpronounceable Eastern European surnames with seemingly randomly placed consonants and virtually no vowels. One day during a discussion of the upcoming football season he remarked that Joe Namath, the New York Jets quarterback, was his hero for having won the recent Super Bowl.

Namath earned millions throwing a football up and down an open field. We earned a fraction of that humping rifles through dense jungle. Bad knees exempted Namath from playing war. A lack of physical defects tagged us for the deadly game.

A buddy remarked, "The only thing you have in common with Broadway Joe is your beak." An irony of the capitalist system I mused. Ever after he was Broadway Beak.

When later I ran into another soldier who went by the name Broadway, I immediately assumed it too was a nickname. I was surprised to discover it was his real last name. He was a cowboy from Oklahoma and somehow on him the name lacked the glamour.

Marvin the ARVN Killer was a husky machine gunner. One of the few creature comforts we grunts had in the field was our air mattresses. (We lived with numerous creatures, mosquitoes, leeches, horseflies, ants, but few comforts.) Those whose mattresses thorns or shrapnel had punctured or over-inflation had ripped a seam suffered. The ground was hard.

But one of the hardships was having to inflate the mattress after humping miles through the jungle with 70 pounds or more of equipment. What little breath we had left we wanted to save for more important tasks, such as talking about what we'd rather be doing, uttering profanities, even breathing. Marvin came to our rescue. A combination of heredity and a life of outdoor living had blessed him with a powerful set of lungs. To supplement his meager private's income, meager even with combat pay, he inflated other guys' mattresses. He often finished in less than a minute. Merely watching him perform was worth the dollar we paid.

Like the rest of us, Marvin was not fearless, but he more than made up for his fear with firepower. In the field he carried inordinate amounts of belted ammunition for his M-60 machine gun. One night he opened up. When the platoon leader sensed that the M-60 was the only weapon firing he ordered Marvin to cease fire, fearing that he might hit my squad which was out on ambush. We wondered at the shooting, but it was not in our direction, and we had confusion of our own (but that's another story).

Marvin finally stopped, but only when the weapon jammed and after several hundred rounds. He swore, literally, that someone had shot at him, but no one else had heard. The other grunts laughed at him for letting the echoes of distant artillery in the jungle spook him. The LT fumed until dawn when daylight revealed that the M-60 had jammed on a link broken and twisted by an AK-47 round. Awe turned into respect when they found a blood trail leading off into the jungle.

Marvin was his real first name. ARVN (rhymes with Marvin) was the acronym for Army of the Republic of (South) Vietnam. Individual soldiers we called ARVN's. They were our allies, although we often wondered. Differences in language and culture and their uncanny resemblance to the VC (Viet Cong) sometimes lead to clashes, always in the rear because we never saw them in the field.

After one encounter, a GI joked, "Let Marvin kill them."

Ever after he was Marvin the ARVN Killer. New guys, confused by the long nickname, sometimes naively dropped the Killer at the end. Old-timers quickly corrected the breach of etiquette before it reached Marvin's ears.

Finally we had Snow White, me. Unlike Broadway Beak and Marvin the ARVN Killer, I gave myself my nickname, and before my first exploits. Name changes were a personal tradition with me. In the sixth grade, when my family moved from Texas to Ohio, I switched from my first to my middle name. In my age group in Texas, David seemed the popular name, there being six in my class. I yearned to be unique. In Ohio I was the only Mike. At the first parent-teacher conference, my mom wondered who the Mike was my teacher was talking about. What had happened to her David?

Shortly before high school we moved to Oklahoma. There I encountered numerous other Mikes and I again became just another name in the crowd. In college, away from family, last names took precedence over first names and I became Thayer. I was unique again. My second year an upper-classman, because of my pale complexion, started calling me Spook, after the "Wizard of Id" character. It was my first firsthand experience with a nickname. I accepted it, not that I had much choice.

When I dropped out of college and went into the Army, I reverted to Thayer, sort of. For 16 weeks, 8 basic training, 8 advanced infantry training, I was simply one of countless other privates. Around drill sergeants with a penchant for yelling at anything that moved, being just one of the crowd had its advantages. The final week of training, we received our orders. I learned that David Thayer was going to Vietnam.

My buddy Kramer suggested that if I didn't want to go, I should send Snowball, the name one of the juvenile wiseguys in our training company had nicknamed me because of my close-cropped blond hair. Kramer had a way with names. The first words out of his mouth when I met him were that his name spelled "remark" backwards (my first experience with the possibilities in rearranging the letters of one's name). I never saw Kramer again. We went separate ways to Vietnam.

I didn't like the name Snowball, with its negative connotations (such as "Snowball's chance in Hell of surviving"), but Kramer started me thinking. When I reached my ultimate unit in the field, I, with my penchant for literary allusions, had mutated it into Snow White. Subconsciously perhaps, I thought that a nickname might protect David

Thayer from getting hurt in Vietnam. One look at my pale complexion, blond hair, and blue eyes, and my new buddies asked no questions.

They did, however, challenge me to name the seven dwarves to prove my identity.

"Sleepy, Sneezzy, Grumpy, Doc, Dopey, Happy," I said. "That's only six."

I easily remembered the five ending in "y" and Doc, the nickname of every 18-year-old medic trusted to save lives under fire. I kept forgetting Bashful. For weeks I struggled memorizing his name and recalling it on command.

Finally after a couple of months in the field, I could name the dwarves in my sleep. At the base camp PX, I had a Vietnamese seamstress sew me a name tag with my nickname for my jungle fatigues. She faithfully copied my handwriting, totally ignorant I'm sure of the Grimm fairy tale that had inspired it.

Later a Lt. Whiteknight (his real name) joined our unit, only serving to reinforce the naturalness of a PFC called Snow White. He was short and thin, a typical new bumbling and inexperienced officer, hardly the dashing character his name implied. My face had tanned and my hair, dirty and disheveled, at least between infrequent showers, had grown.

One hazard of my nickname occurred several weeks after my arrival, when my mail from home finally caught up with me. I had failed to tell my family and girlfriend. The company mail clerk had no idea who David Thayer was and was on the verge of returning my mail. Only Broadway Beak saved my family the trauma of having their letters to me returned "Addressee Unknown." He remembered seeing the name David Thayer on orders at the same time Snow White arrived and put two and two together.

On one mission my platoon by chance ended up on a hilltop firebase in the middle of a broad valley, while the other platoons in the company humped through the jungle below us. Tom Dietz, the other token blond-haired, blue-eyed grunt in the platoon (everyone else seemed to be an ethnic minority, Black, Hispanic, Indian, Italian, Irish with black or brown hair and dark eyes), and I were assigned to one of the guard towers.

Our tower was a 12x12-foot box on stilts overlooking the strands of barbed wire on the perimeter, a structure any kid would have been thrilled to have in his backyard except for the dry, rock-hard sandbags lining the walls and floor and covering the roof. Waist-high windows looked out on all sides. A crude ladder of 2-by-4s led from the ground to the open door in the back.

Another of the few creature comforts available to us was the radio, although it was not government issue and the Army frowned on its use on patrol. It provided our one real-time contact with the World back home. We listened almost exclusively to Armed Forces Radio (Radio Hanoi was amusing, but the continuous propaganda breaks between songs got old quick and the local Vietnamese stations were just so much gibberish to us).

By popular demand (of the majority of lower enlisted and drafted GIs in Southeast Asia, who didn't want to be there anyway), the stations played mostly rock-and-roll music. It reflected our rebellious attitude. Armed Forces Radio could slant the news, but it could not distort the music (it was already distorted). I still remember hearing "War" by Edwin Starr for the first time on a mountain ridge overlooking the South China Sea. "War, uh, what is it good for? Absolutely nothing!" "Yes!"

On Sundays, the station played an hour of classical music, in deference to Gen. Creighton Abrams, Commanding General, a connoisseur of such finer things. Even that brief interlude was enough to drive some of us to thoughts of wasting not only the albums and D.J., but the general himself.

In the summer of 1970, the station was playing songs like "Mamma Told Me Not To Come" by Three Dog Night ("What are all these questions they're asking me?") and "Spirit in the Sky" by Norman Greenbaum ("When I die and they lay me to rest, I'm going to go to the place that's the best.")

One night shortly after dark, Dietz and I sat with our backs to the wall just outside the door of the tower. My M-16 rifle and an M-76 grenade launcher leaned against the front wall, the business end of the tower. Bandoleers of ammunition in magazines and a vest of grenades hung from nails above the weapons. A breeze stirred the air around us but failed to dissipate the heat.

We listened to the black transistor radio I'd brought from home until the music stopped. The announcer told us to stand by for "Mystery Theater". We were both disappointed. We wondered whom they thought they were trying to scare. I had first watch and Dietz started to rise to go crash for a while when the crash of thunder followed by strands of heavy organ music stopped him. A sinister voice intoned that the story for the night was "Frankenstein." Dietz stayed.

We huddled together to hear the narrator better, momentarily forgetting where we were. We shifted our weight on the hard floor to get more comfortable but in vain. Then at a dramatic moment in the story, with the monster standing in a doorway, the tower grew darker. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a tall figure filling the doorway. Dietz and I had incorporated footsteps up the ladder into the narrative on the radio.

Sweat trickled down my face and my heart pounded in my throat. My mind leaped to the weapons out of reach at the front of the tower, but I was too terrified to move. If Dietz and I had had them in hand we would have blown the intruder away.

Someone on the radio let out a scream my own voice refused to make.

The figure, noticing us at last, looked down. "What are you guys doing on the floor?" our LT asked, breaking the spell.

His helmet and flak jacket made him look larger than life. I turned off the radio and Dietz and I stood and mumbled some inane explanation. Skeptical, the LT ordered us to keep our eyes open and backed out of the tower and down the ladder.

After he'd left, Dietz worried about getting caught goofing off on guard duty.

"What are they going to do to us?" I asked. "Send us to Vietnam?"

He laughed at how mistaken identity had brought us within a hair trigger of blowing our own platoon leader away. Only the mental lapse of leaving our weapons beyond arms' reach had saved him.

"They would have blamed it on friendly fire," I joked.

"Yeah," Dietz agreed. "With friends like us, who needs enemies?"

Combat is often marked by weeks of boredom broken by moments of sheer terror. Sometimes it takes real veterans to tell the difference.

Originally published in Mimosa 11, December 1991.

No Capacity for More: The lack of Vietnamese perspectives from America's traumatic past

by Brenda Noiseux

The trauma of the Vietnam War on American culture and psyche can be seen in all the myriad of pop culture and speculative fiction stories, yet those stories remain focused on the veteran experience.

In the United States, it often feels like past events are far removed from us. Desegregation occurred less than 70 years ago, the Civil Right Act less than 60. Growing up in the eighties, I had no idea I was born less than 5 years past the infamous images of the fall of Saigon. My childhood and young adult years were filled with movies, TV shows, a Broadway musical, and other numerous reminders of the horrors of war, pointedly from the military perspective.

They were common narratives - the shock of how unprepared soldiers were, how the draft touched so many families with PTSD and death, and the divisiveness of how Americans felt about US involvement in the war and how they treated returning soldiers. One that's always stuck with me is the 1990 movie, *Jacob's Ladder*, starring Tim Robbins.

Yet, the weight of this trauma didn't leave room for other voices. Hundreds of thousands of Southeast Asian refugees were resettled to the United States, but it was difficult to find any popular media, including speculative fiction. Like the returning soldiers facing hostility, many refugees faced open and hidden hostility. I guess the lack of humanizing stories or at least stories from their perspective should not be surprising, but it still left a gaping hole.

When I initially found Darwyn Cooke's *DC: The New Frontier*, the Eisner Award-winning limited comic book written and drawn by Darwyn Cooke, and published by DC Comics in 2004, I had no idea what the stories were about. I love Cooke's art and was thrilled when a friend gave me the deluxe edition. Its inventive imagining of history, with DC characters from the Golden and Silver Ages

of comics, benefits from Cooke's artistic style with its expressive use of shadow and color, especially in the story where we find Wonder Woman amidst the war-torn areas of Southeast Asia.

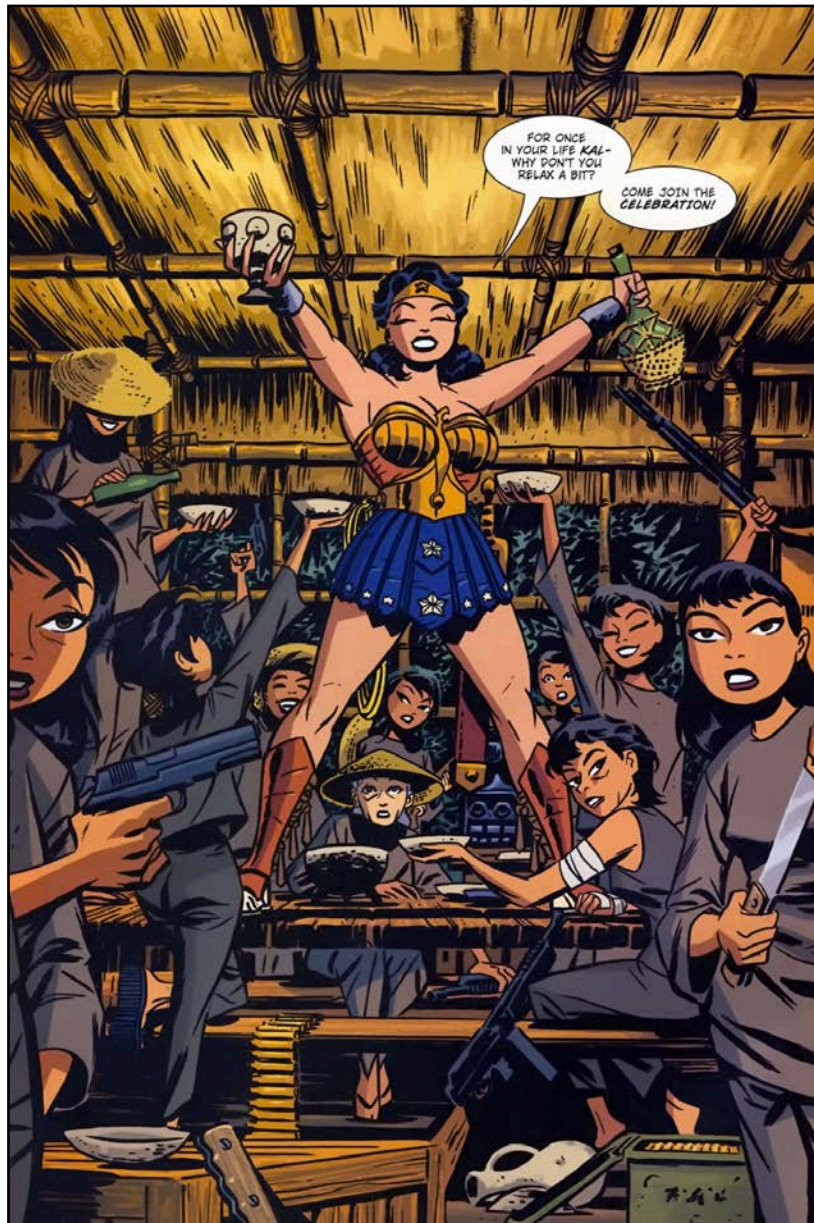
The image I always come back to is a striking full page panel of Wonder Woman celebrating, standing on a table, cup raised, surrounded by other celebrating women, tired women, wary women, *with women who look like me*.

After explaining to a newly-arrived-on-scene Superman, the horror these women have gone through and how she has assisted them by letting them choose for themselves, Superman's superiority and judgment are on full display, reflecting those capitalist and US sentiment.

It rocked me.

It was one of the first times, and in such a direct way, that I saw righteous views of the American perspective on Southeast Asia questioned for all to see. Seeing it come from Wonder Woman, one of my all-time favorite characters, was like a punch to the gut. She sees. She understands. And it transforms her, from her normal depictions of empathy, into celebrating with abandon freedom, justice, and death.

Seeing something that finally attempted to tell a Southeast Asian war story from the perspective of the people and their suffering, as a comic book fan actively working through my personal relationship to the French Indochina and Vietnam Wars, I will always be grateful to Darwyn Cooke for creating it.



Snoopy: a Metaphor, Mascot, or Comfort Puppy

by James Bacon

Snoopy was a very different experience for me, watching on television. I grew up loving the *Peanuts* characters, and when I initially read the cartoon strip, found it a little dry. But I was young and the cartoon was wild fun. Parts were maybe too deep for me, but I adored Charlie and the gang; I always wanted him to succeed, and I loved the World War I Flying Ace.

Root beer, a beverage that was not at all available in Ireland, was placed on a pedestal, and even now, I adore filling a big glass with an A&W, sit and figure out all the nuances and nods and metaphors that I may have missed in *Peanuts*, and smile and think, this is OK. I have visited Santa Rosa, not once but twice, taking in The Charles Schulz Museum and having a coffee in the Warm Puppy Cafe (I kept the paper cup and napkin). My Christmas album is *A Charlie Brown Christmas* by the Vince Guaraldi Trio; it fills me with such joy.

Snoopy and *Peanuts* were something special in America at the time of War in Vietnam.

Gross earnings were \$20m 1967, \$50m by 1969, and \$150m by 1971! What does this say? Did people turn to the *Peanuts* gang for comfort? Schulz was driven in many ways; he noted that he was “torn...between being the best artistically and being number one strip commercially.”

Yet, there is a delicateness about Schulz, a quietness, a focus. He was a cartoonist.

I think he embodies Charlie Brown in some ways. He is a fascinating man, and not what I expected.

On the 26th of November, 1942, he was drafted into the U.S. Army. He was just twenty, and sent to Bravo company, 8th Armoured Infantry Battalion. Tragically, this coincided with the loss of his mom, who was a massive presence in his life. He was wrenched away, bereft, and now loneliness was inevitable with his mom's passing.

He mentioned the draft in *Peanuts*, albeit in name if not experience. The first instance is on the 21st May, 1951, when Patty explains to Charlie Brown that what he thought was a draft notice was actually an advertisement. Then, on the 10th of February, 1958, Patty teases Linus for keeping a blanket, and Linus replies that at least he would never be drafted. On the 5th of June, 1965, Charlie says he feels like he's been drafted as he travels on the coach to camp, and on the 15th of September, 1969, Charlie and Linus worry about being drafted when they are old enough.

Schulz was observant and spoke little, both good traits in the Army, and was soon befriended by Sgt Elmer Hagemeyer, who helped him hugely. Soon Schulz progressed to become a corporal and a marksman trainer and was therefore kept at camp training men. “It was kind of thrust upon him for his intelligence and his capability with weapons,” one of his comrades said. He trained men and then became a leader of men when he was made Sergeant, men who were then themselves now feeling the loneliness and separation from all they knew. He showed empathy and discipline, and soon was made a Staff Sergeant, this made him “very proud” for the first time in his life. He had come through the loss of his mother, was befriended, excelled, and helped others.

He had a girlfriend, Virginia Howely. They had exchanged rings, so they were definitely sweethearts. He departed Boston on the 5th of February, 1945, and arrived in Le Harve on the 18th February, 1945. They then moved to the

Manoir de Malvoisine in Le Héron (a staging area) awaiting their equipment to catch up. France would feature in *Peanuts*, the Manoir especially. On the 1st of April, Easter Sunday, they were loaded into nine named half-tracks; his was called Sparky. They moved quickly into Charleroi, Belgium, where they bivouacked, then through the Netherlands, across the border at Übach-Palenberg, and north of Aachen, pitched camp. They were made part of the Ninth Tank Battalion, and on the 11th of April, bypassed Bonn and reached the Rhine. They then crossed the Rhine using Hodges Bridges at Bad Godesberg.

Passing through or by Rottenberg, Feuchtwangen, Nordlingen, Donauwörth, Affing, “everything was bombed out, crushed, every building shot up.” In Rossbach on the 29th of April, despite the citizens flying white flags, U.S. forces encountered resistance, which was quickly suppressed. In response, the U.S. forces burned the village down, as per operational ground rules. Schulz never forgot the “hysterical woman standing in her front yard while her house was on fire and all the cows walking about”.

They got to Dachau on the 29th, but a bridge over the Amper was blown up, so they camped. They moved on the 30th of April and stopped adjacent to the Dachau Concentration Camp. Many soldiers did not realise what was next to them. The 42nd, 20th and 9th Tank Battalions had broken in the previous day, but Schulz was ordered onward. However, on the 31st of April, some men from the 1st Platoon entered Dachau and witnessed the atrocity. “Schulz would recall four emaciated survivors stumbling along the stalled column, stopping now and again to hug the side of the American tanks.”

Can you imagine. I cannot.

They came under fire outside Munich on the 1st of May, and Schulz's half-track was hit. He went for the brown-ing machine gun but it didn't fire, and when he had it sorted, the Germans were surrendering. The convoy continued towards Salzberg, crossed the Salzach river to enter Austria on the 4th of May. On the 5th of May, Schulz nearly killed one of his own men, a medic, aiming at his red cross with a German pistol prize. It went, off grazing the medic on the cheek. In the 10th January 1952 *Peanuts*, Charlie aims his toy cowboy revolver at Shermey and says after it fires, “Gee, I'm sorry... it went off.”

The war was over on the 8th of May, and Schulz expected to be redeployed to the Pacific Theatre, as he had not seen much combat time, and there was the expectation that taking the Japanese islands would be horrendous. He went home on the 27th of July, looking forward to “movies, sundaes, hamburgers, Coca Cola...” and when he got off the boat on Tuesday the 7th of August, he was greeted with the news that the U.S. had dropped the atomic bomb. He went back home, but during August, his relationship with Virginia, who seemed to want to make him compete for her affection, waned and ended. He did not go to Japan, but he did get a break first with cartooning, *Li'l Folks* started in 1947 in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, and then *Peanuts* first appeared on the 2nd of October, 1950. In the 3rd of May, 1954, strip, a pal of Charlie's complements his war comic collection. Charlie lists the wars in his collection: Revolutionary, World War II, Korean War. Charlie ends with admitting that “the next issue really has got [him] worried,” which I read to be concern over



the potential for nuclear war. Through his reflections, we see things that Schulz might have wanted us to think about.

Now we come to the World War I Flying Ace character, some twenty years after World War II. Snoopy's first appearance as the World War I Flying Ace was in the *Peanuts* comic strip from October 10, 1965. The idea came during the summer. Schulz's thirteen year old son Monte, had a Fokker Triplane, which reminded Schulz of the WWI films that excited him as a youngster like *Hell's Angels* and *Dawn Patrol*. He conceived an idea, considering the line "Captain you can't send young men in crates like these to die."

And so it was that he put Snoopy atop the Dog House, pretending to be a Flying Ace. It was an incredibly clever step, and he knew it. Schulz said "I knew I had one of the best things I had ever thought of in a long time." Monte claimed that he had suggested it, which Charles Schulz frequently denied, but he accepted that he had been "inspired" by Monte.

At this stage, it is hard to know exactly what Schulz was thinking. Nothing is explained; it is all left to the reader. And so I find that, if one reads the WWI Flying Ace looking for a massive reflection of Vietnam, it is clearly there.

How do we know that a story or character is meant to be a metaphor? Or does it just occur by happenstance? Is there a word for the metaphorical power of Snoopy's Flying Ace character? We know that Orwell explicitly wrote that *Animal Farm* was meant as a satire on the Russian revolution. Dr. Seuss intended *The Sneetches* as a satire of discrimination and anti-semitism. But without it clearly being stated by the author, it is up to interpretation.

Choices abound. Was it meant to be satire, allegory, metaphor? Can we choose to read it as such, in something as culturally significant as *Peanuts*? Was it an unspoken nuance that was always there for us as a reader? We know with

many stories, authors love and enjoy how new directions, interpretations and understandings can be found, but I have yet to find a definitive piece of testimony or documentation that Schulz intended *Peanuts* to be a metaphor for anything. However, given the cultural context of the time, I speculate that it might have been.

The scene is set: on the 10th of October, 1965, Snoopy goes out to his kennel, and boards it, with goggles lowered, scarf and tail windswept. He spots the Red Baron. We have take off.

The U.S. Air Force 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron was sent to Biên Hòa, north of Saigon in November 1961, following an order from JFK. Operation Farm Gate "training" South Vietnamese pilots began in December 1961. This was a cover, and combat sorties began with propeller-driven T-28 and B-26's from the 13th of January, 1962. In 1964 the USAF had already lost 59 aircraft, had suffered 54 fatalities and lost 4 POWs. In 1965 those numbers grew to 375 aircraft downed, 347 fatalities, and 53 POWs. There was a peak in 1967 with 655 aircraft downed, 584 fatalities, and 163 POWs. This was a subject that was no doubt in the American people's minds

So now we had a Flying Ace. On a kennel. Going into battle with the Red Baron.

By the third instalment on January 9th, 1966, Schulz has added smoke and the iconic bullet holes in the kennel. The fifth instalment on the 6th of February, 1966, shows Snoopy calling out "Curse You Red Baron!" for the first time, and bailing out to find himself sneaking back from no man's land and navigating the barbed wire, which is a skipping rope.

On the 13th of February, 1966, the fifth instalment we see Snoopy, as the WWI Flying Ace, in France behind enemy lines. He gets looked after by a "French Girl" and as

he wanders on, he says "Curse the Red Baron and all his Kind! Curse The Wickedness in the World! Curse the Evil that causes all this Unhappiness! Curse the..." One can finish Snoopy's sentence in whatever way one wants to oneself, but Charlie's comment in the final panel ("I think these missions are getting to be too much for him") suggests a more serious tone.



The eighth installment published 22nd February, 1966, is a daily rather than Sunday, so with 4 panels, we have the first strip with clouds. Over the next few days of the strip, Snoopy's story continues. He gets shot down and avoids and then fails to avoid the enemy. At one stage he throws a grenade which lands in his food bowl and splatters Charlie. He goes to Paris and relaxes, only to fret about the war and goes back to the air, immediately regretting leaving Paris.

In a letter I found on an auction site, which was written on the 19th of May, 1966, Schulz replied to a correspondent: "I appreciate your suggestion that I have Snoopy as a soldier in Vietnam, but this would be very difficult because the opinions on the Vietnam situation vary among readers and newspaper editors. It is somewhat the same situation a television writer faces in having to co-operate with a sponsor." Is this a clear statement that the World War I Flying Ace was not a metaphor or meant to reference any entities currently fighting in the Vietnam War?

Snoopy kept on flying though. He appeared as a Flying Ace on forty two occasions in 1966. We saw him at the Vets, his kennel "home" burned out, we saw a "Cry of Anguish" and many aspects that could easily be compared to Vietnam. No man's land was astonishing, and how could one not think about the pilots who were shot down. On the 10th of August, Schulz presented a sequence with Snoopy as the World War I Fighter Ace. In one panel, Snoopy describes the enlisted men as "Good Lads," implying a broader positive attitude towards those that are enlisted.

The WWI Flying Ace had an impact. On the 27th October, 1966, *It's The Great Pumpkin*, Charlie Brown was televised, and 49% of U.S. viewers watched it. The film featured the Flying Ace. Interestingly a calendar year later, on the 27th of October 1967, Herbert Block published a cartoon reacting to military testimony before the Senate Preparedness Investigation Committee in which he satirises the military's argument that American pilots would be safer if they were allowed to attack North Vietnamese targets. In the cartoon, which appeared in the *Washington Post*, Snoopy is a General and speaks of wanting to bomb Vietnam, China, and the Soviet Union. It is not the Red Baron, but "Red Civilians" who Snoopy curses.

From the 11th to the 18th of January we have a

sequence: Snoopy is on the Dawn Patrol, he gets shot down; he is behind enemy lines; he disguises himself with a moustache; he confronts the Red Baron; he is imprisoned on the 16th; in his kennel a four dark panels, where, at the end, his wailing upsets Linus; finally, Snoopy escapes, stealing the Red Baron's Fokker D.III which looks like a Sopwith Pup.

On 11th May, 1967, we see empathy for "The Blighters in the Trenches." On the 13th June, 1967, Snoopy lists a number of gripes, ending with "Curse this stupid war," which is the first time this is said. On August 13th, 1967, the 74th instalment by this stage, the strip includes many thoughtful things. Snoopy the WWI Flying Ace goes for a root beer. He then does the Snoopy Happy Dance, sings "It's a long way to Tipperary," calls out "Vive Le France, Vivent les Americans" and then in the next panel, a sad and melancholic Snoopy says "Curse this stupid war" again. The next day, as he is airborne, Snoopy notes that the Red Baron doesn't dance and drink root beer all night.

The cultural importance of *Peanuts* had permeated much and reached as far as U.S. soldiers in Vietnam. On the night of the 4th into 5th of May, 1968, an incident took place in Vietnam, west of Khe Sanh, not far from Route Nine. An AirCav LZ known as Landing Zone Peanuts under the the 1st Battalion, 5th Air Cavalry Division and 1st Battalion 77th Field Artillery Regiment on the top of a ridge was attacked. It was a sustained and significant attack by superior forces. Lt Mike Maynard called in a "Blue Max" attack. C-model Huey Hog (48 rockets) helicopters of the 20th Field Artillery Regiment (Aerial Rocket), 1st Cavalry Division attacked the Hill. Then a Douglas AC-47 "Spooky," a DC-3 fitted with 3 x 7.62 mm miniguns, arrived just as Star Shells from LZ Snapper ran out. The attack was repulsed, but there was significant loss of life. The second in command, Lt Charlie Brown survived the night.

In the strip published 31st July 1968, we first meet Franklin when Charlie encounters him on the beach. Harriet Glickman, a school teacher, wrote to Schulz on April 15, a mere 11 days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, to suggest including a Black character in the beloved comic.

In Franklin's second appearance, on the 1st of August, 1968, Charlie asks if he is with his whole family. Franklin replies, "No, my Dad is over in Vietnam," to which Charlie replies "My Dad's a barber...he was in a war too, but I don't know which one." After this, they talk about baseball, and that is hilarious. In this one moment, in these two strips, we see Schulz mention some of the most important issues of 1968, as we see two children bond and become friends.

This is the one and only time Vietnam is mentioned.

On the 13th of August, we see a Sunday where Snoopy again says "Curse this Stupid War." But it is interesting that the frequency of the World War I Flying Ace lessens. At the end of 1967, on Christmas Eve, Flying Ace is frustrated that he won't be "home by Christmas," and when he hears Christmas carols sung (by his enlisted men in his imagination, but in reality by Charlie and Sally inside the house), he begins to cry. Charlie points out that "when you're a long way from home, [carols] can be very depressing." Even as the Flying Ace appearances are fewer, they are as ever poignant and pointed. On the 5th of May, 1968, in the 84th instalment, we see Snoopy quite depressed, and clearly saying "Curse this stupid war." Then on the 16th, he notes how he entertains the "enlisted men" but then asks sadly "but who is going to cheer up the World War I Ace." As woodstock is transferred to the infantry on the 13th of August, our Flying Ace sees this as a bitter blow.

In the Autumn of 1968, Schulz started visiting wounded soldiers in the Letterman Hospital in the Presidio, San Francisco, spending time with them, which was appreci-

ated by Maj Gen. Charles. H. Gingles, also a WWII veteran and commander of the hospital.

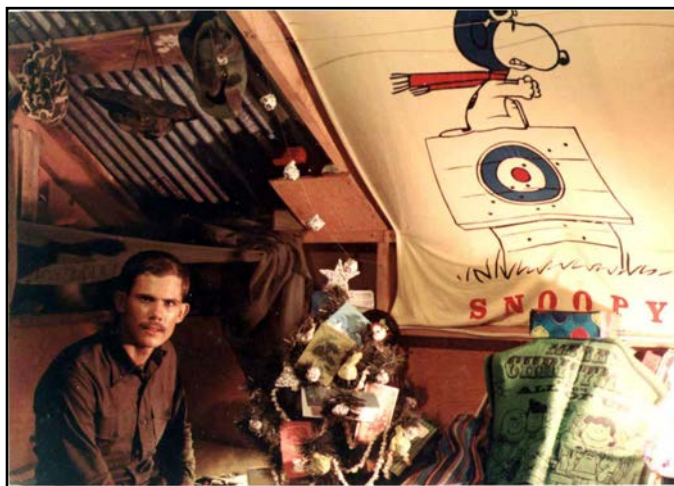
Franklin again visits Charlie Brown on the 16th of October, 1968. By this time, there have been nearly 100 instalments of the Flying Ace, and now we see Franklin addressing the WWI Flying Ace directly by rank, saying, "Excuse me Lieutenant," and asking where Charlie lives. Snoopy points aloofly towards the house and comments that HQ must be planning a big drive, as he does not recognize a lot of these new men. There is something very familiar about the disinterest and contemplation of Snoopy's comment and what it implies.

On December 23rd 1968, we see Snoopy taking fire. As smoke comes from his Camel, he notes that "this could ruin [his] Christmas." This followed on December 24th, Christmas Eve, where our WWI Flying Ace is down behind enemy lines. There is a sadness to it as he says "Back home everyone is opening presents and having a good time... Curse you Red Baron." On the 25th we see that Snoopy is back at base, but he is "very bitter," and wonders, "Will this stupid war never end..." How poignant a sequence.

There were over half a million U.S. troops in Vietnam at the time and in 1968 some 16,899 U.S. people had been KIA.

There is a hiatus after these, possibly three of the most pointed installments at a festive time.

Snoopy is in the press for other reasons though on the 11th of May, 1969. LZ Snoopy (BS708610) was an engineer Landing Zone of the 23rd Infantry (American) Division's Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 82nd Artillery, and Company C, 39th Engineer Battalion, in Vietnam and consisted of a sequence of bunkers, fortifications and howitzer gun pits, with 4 x 155mm Howitzers. On the 11th of May, they were attacked by the NVA. Fighting ensued, the attack was repulsed. LZ Snoopy was in the news. There was also LZ Charlie Brown with a big seven foot Charlie Brown welcoming people.



With only 6 installments in 1969, we see Snoopy so down, cursing the Red Baron, the "stupid war" and referring to his mechanics as "Good Lads," as well as deciding to "forget it" on the 1st of June 1969. We see a sequence where Charlie heads off to camp, and so our WWI Flying Ace spends time with Lucy for some days in June. Another hiatus, the 104th installment, occurs on the 16th April 1970. Here Linus asks Snoopy not to fly in the bad weather, and we see Snoopy retort, "Tell him we'll all be home by Christmas."

On the 17th September, 1970, Snoopy gets taken to the vet, but the WWI Flying Ace sees it as imprisonment "in a cage or something", as Linus puts it. His weariness when he is greeted by Charley at home is obvious. The scene with

Snoopy in a cage is heartbreaking, made more poignant in the context of American prisoners of war in Vietnam.

On the 10th of January 1971, our Flying Ace says, "I'm exhausted...this stupid war is too much." However, on July 19th, 1971, Schulz's commentary is much less veiled. As Charlie and Snoopy head to summer camp, Charlie comments that "Going to camp prepares you for getting drafted, which I don't want to do either." Snoopy thinks again, "Curse this stupid war!" One wonders if Schulz was reflecting growing frustration with the draft, as later that year, in September of 1971, Nixon signed legislation putting the Selective Service system on "standby," and it wasn't until two years later that the draft was officially ended.

By this time, Snoopy was a mascot for the U.S. military. Schulz gave permission to use Snoopy as a "war eagle" to the military in Vietnam on fighter planes, on the Aircraft testing the GAM-77 Hound Dog strategic missile, for the "Able Aces" USAF 691st Radio Group Mobile, in Germany, Darmstadt. The image of Snoopy was everywhere, both officially and unofficially, along with a glut of merchandise.

In *Schulz and Peanuts: A Biography*, David Michaelis writes "Snoopy had taken his place as the American Fighting Man's most trusted friend when going into combat" and who could blame them? So much ambiguity meant that one could feel any way you wanted; but Snoopy was universally comforting.

"Happiness is a warm puppy," says a smiling and content Lucy after hugging Snoopy on the 25th of April 1960. Snoopy sees the commercial side of this later, offering Puppy Hugs in competition to Lucy's Psychiatry. Schulz did as well, publishing "Happiness Is a Warm Puppy" in 1962. By 1967 it had sold a million copies.

Who wouldn't want to hug a warm puppy?

And then this puppy climbs into a Sopwith Kennel and flies off to fight the Red Baron!

As Flying Ace, Snoopy is in some ways the antithesis of Charlie Brown. Snoopy hates losing, be he the manager of the baseball team, or waving his fist at the Red Baron. Charlie Brown, on the other hand, shows us that losing is not as bad as it could be, hoping always to win the game, or kick the ball, or not have his kite fall foul of the tree. There is a realistic and honesty about Charlie; he knows nothing is perfect, and that knowledge can bring one down. But also we have Snoopy, who is unwilling to accept any defeat whatsoever, angry, violent even. He is owner of the happy dance, the happiness befitting a loved warm puppy who we all would love to hug. Don't we all want to be loved, and then fight the good fight?

This is not some imagined love; it is tangible. Ethel Kennedy wrote to Schultz in August 1968, "It is very cozy to have Snoopy and his pals on our walls, mixed up with photographs of the family, which we think of them as anyway." Schulz had sent ten pictures for her ten children on the 1st of July, after Ethel had let it be known that it would be a comfort to her children on June 7th, the day after their father Robert was assassinated. (JB: *I have to stop writing this, as I am crying*) Snoopy was a comfort in tragedy.

In November 1968, on the *Today Show*, Schulz in his own way, made his position on matters clear enough: "We're gradually, finally coming down to the point where we're really beginning to realise how unspeakable war is, and that we simply have got to learn to stop this"

This is not insignificant. Schulz was a quiet person. His wife Joyce did a lot of public things, like building the Snoopy Redwood Arena (which I had thought that Schulz had done). But he was human; he suffered depression, would eventually divorce Joyce, become withdrawn. But through this, he always focused on his cartoon, determined to be the best, and notably profitable. Sales were phenomenal, and it is

noted that “1 Billion people watched Snoopy” during Apollo 10, where the Lunar Module was called “Snoopy” and the Command and Service Module named “Charlie Brown,” a fact which mildly worried Schulz, given Charlie Brown’s luck. It went well.

I had nearly always imagined that Snoopy was a metaphor for U.S. Airmen, flying in Vietnam, and that the “Curse You Red Baron” was perhaps a fist-waving chant at Red Communism.

Given Schulz’s service, it’s possible he intentionally set out to paint the WWI Flying Ace as a metaphor. Or perhaps not. Either way, it captured something and spoke to the complex and challenging issue that was Vietnam, while cursing the enemy—the Red Baron and the war itself. He likely faced confusion, just like Americans may have. Snoopy’s imagined world behind enemy lines could as easily have been the jungle of North Vietnam as it could have been France. As readers themselves tried to navigate the politics, the truth, the lies, all the aspects of this god awful war, where they were no longer the underdog, no longer really the good guys, we have a Beagle fighting to remind readers of the individual.

There is so much within *Peanuts*. We wonder and adore people for their imagination and genius, but what mo-

tivates and forces those ideas from notions to percolating and coalescing on the page is a mystery generally, and with Schulz even more so. He was a contradictory fellow who had clear juxtapositions on stances and activities, as far as we fans know. He was a private man for sure, and there is much we may never know. If it is left to one’s interpretation, one can definitely feel the connection between Snoopy’s WWI Flying Ace and the complexities of the Vietnam War. Did Schulz, though?

Schulz once said that he stopped drawing the Flying Ace in combat because “we were suddenly realizing [...] this was such a monstrous war and everything. It just didn’t seem funny. So I just stopped doing it”

By my reckoning there were 129 installments of the Flying Ace by the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but the WWI Flying Ace continued, with about 400 in total. Some referenced how Snoopy the airline pilot once fought in the War, others brought him back to WWI, with Marcie frequently speaking French, but the War was over in Vietnam. But for many, surely Snoopy was the Warm Puppy who always made people think of the pilots and enlisted men.

•Notes

- Chris Hobson Vietnam Air Losses, United States Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps Fixed-Wing Aircraft Losses in Southeast Asia 1961-1973 (2001)
- Hell on a Hilltop in Vietnam
- John McGuire Vietnam December 2018 Nam War Travel. LZ Peanuts <https://namwartravel.com/lz-peanuts/>
- https://peanuts.fandom.com/wiki/Peanuts_Wiki BRAVE DEFENSE OF LZ SNOOPY DURING THE VIETNAM WAR
- Hubert Jordan Vietnam Magazine April 1998 <https://www.historynet.com/americal-divisions-bravo-batterys-brave-defense-of-lz-snoopy-during-the-vietnam-war/>
- [Snoopy is the hero in Vietnam: Ambivalence, empathy and peanuts’ Vietnam war and Charlie Browns America by Blake Scott Ball. \(which is brilliant\)](#)
- Schulz and Peanuts David Michealis Image <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C332113> <https://vietnamwarera.tumblr.com/post/182563932095>



Apocalypse – the Eyes of Doom

by Jim O'Brien



For the first seven of its 55-odd pages, *Apocalypse – The Eyes of Doom*, from the July 1993 issue of US comics magazine *Heavy Metal*, reads like a fairly standard (Vietnam) war story. As it kicks off, it's 1972 and we're in the midst of the steaming South Vietnamese jungle between the villages of Xuan Loc and Bien Hoa. US Marine Sergeant Dan Curry and his platoon of hard-bitten GIs are preparing to call in helicopter support as they enter a sleepy rural hamlet, believing there to be only a minimal Vietcong presence in the thatched houses before them. Curry is right in his assessment of the enemy's strength, and US ground forces quickly overwhelm the few black-pyjama clad fighters who attempt to resist the American incursion.

The story's register and genre begins to shift, however, when Curry observes a very young Vietnamese boy emerge from the chaos and begin to stare intently at one of the American helicopters, only for the chopper to suddenly explode in a ball of flames. A further helicopter goes the same way, and the pilots of the remaining birds later pour scorn on Curry for having failed to spot the Viet Cong weaponry that was evidently being trained on them. Only Curry has seen that it is the boy with the blank stare who has brought down the choppers. Before he is flown out to begin some enforced R&R, the troubled sergeant sees the boy being picked up and carried to safety by his mother.

Cut to some years later and Curry – now a PTSD-addled writer of mystery novels – is living in Los Angeles, frequently drunk or high on opium and the object of pity to the beat cops who find him passed out outside his apartment. Investigating a series of murders amongst the higher echelons of the City of Angels' Chinese mafia, Curry comes to learn that (as part of the wave of boat people who fled Vietnam following the fall of Saigon) the boy he saw exploding US helicopters with his eyes has relocated to LA, and that his mother (now operating under the name 'Great Spirit') is using her son's powers to take control of the Chinese underworld. Curry is dosed with hallucinogens to try and drive him off the scent and endures a horrific trip as a result but persists in his sleuthing. He finally breaks into the pagoda-style headquarters used by the boy and his mother. There Curry witnesses the boy, now wheelchair-bound through overuse of his terrible ability and evidently sickened by his mother's lust for power and casual disregard for his own needs, turn his powers on his mother before taking his own life by staring fixedly at himself in a mirror.

Curry returns exhausted to his apartment to write up his story, beginning with the day in 1972 between the villages of Xuan Loc and Bien Hoa where he first saw the boy with the eyes of doom.

Apocalypse first appeared in album form in France in 1991 and was quickly reprinted in Spain and Italy before being picked up by *Heavy Metal* in 1993. Almost simultaneously, the story was also published as a hardback graphic novel by Kitchen Sink. Although not given an on-page credit in *Heavy Metal*, *Apocalypse*'s author was Italian writer Roberto dal Prà, a veteran comics scribe who was a regular contributor of stories – often historical adventures – to Italian anthology titles such as *Lanciostory*, *Skorpio* and *L'Eternauta*. Although never a 'big name' in English language comics, dal Prà's storytelling is tight and efficient. Characters aren't that developed, but he plays his genre trope cards effectively and there is just sufficient softcore T&A amongst the gun play and exploding heads for *Apocalypse* to maintain its credentials as a bona fide *Heavy Metal* strip. As with many comics adapted into English, the dialogue sounds flat and inauthentic in places and there are odd translation glitches along the way, with Dan Curry for instance suddenly becoming 'Dick' (Freudian slip?) in one panel.

The strip's powerful artwork was provided by the renowned Argentinian artist Juan Gimenez, by 1993 a *Heavy Metal* regular and co-creator – with Alejandro Jodorowsky – of the epic *Metabarons* saga. Gimenez was an ideal choice of artist for a story that involved both the blunt force trauma of contemporary warfare and weaponry and the psychedelic pyrotechnics of bad LSD trips and violent psi-powers. By 1992 his back catalogue boasted both short-back-and-sides war stories (chiefly on *As de Piques*, or 'The Ace of Spades', a long running Spanish title focused on a US bomber and its crew during World War Two) and more fantastic, sci-fi inflected work such as the aforementioned *Metabarons* as well as albums *The Fourth Power* and *Leo Roa*.



If *Apocalypse*'s Vietnam-set opening section comes over like a graphic novel version of a scene from Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (hence, one assumes, dal Prà's choice of title) or Oliver Stone's *Platoon*, the remainder of the tale is a fusion of noir PI thriller (Curry is a trench coat wearing loner in the Philip Marlowe mould), triad crime drama (John Carpenter's 1986 film *Big Trouble in Little China* seems the most obvious

point of reference here) and psi power horror films such as Cronenberg's *Scanners* from 1981, Brian de Palma's *Carrie* (1976) and *The Power* (1968).

Apocalypse goes full inscrutable oriental in its depiction of its Vietnamese characters. Great Spirit in particular is a further iteration of the East Asian femme fatale familiar from at least as far back as Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu stories, where the archvillain's daughter Fah Lo Suee is every bit as deadly as her father. With her split skirt, ice cold delivery and penchant for disposing of opponents with little or no emotion, dal Prà's Great Spirit also tips her hat to comic book antecedent The Dragon Lady from Milton Caniff's long-run-

ning and hugely influential newspaper strip, *Terry and the Pirates*.

Having its other central protagonist confined to a wheelchair for most of the narrative lends the boy a nice Bond villain/ X-Men mutant touch even if it does unapologetically buy into the hoary old stereotype of the twisted mind = twisted body concept.

To be filed under Vietnam Comics (sort of) and enjoyed chiefly for Gimenez's solid draughtsmanship and rich colours.



Truyện Tranh: Piracy, Crowdfunding, and the Growth of Vietnamese Comics

by Allison Hartman Adams

Truyện tranh, or “story pictures,” in Vietnam have often been dismissed or ignored, even by the Vietnamese themselves. Truyện tranh are for kids, right? This perspective is hardly unique, as comics in any country that loves them have long been denigrated as childish and frivolous. But that is changing in Vietnam. Slowly. And, as much as we might cringe to read it, much of the credit goes to piracy and copyright infringement. In the face of censorship and closed borders, what are burgeoning comics readers and creators to do, after all?

As compared to the rest of the world, Vietnamese comics are in their infancy. While the path of their development has mirrored that of comics across the world, from morality lessons to children’s heroes to propaganda (and a thousand iterations in between) the changes that began a century ago have moved at a glacial pace. The highly-restrictive government censors keep experimental, pioneering expressions of art and literature in check. One must apply for a permit to publish anything in Vietnam, and any critique of the government or Vietnamese culture in comic form earns a quick, hard pass. Edginess is hard to achieve in that climate.

Traditionally, comics in Vietnam were heavily influenced by Chinese Confucianism and were primarily a vehicle for children’s morality lessons. However, after the establishment of French Indochina, and the rise of western-leaning sentiment across the country in the 1930s, Vietnamese comics turned to satire and propaganda, as well as romance and Vietnamese mythology. During the First Indochina War and the American War in Vietnam, comics topics broadened, and, unsurprisingly, began to reflect the cultural ideology of the time. *Flora Age Bimonthly* (*Tuổi Hoa*) founded in 1962 in Saigon, focused on science fiction, detective stories, and adventure tales. The Vietnam Language Center in Singapore cites the pirated and often poorly-printed Chinese Lianhuanhua (small booklets of sequential drawings), *Bande Dessinée* (French and Belgian comics like *Tintin*), and American comics as primary influences on Vietnamese comics during this time. One of the most famous comic artists during this time was Võ Hùng Kiệt (under the name ViVi when working with *Tuổi Hoa*), whose work encompasses fine art, illustration, comic art, and award-winning postage stamp design.

Conversely, comics published in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) mirrored styles popular in Soviet art. After Saigon fell in 1975, and North Vietnam reunified the country, censorship and the basic need for survival slowed comics’ development. “Some [comic artists] continued after the war,” writes Huu Do Chi, author of “Comic art in Vietnam: A Brief History,” (*International Journal of Comic Art*, 2001). “But there was no market...Everyone came down to the problem of what to eat, where to live, so no time for entertainment.” While the Đổi Mới Policy, initiated in Vietnam in 1986, brought new liberties to expression through comic books—as well as all art and literature—its influence was limited. Indeed, it was the introduction of Japanese manga that truly altered the course of Vietnamese comics.

Manga’s wide-reaching appeal and quick integration into youth culture in Vietnam still rankles the older generation, who see the violence and mature topics present in the storytelling as dangerous to children. Sound familiar? Rejec-



tion of the New is not an uncommon experience among those grappling with changing cultural identity, and comics—as a reflection of cultural identity itself—often get a raw deal in these conversations. And yet, who could stand up to the manga typhoon?

In 1992, the importing of *Doraemon* by Kim-Đồng Publishing House triggered a manga-fever. *Sailor Moon* and *Dragon Ball* quickly followed in 1995, and as Nguyen Hong Phuc points out for *Kyoto Review*, “suddenly Vietnamese comics with educational and moral stories were overwhelmed and dull by comparison.” Pirated copies flooded the market until 2004 when Vietnam adopted the Berne Convention’s Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, which demanded strict control of manga copyright, sales, and printing.

Despite manga’s popularity—perhaps because of it—Vietnamese artists and comics have started gaining traction. In 2002 Phan Thi Company published *Thần đồng Đất Việt* about Lê Ty’s adventures with his friends. The work is influenced by Vietnamese national heroes, customs, and history and shares many visual similarities with manga.

Since then, Vietnamese comics have made their presence known on the international stage. Working within the restrictive publishing world in Vietnam, the crowdfunded *Long thần tướng* (*The Holy Dragon Imperator*, 2013) by Nguyễn Thành Phong and Nguyễn Khánh Dương won a Sil-

ver Award at the 2016 International MANGA Awards, as did Can Tiểu Hy's 2017 *Địa Ngục Môn* (*Gateway to the Underworld*) in 2017. It's notable here that Vietnamese comics, even with American, French, and Japanese influence over the years, have not fully detached from Vietnamese culture. *The Holy Dragon Emperor* and *Gateway to the Underworld* both draw on the riches of Vietnam's history (the main character in *Gateway* wears the traditional Vietnamese áo dài).

More recently, after some controversy over a pirated version of his *Phê nhu con tê tê*, Nguyễn Thanh Phong and Khánh Dương, who are part of the "manga generation," founded the Phong Duong Comic Artists Group and published *Orange* in 2011. This is one of the first comics in Vietnam in which American visual influence is most prominent. Its realistic artistic style and portrayal of the everyday life of young Vietnamese students puts it on the same stage as countless other more "realistic" comic arts across the world. "We want something that relates to our life," Nguyễn Thanh Phong told the BBC, that isn't developed with a young audience in mind. "There's still a tendency to see comics in genre terms, superheroes and comics for kids, rather than a mature medium," he said. Nguyễn Thanh Phong, buoyed by this success, has pushed the envelope a bit, and while he has faced censorship for some of his more risqué works, he continues to be one of Vietnam's most promising young comic artists.



Perhaps it's the piracy. Or maybe it's the success of crowdfunding. Or even just the lingering desire for Vietnam to be taken seriously on the international stage. In any case, the Vietnamese government has begun to pay attention to comics. The popularization of this media, especially as a serious art form with wide-reaching international appeal, has led the Vietnamese government to use comics to leverage and promote Party policies. Maybe this is good—comics are becoming more "respectable." But in these conditions, they're not exactly a vehicle for truth-telling. Ultimately, Party control is just another barrier in the road for comic creators who are eager to have their voices heard by readers around the globe. As Nguyen Hong Phuc notes, "in this dubious situation, Vietnamese comics are not afforded the leeway to stabilize and find their own equilibrium in contemporary Vietnamese culture." The irony here is painful. Surely, comics are an expedient way to share a message with the masses. The Vietnamese government gets this. But that message, if controlled and sanitized, only serves to undermine the true glorious power of comics—the power to make us question and understand and see our world in a new light. That can't happen under the shadow of censorship.

But artist Huu Do Chi is hopeful, and he looks to crowdfunding as a solution. The mechanism of crowdfunding is like piracy in reverse: the people want what they want, are

willing to pay for it, so instead of getting low-quality copies cheaply on the street corner, crowdfunding offers them the opportunity to get the *real thing* cheaply, directly from the artist and writer. Also, and perhaps more importantly, crowd-funded projects don't need publishing permits or governmental approval.

Nguyễn Thành Phong agrees, seeing crowdfunding as a way for the Vietnamese people to tell the creators what they really want—and for the creators to make it happen. In a 2014 interview with the *Hanoi Times*, he confesses that "Vietnamese tend to have little faith in domestically-produced content. However, we have faith that there are people willing to support real innovation." After raising 300 million dong (about \$12,000 or £9,900), Nguyễn Thành Phong believes that the Vietnamese lean on crowdfunding as a tangible way to show they "are enthusiastic about real creation and open to new Vietnamese comics," rather than simply accepting whatever the government feels is appropriate enough to publish.

The future of Vietnamese comics *will* be bright. At present, it is a glimmer, one that creators and fans are trying to keep from being snuffed out. As popularity grows, and the censors' restrictions (hopefully) loosen, the world will see much more in the way of extraordinary and vivid Vietnamese comic storytelling.

"We have very good artists and they will be published in the years to come," Huu Do Chi says now that crowdfunded comics projects are growing in popularity. "We will have a garden in spring, the flowers are just coming up."

Hunter S. Thompson: Too Much Tension and Too Little News by James Bacon

Working out exactly when in 1975 Hunter S. Thompson went to Vietnam is tough, but utilising the *Gonzo Tapes*, (CD5), *Fear and Loathing in America*, *Fear and Loathing at Rolling Stone*, *Songs of the Doomed Gonzo Papers Vol. 3*, *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson* and *Rolling Stone* no. 167 (22nd May 1975), some elements have become clear. He was definitely in Vietnam and Saigon for the last weeks of the War, but he left Vietnam before the fall of Saigon.

It is amazing to think that one of the most famous journalists of the '60s and '70s would have been in Saigon at such a crucial time, but this is also an insight into the pandemonium of the Vietnam situation. It was a war, and Hunter was worried, and he recorded his observations. One must consider just how crazy and frightening the environment was if Hunter felt the need to leave.

What follows is an attempt to piece together dates and events as best I can. I explain where I got them, but these are my personal conclusions, so I absolutely am happy to be corrected, to have more information and details shared, and to adjust future iterations.

Hunter Plans for Vietnam

While still in the U.S., Hunter speaks with a colleague in Vietnam who lets him know that a town 20 miles from Saigon had just fallen, one where the Viet Cong were stopped in 1972, and that the North Vietnam Army would be in Saigon in the next week. I believe this might be Tân Thành, capital of Binh Long province. She also notes that if one unit of the South Vietnam Army breaks, they would all break. This colleague senses Hunter's fear, and reassures him by telling him who was there and how there was support and frequent flights out of the country. She tells him to 'come on out here.'

He then speaks to Gloria Emerson, a *New York Times* reporter, who encourages him to come to Vietnam. She tells him that she thought he'd been on the 4 o'clock plane out of Aspen, and that 'no one wants [him] to go more than [she does].' They discuss information that Jann Wenner, co-founder of *Rolling Stone*, shared with Hunter about a secret evacuation plan for American press, but Emerson assures him to not worry about it. 'You wouldn't worry about it?' Hunter says. 'Jesus, I thought you were sane. I'm the one who's supposed to be crazy.' After this, they discuss how the press would evacuate or stay after the invasion. Despite Hunter's misgivings, Emerson reassures him that he would not be trapped there. Emerson says, 'To go there is to always take enormous risk, if it really gives you bad dreams,' but Hunter replies, 'I don't worry about risks so much, I just worry about total suicide. The risk factor has never deterred me.'

They speak about Madam Binh, who was in Paris at the time. Emerson is keen to suggest that Hunter write a 'Fear and Loathing in the last days of Saigon,' reinforcing that 'these are the last days of Saigon.' Hunter is not so sure, telling her that he 'didn't want to go over there and meet a load of people rushing towards the plane with [him] getting off of it.' In response, Emerson, who was last there 3 years previous, encourages him to stay at the Hotel Continental (which, Emerson says 'represented French dominance'), to

speak to Mr. Lôi who manages it, and to just 'sit on the terrace' and get a 'marvellous four thousand words and get out.'

Date Unknown

Hunter arrives in Vietnam. In his recordings, Hunter talks with others about leaving just as he arrived. In an evening discussion with Loren Jenkins, war correspondent for *Newsweek*, and other reporters, he shares the worry about the angry ARVN (the Army of the Republic of Vietnam) or the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) shooting up the hotel, and whether American reporters would be interned, or if the ARVN would pick out guys with American passports and execute them.

In *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson*, Loren Jenkins recalls Hunter arriving from Hong Kong, going back to Hong Kong, coming back with electrical equipment like walkie talkies and then heading off. This makes tracking exactly what his movements are rather difficult. Jenkin says, 'Eventually he got installed on the Continental Hotel and went out on a trip. I was his patron... Hunter wanted to go to the front.... I had all sorts of vehicles... I think he was with Nick Proffitt.... Hunter appeared in the morning with a cooler of beer and off they went. He came back after a couple of days....'

A few days after that Hunter jumps into a plane to Hong Kong and comes back with a 'footlocker' full of electronic gear.

Thursday 10th April

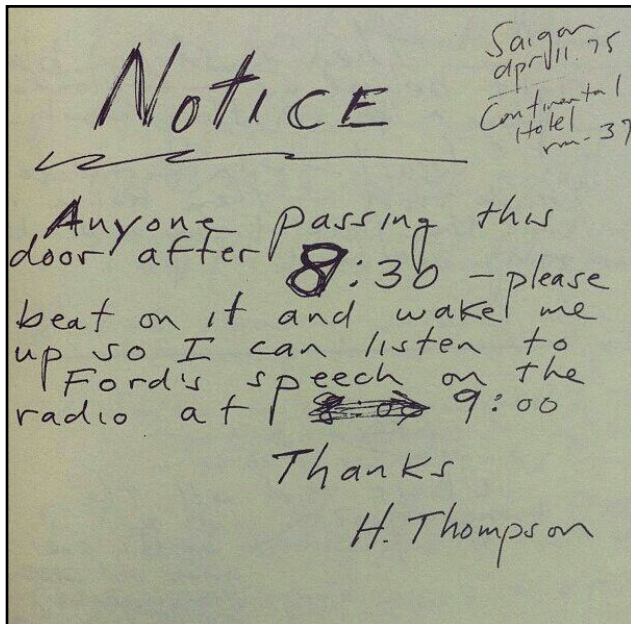
Hunter notes that it was very quiet Thursday morning, much quieter than it had been for the last few days, and talks about the slow down in volume and traffic and a panic the night beforehand, which we don't get contextualised, but we can speculate. He was going to go to the airport and embassy and try to ascertain the situation. *The Washington Post* got the message to cut and run. Hunter says in recordings that Wednesday night was 'The Washington Post Panic' and Thursday night panic was the 'Newsweek Panic.'

Friday 11th April

This is Hunter's second night trying to get a piece written on no sleep. There was another panic. He speaks about having some powder for his armpit rot and taking a shower at 0805. He talks about President Ford's speech, which he listens to with Loren Jenkins, the sound of artillery in the distance.

There is an 11-hour time difference between Washington and Saigon, and the address by President Gerald R. Ford before a joint session of the Congress, reporting on United States Foreign Policy on April 10, 1975 at 9pm (EST) is then heard on Hunter's tapes. One can hear a considerable amount of his speech, with voices behind. And when Ford says 'I must, of course, as I think each of you would, consider the safety of nearly 6,000 Americans who remain in South Vietnam,' we hear someone say, 'He's talking about us.'

Further, there exists a note presumably written by Hunter which he taped to the door of his Continental Hotel room requesting someone wake him up in time for Ford's speech. The tape and note give us our first hard date.



Date Unknown

He records himself on Biên Hòa highway, heading out to the front in what sounds like a Jeep. He noted the barrells blocking the way. There are two gents other than Hunter in the vehicle talking, a British and US accent. He notes refugees leaving Saigon. He asks, 'Nick, how far is Xuân Lộc from Saigon?' This, presumably, must be Nick Proffitt, Newsweek Beirut Bureau chief. Nick tells him that they did not get as far as Xuân Lộc, but about 15 kms from it, when they got mortared at a command post the previous day. Here, the tape breaks.

Date Unknown

Hunter records himself in Hong Kong and said he is going back to Saigon the day after tomorrow with Nik Wheeler (Newsweek photographer) and Nick Proffitt, and says he went to 5 miles beyond the front, where earlier the day before, journalists had been mortared. He said 'it was the first time I even heard an artillery shell fired, and when they come in hit, it's an unnerving experience.' He could not go the day before as he had to get a press card. He mentioned the Wednesday night panic and Thursday night panic, so I think he must have gone out to the front after that.

He speaks about panic and calm, and how the panic comes to him at night. Recalling an image of a soldier firing into the sky with an M16, Hunter talks about the impersonalness of artillery and how an M16 at point blank range is even more personal.

Tuesday (my reckoning is 15th April)

Hunter speaks about the Vietnamese backlash after Ford's speech. He wants to get communications set up, and knows he will have to go back in for an 'extremely ugly thing' and not come back out in the air evacuation. He is well aware of what is happening, calm, but contemplative. Here is a man who has been up close to a war zone, and he now considers not evacuating with the rest.

From a 'luxury hotel' in Hong Kong, Hunter contemplates returning to Saigon for the last days, confessing that other correspondents think he's crazy for trying to go back. He says, 'But Saigon and the Continental are something else... and if the worst happens it happens... I am not looking for the end, but I am not that worried about it either. I've had a good time and made a few points, and I don't know if that justifies doing killcrazy or suicidal things. If I really

thought it was suicidal I would not go back in, but the fact is that it's not safe....' This is dark, but he sounds coherent. Also it's interesting to hear him talking about 'going back into the eye of the storm, and it will be a storm.'

The recording pauses and restarts later at '[f]ive minutes to six at the Newsweek office.' Hunter reads the wire print, in which 'President Ford agrees to an unusual emergency meeting.' He mentions that Democrats are 'urging the president to withdraw all remaining American civilians from Saigon in seven days using only civilian aircraft.'

'Here I am on Tuesday.'

And Hunter gives us a day!

He notes, 'Here I am on Tuesday, seven days from now would be next Monday. I am making plane reservations for next Thursday or Friday, which should make it pretty close.'

Wednesday 16th April

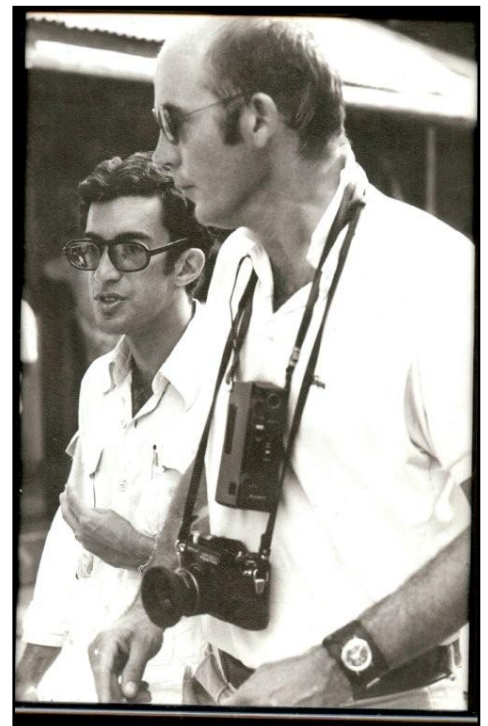
Hong Kong. Hunter reads out news, which includes an explosion of a bomb store at Biên Hòa airbase. On the Thursday 17th of April, it was reported in the *New York Times* that 'air traffic had been hampered by damage from the shelling and from the explosion two nights ago of a large bomb storage dump. That blast apparently was set off by a commando attack.' These are the same events and give us another hard date.

Saturday 19th April

'We had just come back.... from the weekly Viet Cong Press Conference, in the heavily guarded VC compound right in the middle of Saigon's Tan Son Nhut air base,' Hunter says. 'That was one of the last press conferences the provisional revolutionary government (or Viet Cong as the American Press calls it) ever held at Tan Son Nhut. About 10 days later, they emerged from their barbed wire compound and took over the whole base along with the rest of Saigon.'

There

is a photo by Neal Ulevich entitled 'Press Corps en route to news conference, Vietnam, 1975.' Hunter appears here in sunglasses, white Polo shirt, shorts and tennis shoes, but he has a distinctive watch, one of those leather bands. There is also an excellent photo of Hunter with David Andelman in Vientiane, capital of Laos, with the



distinctive watch. This photograph is featured in Hunter's interview with Roy Hamric (<https://royhamric.com/2010/05/16/hunter-thompson-in-laos/>)

Xuan Loc fell on the 19th of April and Hunter makes mention of this in his 'Interdicted Dispatch from the Global Affairs Desk,' in *Rolling Stone*, 187, May 22nd 1975.

Monday 21st of April

Memo to Paul Scanlon of the *Rolling Stone* stating he will file another 2000 words, which should arrive Monday morning or afternoon, or Tuesday morning.

Tuesday 22nd of April

Hunter sends a letter to Col.Vo Dan Giang, PRG.
Jann Wenner sends Hunter a letter, explaining phones are cut, and not really giving any helpful advice.

Wednesday 23rd of April

Hunter sent a memo to Tim Crouse % Paul Scanlon suggesting that Tim could take over the Global Affairs desk there in suite 37 on April 26th. Hunter planned to leave.

Xuan Loc falls.

Thursday 24th of April

Journalist James Fenton from *The Independent* reports on arriving at Saigon. 'On 24 April 1975, the day before my 26th birthday, I boarded the plane from Bangkok for Saigon,' he writes 'I checked in at the small hotel near the market where I had stayed before, and went off to dinner at the Continental. The garden was crowded - *tout le monde* was there. The famous Dr Hunter S Thompson was there, surrounded by admirers, and was rumoured to have bought a gun.'

Saturday 26th of April

Hunter has a plan to go 'off to Laos on Saturday and then back to Hong Kong and Bali.' At this stage, I reckon Hunter left Vietnam. He says 'on the last commercial airliner still flying out of here...Air Vietnam Flight 783 to Hong Kong. China Airlines stopped today apparently... anycase we are leaving Vietnam and I have a feeling I will not be back to it, I don't know why. Maybe I will.'

'The ugliness.. Toilet paper... it suddenly dawned on me... whiskey shortage, the sort of breakdown that makes life more and more miserable... I just have a suspicion I will never be back here.'

Wednesday 30th of April

Saigon Falls.

Thursday 1st of May

Hunter sends a memo to Jann Wenner from the Repulse Bay Hotel, No 205.

Sunday 4th of May

Hunter writes a memo, noting that he had a tortuous five day journey from Saigon via Hong Kong and Bangkok from the Lane Xang Hotel, which he arrived at last night (2.30am) in Vientiane, Laos. Photos exist of him in Vientiane.

Viewpoints

Ronald Yates said of Hunter in an interview 'What a perfect metaphor for this f...ked up place,' the late Hunter S Thompson, who was covering the end of the war for *Rolling Stone* Magazine, told me one evening. We were having dinner at the My Canh floating restaurant on the Saigon River. 'Lies, deceit and betrayal. Hey, I think I have the name for my next book.' The 'gonzo' journalist then took a long drag on a fat Buddha grass joint and asked if he could ride out with me to 'the action' the next day.

I dreaded taking Thompson with me because he had a tendency to wander off. I always feared that I would return to Saigon and have to announce that Thompson was captured by the Viet Cong or had stepped on a mine. I didn't want to be responsible for the death or capture of 'Uncle

Duke' the *Doonesbury* cartoon strip character modelled on Thompson.

'What a thought,' someone said one evening. 'If Thompson gets captured he will get the whole North Vietnamese Army high and the war will be over tomorrow.'

Neal Ulevich, in his book *Polaroids Tell the Story of Those Who Covered Vietnam*, took an excellent photo of Hunter and said 'Although famed for altered states, Thompson did not act crazy or stoned in Saigon. In fact Thompson was an Air Force Veteran and his conduct while gathering facts was understated, respectful.'

Loren Jenkins, at an unknown date, recalls that 'the shit came down and the North Vietnamese came into town....We all were evacuated off the roof of the American Embassy in Helicopters...I spent four days on a Carrier... I made my way to Bali, Sanur Beach, the Tandjung Sari Hotel... on the first night at about three in the morning, there's this racket and gunfire and loud sounds and explosions. I jumped up... and there's Hunter standing down in the salon with his tape recorder blaring...

We spent the next ten days on the beach, talking about our Vietnam War.. It was such a good story, It was a classic story. Hunter was going to write it - he just never got down to it. It really was my greatest disappointment.'

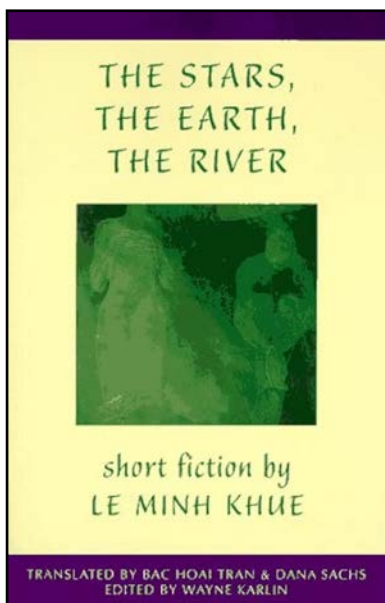
Hunter's own reflection on Vietnam from *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72* is simple. He recorded it on the road to Xuân Lộc at the front, watching refugees, and noting his own panic and unpredictability of everything: 'You maybe do think the world is about to end.'



Lê Minh Khuê's Postwar Fiction

By Allison Hartman Adams

Lê Minh Khuê's short story collection, *The Stars, The Earth, The River* (1995), is the first in the series *The Voices of Vietnam* from Curbstone Press aimed at refocusing the camera on Vietnamese writers who otherwise wouldn't get much exposure in the West. Lê Minh Khuê's characters defy stereotypes. In his introduction, Wayne Karlin reminds the reader that the characters in these pages are neither "sadistic, heartless communist robots," or "saintly simple-yet-wise peasant-or poet warriors." They are, simply put, real people. Additionally, Lê Minh Khuê's sparse, clean style leaves room for narrative subtlety that allows her to simultaneously address real problems in post-war Vietnam, and also sidestep harassment from government censors.



Lê Minh Khuê was born Thanh Hoá in 1949 near Hanoi. She lost her parents to the Land Reforms of the 1950s and was raised by an aunt and uncle who encouraged her education—both in literature and national pride. Hers was the generation of Vietnamese youth who viewed liberation from colonialists plaguing her country as the pinnacle of patriotism. In 1965, when a recruiter for the People's Army of Viet Nam arrived in her village, Lê Minh Khuê lied about her age and volunteered to serve as a sapper. For four years, she repaired damage done by American bombs along the Truong Son Strategic Supply Route, better known as the Hồ Chí Minh Trail. She carried books by London, Chekov, and Hemingway every step of the way.



Lê Minh Khuê's characters are driven by a sense of longing. Each of them is on a journey—both literal and figurative—and few of them have found their balance. Indeed, it is their *imbalance*, brought on by everything from blind idealism to toxic materialism, that galvanizes their hard-won lessons. Imbalance is the vehicle by which Lê Minh Khuê both memorializes a changing Vietnam and subtly criticizes the government that attempts to guide it.

In a letter to Karlin, the editor of the collection, Lê Minh Khuê wrote "the war years were both the worst time and the best time for me." This tension is clear in her short story, "The Distant Stars" (published at 19), which follows three young girls living in a cave on the Hồ Chí Minh Trail, rushing out to rebuild bombed-out sections of the road, just as Lê Minh Khuê did herself. There is a temptation to see this story as thinly-veiled propaganda, but the three girls, Dinh, Nho, and Thao, are far from the dewy-eyed, straight-backed, young saviors of the country. They are teenagers, at turns frustrated, tired, hungry, homesick, irritable. They stand on their "strategic hill, where wishes and desires were born, dreaming of a Vietnam after the war." They test out new gender roles—like all women who are asked to go to war (and who then are asked to surrender their newfound liberty when the boys want to come home to the way things used to be). They fantasize about demanding romance and fun from life, and avoiding the arduous labor of traditional wife-dom.

When Lê Minh Khuê's own enlistment ended in 1969, she found the Hanoi of her youth changed. It had, in her view, become petty, competitive, and materialistic. She retreated back into the war as a correspondent and continued to travel with combat units until the end of the war in 1975. We see her characters encountering this same brutal reality: the country they loved—fought for, died for—has changed. The people have changed. In "The Blue Sky" (1986), protagonist Ninh is a reporter who suffers from an inability to "distinguish between love for an individual soldier and lover for all of them," so her war reporting becomes overwrought and sentimental. Her editor chides her, telling her "write something more believable." Perhaps drawing on personal experience, Lê Minh Khuê paints the editor as a careless and gutless sort of man, who is, much to Ninh's frustration, actually quite good at his job. By the end of the story, Ninh's writing has become "accurate, temperate, and no longer as full of fire as before." Some part of Ninh—and the spirit of Vietnam—has died, and the reader feels that loss. Ninh understands the love the three girls in "The Distant Stars" feel for their Vietnam, a "love beyond words, that only someone who had stood on that hill in those moments... could understand fully." But Ninh's editor scrapes that love away to make room for the official Party message, a message which is, ironically, at odds with the idealism that Ninh professes.

This rude awakening is echoed in Lê Minh Khuê's 1987 short story "A Day on the Road," published the same year the author won the Viet Nam Writers Association national award for best short stories. The narrator, a member of the Youth Brigade who saw friends die in the war, reflects on an ex-boyfriend's shallowness as she carries heavy bags filled with gifts to his family in Hanoi. Duc, she tells us, who once was a simple, loving young man, was bewitched by products newly available in the country (sponges, nylon

brooms, etc.) and “went looking for a more comfortable life in a city to whose liberation he had contributed almost nothing.” Lê Minh Khuê takes her condemnation of consumerism a step further in the 1992 story, “Scenes from an Alley,” wherein the characters blackmail a rich Westerner who accidentally kills a neighborhood girl while driving drunk. The couple fantasizes about arranging a similar “accident” for their burdensome aging father. The Westerner is a gold mine, they think, and even though they live in comfort, “who would turn down a few million more?”

Similarly, “The Coolie’s Tale” (1989), “The Almighty Dollar” (1990), and “Tony D” (1991) all delve into the murderous lengths the characters will go to to achieve some level of comfort. Lê Minh Khuê examines the new generation that has forgotten the sacrifices of the war in favor of a distinctly western consumerism. But these stories, as disquieting as they are, are overshadowed by the tragic ugliness of “An Evening Away From the City” (1982). While traveling for business, the main character Tan visits an old classmate, Vien. On her journey, Tan recalls their bright youth together at school, one that was cut short for Vien by her untimely pregnancy. However, when the friends are reunited, Tan is horrified to find her delicate, clever friend turned into a coarse, shouting, exhausted wreck of a woman, who is perfectly content to ask the family dog to lap up her infant son’s diarrhea. Her children are near-feral, but Vien, who’s been all but abandoned by her husband, defends and dotes on them as only a desperate mother could. Tan promises that she will rescue Vien by helping her return to university. Back at home, however, Tan is simply too busy with social engagements to manage fulfilling her promise. Even being called out by her somewhat boring (but financially secure) husband doesn’t jostle Tan towards compassion. His is the last voice we hear in the story, as he reflects on his wife’s callous disregard for an old friend. “Shallowness,” he thinks, “could be a kind of crime.” And indeed, this shallowness, Tan’s choice to leave Vien to her fate, is more chilling than the desperate deprivation that led Lê Minh Khuê’s other characters to murder.

As much as Lê Minh Khuê’s stories critique this obsession with material wealth, she is also careful to give context for it. Her characters long for love, and the loss of it is often what drives them to misery. In “Fragile as a Sunray” (1992) the narrator’s mother, as a young doctor serving with a military unit, fell in love with a foreign POW. “Now, twenty years have passed and many barriers have been torn down,” Lê Minh Khuê writes. “And yet [the mother’s] hope has never been fulfilled.” Similarly, in “Rain” (1991), the Ngan hopes for love and marriage with Quoc are unfulfilled after he seduces and then leaves her. In “The Last Rain of the Monsoon” (1991), Duc advises his friend Mi to resist entering into an affair with a mutual friend that she thinks will help her avoid the fate of a wife who will “erode a little more every day...become stupid, lethargic, housebound.” Of course, the affair does not succeed, and Duc is left at the end observing Mi, “crying over love, over the trivial things of life, over extravagant wishes.” It is the implicit statement here, one present in her 1990 story “A Very Late Afternoon,” that underscores Lê Minh Khuê’s understanding of what has happened to her country. Her characters from her earlier stories are ripe and full of love—a love entered into with wild abandon. Now, love is “trivial” and “extravagant” and those who pursue it are invariably disappointed.

“A Small Tragedy” (1990) is the most Shakespearean of Lê Minh Khuê’s work and is also the clearest criticism of the government. Bac Hoai Tran, the translator of the collection, describes it as “one of the most important stories in contemporary Vietnamese literature.” When young journalist Thao returns home to report on a murder, she discovers the ugly secrets of her Uncle Tuyen, a high-ranking municipal offi-

cial. During the war, and against the advice of military personnel, Tuyen ordered hundreds of young volunteers to fill in bomb craters during the day, in full view of the American F105 bombers. The gruesome outcome is obvious. The volunteers, one character recalls, “were empty-handed, puny, running like ants on the naked riverbank where all the trees had already been mowed down by bombs.” Instead of outwardly criticizing the government here, Lê Minh Khuê simply uses the language of the official report to underscore the callous idiocy of these decisions: “At the G Bridge we shot down an AD6. The soldiers and people put on a magnificently heroic struggle.” Lê Minh Khuê’s clever move here allows Tuyen’s immorality—a stand-in for the government’s own—to show itself clearly. She needn’t editorialize at all. Tuyen’s comeuppance is ugly, sad, and results in the death of his own son, who he abandoned with his first wife during the Land Reform in order to indulge in the promotion of his political career. Unaware of his parentage, this son is engaged to Tuyen’s own daughter—his own half-sister. One wonders which part of this tragedy is “small.”

Despite this disappointment and frustration, however, Lê Minh Khuê closes the collection with a note of hope. In one of her most famous stories, “The River” (1986), the characters turn not toward consumerism, wealth, or power, but toward the past, and with it, respect, honor, and hope—perhaps even the same hope that Dihn, Nho, and Thao might have imagined while huddled in the cave on the Trail, listening for the approach of American planes. In this story, the protagonist travels home to honor a beloved aunt at the Hundredth Day Ceremony (100 days after her death). As he travels, he thinks of his formidable aunt’s life, of how she persevered every day during the war, teaching any child who wanted to learn, giving birth in a bomb shelter, raising children to strive for something better. The characters around her are not the shallow, selfish people of Lê Minh Khuê’s other stories, but are upright and hard-working. The narrator finds his home changed after so many years away, but ends the story by discovering that, underneath the urban noises and clutter of imported products, the locals still make sugar syrup the same way as they did in his childhood.

Not everything has changed after all. Love of country and love of family, underpinnings of Vietnamese culture, win out in the end, even after the long slog through the ugliness of post-war rebirth and reinvention.

In 2019, Lê Minh Khuê was honored with the Lifetime Literature Award by the Hanoi Writers’ Association (HWA). She has published 20 novels, only a few translations

of which are available to Western readers. Ken Burns and Lynn Novick interviewed her for their 2017 series *The Vietnam War*. She continues to shine as one of Vietnam’s most important literary voices, and we are lucky to have this glimpse into what war and post-war life actually looked like, unfiltered by the stereotypes of American cinema.



The Forever War and Coming Home by Chuck Surface

After reviewing Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* on his website (2010), Andrew Liptak concludes that the novel, despite its plot, isn't military science fiction. It's not a "good romp with powered armor and shooting" that focuses on ordinance or military theory. There are several parallels with *Starship Troopers* by Robert Heinlein. Haldeman and Heinlein focus on first-person characters involved in wartime activities, Heinlein's Johnny Rico against the Bugs, and Haldeman's William Mandella against the Taurans. Also, both integrate future technologies, armored war suits, and other military advances. However, Haldeman says his novel isn't a reaction to *Starship Troopers*, which he felt was well-crafted and honest, although he disagreed with how it glorified war. Influenced by Heinlein? Sure, but not reacting to him.

I partially disagree with Liptak's assertion. Haldeman indeed did craft a war novel, just not a traditional one filled with gung-ho and boo-yah. Instead, Haldeman uses his experiences from Vietnam, offering a statement about war's futility, the emotional effects on soldiers, and the overall sense that good and evil aren't so clearly defined. Writing for *The Guardian* (April 14, 2011), Sam Jordison takes these themes one step deeper, homing in on one particular military experience, coming home from war, and asserts that Haldeman infuses his personal experiences from Vietnam into Mandella's narrative:

Like so many others, Haldeman was conscripted against his will, plunged into horror, wounded and dropped back into a society that now felt alien to him. *The Forever War* is a clear attempt to come to terms with that experience – even if it's set light years away. In 1997, the novel's hero William Mandella (a near anagram of the author's full name Joe William Haldeman) becomes one of the first batch of recruits sent into the far reaches of space to do battle with a clone-based species called The Taurans.

Society felt alien because Einsteinian time dilation alters the course of time for Mandella and his colleagues. They fight battles on distant worlds reached through collapsars, which slow time considerably for them. Through the novel's progression, years pass for Mandella while hundreds of years pass in real space. Jordison continues describing this phenomenon and how it relates to coming home:

[Mandella] hates fighting – but finds the return to earth even more upsetting. Only two years have passed for him, but thanks to a quirk of relativity and the fact that he's been travelling near the speed of light, a full decade has passed on earth. He can't fit in. It's too violent, too many customs have changed (even his mother has adopted the kind of homosexual relationship encouraged by authorities eager to control the population) and too few people understand what he has gone through.

The above refers to Mandella's first return home during a section Haldeman calls "You Can Never Go Back," but that Ben Bova thought was too negative for inclusion into the version that first appeared in *Analog*. Later, Ted White

would publish it in *Amazing*, and in 1991 this portion became included in what Haldeman feels is the definitive version of *The Forever War*.

Mandella returns after a decade has passed back home to find that the population has exploded so sharply that homosexuality is promoted to control birth rates. Crime is soaring so many employ bodyguards even for simple trips to the market. Food has become so limited that governments have converted economies to ones based on caloric currencies. Eventually, Mandella winds up living with Marygay Potter, his fellow soldier and love interest, and her family in a remote commune. After the brutal deaths of Marygay's family and the death of his mother, Mandella and Marygay opt to re-enlist, earning promotions to lieutenant, sort of a reenlistment bonus. They had been adamant about not re-signing, but they couldn't adjust back into the world.

Mandella and Marygay are promoted to majors and are separated into different areas of conflict, and when the war finally ends, they return to Earth again, now during 3143, quite a span from when they first left in 1997. Humanity has evolved into clones of a single individual collectively called man. Although only a few years had passed for Mandella, the war, which lasted 1,143 years, had ended 221 years ago. What to do with soldiers returning home so far out of time and culture? After describing the cloning process and how humankind operates, Man explains Mandella's options:

There are some planets, however, on which humans are born in the normal, mammalian way. If my society is too alien for you, you go to one of these planets. If you wish to take part in procreation, I will not discourage it. Many veterans ask me to change their polarity to heterosexual so that they can more easily fit into these other societies. This I can do very easily. (260)

Mandella and Marygay opt for Middle Finger, a planet set up under the standards Man outlined, and continue with their lives.

So, the coming home experience plays an important thematic role throughout *The Forever War*, and we remember that Sam Jordison asserted that Haldeman is attempting to "come to terms with that experience." I can't speak directly about Haldeman's experiences coming home, but a sizeable body of recollections exists online that features Vietnam veterans describing their experiences. How do these measure up with Mandella's despite Haldeman's presenting them through a fantastical science-fiction lens?

Arguably, the most prominent attempt at cataloging Vietnam veterans' coming-home experiences is Bob Greene's *Homecoming: When the Soldiers Returned From Vietnam* (1989). After hearing stories about people spitting on returning veterans, Greene asked via his newspaper column: "Were you spat upon when you returned from Vietnam?" He wanted to know if these stories were true or myths, and he wanted "approximate dates, places, and circumstances." He tells us what happened next:

The response was astonishing. From every section and corner of the country, well over a thousand people took the time to sit down, put their thoughts on paper, and tell me what happened

when they returned to the United States from Vietnam. Virtually no one sent a letter with a simple confirmation or denial of being spat upon; the letters were long, sometimes rambling, invariably gripping essays on what it felt like to come back home after that war. These are the stories -- some shocking, many disturbing, some loving -- that I have compiled in *Homecoming*.

I'm quoting the above from an article Greene wrote for Deseretnews.com that includes examples of the responses he received. These were not monolithic, of course. Greene separated the letters veterans sent him into sections from those who had been spat upon and those who hadn't. A third section, then, records those who were shown kindness upon returning home. Beyond spitting, veterans described insults, bullying, and other unkind acts. Interested readers can find Greene's article here: <https://www.deseret.com/1989/2/4/18800994/vietnam-vets-recall-their-homecomings-often-painfully>

On Ranker.com (2019), Melissa Sartore lists several narratives from veterans relating not only occurrences similar to Greene's respondents but also emotional turmoil. I'll share a couple that caused me to reflect upon William Mandella's fictional situation, whether or not they jibed with his reality:

- Michael Ball, a 21-year old veteran from Midland, Michigan, found himself in what *Life* magazine called "limbo." Reporter John Olson did a profile on Ball in 1971, detailing the struggles he faced upon his return. Ball bought a car when he got back to the United States with the \$3,000 he saved in Vietnam. With half of the money going to "the down payment on the car... monthly insurance, rent, school bills, beer and food soon ate up the rest." Ball's "\$175 a month under the GI Bill for school tuition and expenses, and another \$46 disability for [a hurt] knee and bad nerves" didn't "cover his expenses." Unable to find a job after eight months, he was left with his past dreams and a new existence defined by Vietnam sapping him of "the potential for making new plans and having dreams."
- David Perry had a different reaction after seeing how his fellow Americans treated returning veterans. He recalled walking through the airport in 1969 in California after his first tour: "Man, my chest was puffed out. I was proud of my service in Vietnam ... I thought to myself, all the people I saw get hurt, all the people I saw [lose their lives] was all for nothing. At that moment I was not really proud of my country. After that I did not have much respect for our government for many years because they let that happen to us."

Michael Ball's limbo mirrors William Mandella's before he and Marygay decided to re-enlist at the end of "You Can Never Go Back." Like Ball, Mandella has back pay, albeit exceptionally more given that time dilation expanded his time served so mightily. Still, inflation made Mandella's pay not so abundant. Mandella does, however, struggle with his mother's latent homosexuality, changes with the monetary economy, and how aggressive society has become, until finally deciding to re-enter the military.

Unlike David Perry, Mandella feels no pride in his wartime associations. He doesn't puff out his chest. Instead, throughout the novel he illustrates how authorities use hypnotic techniques to increase bellicosity among the troops.

And when he elevates to major, he undergoes conditioning that rapidly "inserts" military knowledge and skill into his psyche -- quite inhumane and dehumanizing by most standards. Both Perry and Mandella do lose respect for their governments springing from having witnessed people losing their lives for nothing.

Finally, on USWings.com, SFC (Ret) David Hack posts the following statistics:

- Vietnam Veterans represented 9.7% of their generation.
- They have a lower unemployment rate than the same non-vet age groups.
- Their personal income exceeds that of our non-veteran age group by more than 18 percent.
- 87% of Americans hold Vietnam Veterans in high esteem.
- There is no difference in drug usage between Vietnam Veterans and non-Vietnam Veterans of the same age group (Source: Veterans Administration Study).
- Vietnam Veterans are less likely to be in prison -- only one-half of one percent of Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes.
- 85% of Vietnam Veterans made successful transitions to civilian life.
- 97% of Vietnam Veterans were honorably discharged.
- 91% of Vietnam Veterans say they are glad they served.

Hack doesn't offer much about how he gathered these numbers, but they paint a different picture than imagery about spat-upon souls painfully striving to reintegrate back into "the world." I could conclude that there were many responses to returning home depending on individual outlook and perspective. I will conclude, however, by outlining my non-veteran encounters with those dealing with these issues.

Over my decades being a suicide-prevention counselor, I've encountered many returned soldiers struggling with PTSD, long-term physical disability, and mental distress. Hack's findings don't mean we should ignore those not finding their landing gear -- we should honor them and help them. I wonder if many would jump at the chance for relocation to Haldeman's Middle Finger or some similar world because though they lived through no physical time dilation like Mandella and his colleagues, they did encounter an emotional time dilation from having been out of the world, one which kept moving while they were serving in-country. So much changes over so little time. When I returned from nearly three years serving in Peace Corps Ukraine, I required nine months to fully integrate, or rather adapt, to what greeted me. The economic crisis of 2008 left me with extended unemployment, important friends had moved past associating with me, and even smartphones had proliferated. So, for nine months I waded through crises until finally reestablishing myself.

But, you know what? No one was shooting at me. I was not witnessing friends killed daily. No one was shooting at me. So what happened to me most assuredly was less intense than what individuals coming home from Vietnam or other war venues might endure. This is what Haldeman so deftly portrays, and while *The Forever War* doesn't fulfill Andrew Liptak's conceptions about military novels, it gives us a symbolic representation of another layer, an unglorified stratum that enlightens readers and hopefully inspires compassion for any not-so-fortunate to fall into Hack's statistical catchment. War is Hell. Let's never forget that.

Little Saigon: How the Vietnam War transformed San Jose Cuisine

by Chris Garcia

Silicon Valley is, for better or worse, a melting pot.

The racial and ethnic mix of the city has been in flux from the very beginning, and one thing that has helped build the city, other than cheap land and fertile ground, is the accessibility of everything. San Francisco was always far more sectioned than San Jose. Though San Jose had a Chinatown and Japantown, various groups blended more naturally in SJ, partly because of a flatter geography that didn't immediately portion off sections of the city. Various forms of displaced peoples have fled to California over the decades, and have built the Valley into what we know it as today.

The Valley had been the destination of tens of thousands of Vietnamese refugees following the 1975 fall of Saigon. Many would arrive at Camp Pendleton, down in Southern California, and then be on their way. They were supposed to be relocated and spread across the country, but really they mostly ended up having a few specific destinations. These were Houston, New Orleans, Los Angeles, and San Jose. These were all areas of warm weather, with thriving, multi-ethnic communities. Orange County has a famous Little Saigon, which drew tens of thousands, but it was San Jose that seemed to draw not only primary settlers, but those who came across later. Many refugees also came across in

other ways, often on boats, and some by crossing the border from Canada or Mexico. These tended to convene more in the Valley than down South, largely because it was cheaper, and the political climate perhaps a shade less murky.

As soon as an ethnic group is settled, they begin to pick up jobs in the dominant business concerns of the area. In the 1970s and 80s, Silicon Valley tech companies hired a large number of Vietnamese employees. The communities also begin to establish their own staple businesses. The first of these are almost always food-related. Restaurants and grocery stores are often the first, which is common with every wave of immigration this country has ever seen. In the old days, you could identify places like North Beach and Chinatown in San Francisco by the signs for restaurants and little groceries. In San Jose, you know the percentage of Mexicans in a given region by the number of mercados overwhelming the Safeways.

The 20th century had seen foods in San Jose changed, almost always by immigrant populations fleeing war and other strife. Mexican, Central and South Americans communities had been in San Jose since before it was a city, and they had an established food culture, somewhat based



around the taco, spicy soups like Birria and menudo, and the burrito. There was a fairly large resident Chinese population in the 19th century that had waned in the early 20th century, only to bounce back significantly after the Maoist revolution triggered another wave of immigration. Japantown had been home to thousands as early as the 1880s, and the numbers increased in the 40s and 50s after WWII. Various people from around what had been the Pacific Theater arrived in San Jose in the late 40s and early 50s, especially Filipinos and Indonesians. They all opened restaurants, but more importantly, worked at restaurants and incorporated other cooking styles. A unique variant of fusion happened in San Jose, such as Mr. Chow's Chinese Fast Food & Donuts, and continues to this day, often influenced by those fleeing war zones like the Vietnamese population in the 1970s.

One of the first significant Vietnamese eateries in San Jose was Lee's Sandwiches. The bánh mì is a classic Vietnamese sandwich, and one that shows the French influence while making use of ingredients that were always a part of cuisine in Vietnam. By the 1950, bánh mì sandwiches (bánh mì is really just the bread, though it's used as the name of the dish by many restaurants in the US) were a widely-available street food, usually filled with pate or pork, cilantro, white radish, and bean sprouts.

Chieu Le, founder of Lee's Sandwiches, came to the US by sea in 1979 as part of the massive exodus out of Vietnam starting in 1979. While people had been fleeing for years, this was the biggest push since 1975. The Le family had run a sugar refinery in Vietnam before the war. He first headed to New Mexico, then tried Monterey, before settling in San Jose in 1980. He worked on a food truck, which at that point likely would have been either a breakfast truck (San Jose had several of these that were a major part of areas where construction was going on for most of the 70s and 80s) or a Mexican lunch truck (which were incredibly plentiful, though the main competition was from what my dad always called 'Tamale Wagons' where women would drive a station wagon to job sites and sell tamales—3 for 2 bucks!).

In 1981, he bought his own truck, and Chieu Le and his wife Yen sold burritos, burgers, chow mein, and of course bánh mì, at various office sites around San Jose. I believe, though I'm not 100% certain, this would have been the truck my dad would get lunch at when he worked security, which would mean I almost certainly had one of the burgers from Lee's when Mom would take me to see him. Chieu Le's brother Henry bought another truck, and the two formed Lee Bros. Foodservice, Inc. as a catering distribution company. These ended up becoming massively popular, and bánh mì began to play a larger role, as many of the trucks they serviced were owned by immigrants from Vietnam. This helped spread the popularity of the bánh mì outside of Little Saigon, which was where about 30% of the Vietnamese population worked. In 1983, Chieu Le's parents started borrowing his truck to sell bánh mì on the weekends to San Jose State kids. This was wicked popular, and other restaurants in the area were not happy about the truck parking there. So, to make everything better, they opened a restaurant right by City Hall, called Lee's Sandwiches.

Lee's Sandwiches grew, and not just in San Jose, where it's still headquartered today. By 2001, they had three different restaurant concepts, and in 2005, they began to franchise. In 2006, they opened a 10K sq. ft. location in Houston. In 2008, they opened a location in Hồ Chí Minh City in Vietnam. They have grown to more than 50 stores, and are one of the most recognizable brands in Vietnamese restauranting.

Little Saigon in San Jose's East Side grew, and developers began to take notice. Malls that were popping up elsewhere around the Valley inspired large-scale indoor malls that served the large Asian populations of San Jose's East Side. Thus, Lion Plaza, the first San Jose Mall that focused on Asian customers, mostly Vietnamese, opened in 1983. This became a popular location for nearly every Vietnamese family in the area, because of the large supermarket and the incredible number and variety of shops, including clothing stores and nail salons (the history of how nearly half of all manicurists in the US today are of Vietnamese descent is really fascinating!).

There was also the food.

Pho Hoa, one of the best-known pho chains in America, was founded in 1983 in Lion Plaza. The noodle soup was phenomenal, and I can say that, other than Vietnamese people, Mexicans were some of the first San Jose locals to really dig in. Several varieties aren't that different from Menudo, you know. The chain grew, even a little more quickly than Lee's, and has done incredibly well. In 1993, about 90% of their customers were Asian, but recently, it's 50% or so. Part of that is that they've expanded into new markets, but a lot is due to the explosion in food culture that encourages once-underappreciated, non-European cuisines.

Also, pho is just awesome.

The thing about Lion Plaza was that it wasn't a single, one-dimensional shopping idea. There were so many different stores, which drew all sorts of different people, and it served as an unintentional meeting place. As the Mercury News once said, Lion Plaza is 'a place where no one makes a rendezvous, yet everyone comes.' There were many more Asian-centric malls founded in and around San Jose, but Lion Plaza has been one of the most popular, and it continues to be a focus of the Little Saigon community.

There is another idea, one that is born out of another, older tradition. The joke used to be that San Jose was the city where your Chinese food was cooked by a Mexican. This is actually true. The majority of cooks in San Jose, and up-and-down California, are Hispanic. Not chefs, mind you, but cooks, especially short-order cooks. Vietnamese restaurants tended to remain Vietnamese-run and operated. The introduction of chain Vietnamese restaurants, as well as Hawaiian and Korean, has led to a generation of Chicano cooks who have learned their trade by working in Vietnamese cuisine. This has helped to introduce a new form of fusion, though subtler. It's not all that unusual to find Sriracha, the hot sauce served with a lot of pho, at Mexican restaurants, and Tapatio alongside a bowl of Bun. This is best illustrated by the recent explosion of chè (Vietnamese dessert) shops, opened by multi-ethnic teams. They will happily serve sticky rice balls and mango cakes alongside flan and tres leches.

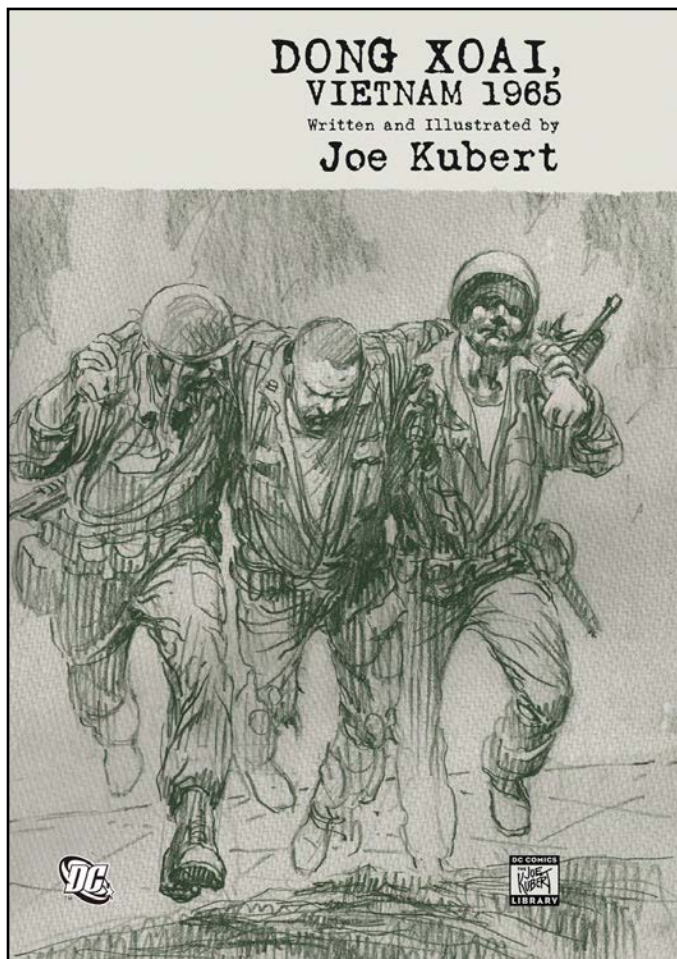
San Jose has seen an explosion in pho and bánh mì places over the last decade. Food trucks love bánh mì for the ease of preparation, and pho restaurants are opening at the rate of about 20 a year. Many of these are being founded by the grand-children of those who came to San Jose in the years following the Fall of Saigon. The Vietnam War forced new populations into San Jose, and here they were required to find new ways of making a living. This irreversibly changed the way that food evolved in Silicon Valley, and one-in-five new restaurants today are Vietnamese. Probably not a shock, as 1-in-10 residents of San Jose are of Vietnamese heritage.

The Kubert Connection

by James Bacon

Joe Kubert was born in 1926, in a part of Poland that is now Ozeriany, Ukraine, and moved to Brooklyn, New York, as a baby. "I got my first paying job as a cartoonist for comic books when I was eleven-and-a-half or twelve years old. Five dollars a page. In 1938, that was a lot of money," says Kubert. And so a career began. He went to the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan and enjoyed nearly continuous work over the years. Kubert worked on many comics, but is best known for his development of the Hawkman and Sgt Rock characters.

Kubert was conscripted in September of 1950 to serve in the 9th Infantry Division of the US Army. While half of the recruits he served with were killed in Korea, he survived due to being put to work for special services at Fort Dix, using his artistic skills painting signs, helmets, posters, and basic silk screens. Meanwhile he was still drawing comics, such as Foley of the Fifth in *All American Western* for DC, and later pursued a managing editor role at St John Comics.



In 1955, Kubert was again freelancing for DC comics, having done some work for *Two Fisted Tales*. He began this period with *Our Army at War* #32 while working elsewhere, but had sufficient work that he stuck with DC. He inked Carmine Infantino's pencils in Robert Kannigher's Flash story in *Showcase* #4, which heralded the start of the Silver Age in 1956.

Sgt Rock had an interesting germination. There were prototypes that appeared in the likes of *All American Men of War* #28 (December 1955) and then *The Four Faces of Sgt. Fay*

by Bill Finger with Joe Kubert, with mentions of a "stone face" and "Easy Company" in *All American Men of War* #39 (November 1956). Further mentions occurred in *Star Spangled War Stories* #53 (January 1957) *The Rock Sergeant*, with script by Bob Haney, pencils by Ross Andru, inks by Mike Esposito and *Our Army at War* #61 (August 1957), which features an unnamed Sgt in Easy Company. Robert Kannigher also wrote a story called "The Rock" in *GI Combat* #68 (January 1959).

These were the key issues, including *Our Army at War* #81 in April 1959, where another prototype appeared, followed by a cameo of Sgt for in *OAAW* #82 and the first full appearance in #83, June 1959. While never credited with his creation, nor desiring to and stating that "Rock was Bob's idea from start to finish, as far as I was concerned," (Schelly, 134) Kubert's style was key to Rock. He added a gritty and genuine look. While others like Russ Heath would nail every rivet of a tank in accuracy, Joe was the guy who did the pain and anguish, anxiety and bravery, darkness shadowily painted across faces tired of war.

Bob Kannigher created *Enemy Ace*—a loner, his best friend a wolf, wordlessly following a common path of hunting and killing, a German character—in *OAAW* #151, February 1965, eight months before Snoopy boarded his Kennel Sopwith Camel as the WWI Flying Ace.

Vietnam was happening. Captain Roger Donlon was serving as the commanding officer of the U.S. Army Special Forces Detachment A-726 at Camp Nam Dong when a reinforced Viet Cong battalion suddenly launched a full-scale, predawn attack on the camp on July 6th 1965. For his actions that day, he received the Medal of Honour. Donlon was a Green Beret.

Robin Moore had trained for nearly a year with the Green Berets, so that he could serve with them in Vietnam, he was a Nose Gunner in the USAAF during WW2 and studied at Harvard, and in 1963 at the age 37 was deployed with the 5th Special Forces Group on deployment to South Vietnam. He wrote *Green Berets* which was published in April 1965. According to Moore, Lt Gen William P. Yardborough, who had insisted he go through training school, suggested that *Green Berets* get a first class comic strip and be syndicated.

Initially Neal Adams was approached, but after a lunch with Moore he opted out, and suggested Kubert. Joe had sought a syndicated strip before, and as this was seen as the ultimate artistic goal, he embraced it. He went and met Green Berets, and like many WW2 Veterans supported the troops. (Note the Authors in *Galaxy*) The first series was syndicated September 20th 1965.

In January 1966, the "Ballad of the Green Berets" by Robin and Sgt Barry Sadler beat the Beatles' "Day Tripper," and the Stones' "As Tears Go By." In this, we see the complexity of the Vietnam War. The films we know now may play "California Dreamin'" by the Mamas & The Papas, but in that year, a pro-war song hit the top of the radio charts. This is important, and plays throughout all the aspects we look at when it comes to Vietnam: the juxtapositions, the Battle Hymn for Lt Calley, the *Galaxy* adverts, the challenge of those who felt they were anti-communist and pro-democracy against the those who saw themselves as pro-democracy and anti-corruption and death.

A second series of strips started on the 4th of April, 1966. In September of that year, as American newspapers



received complaints, forcing the country to consider what it was doing, Newsweek asked Kubert for his views. "I don't think we are taking any side, Hawk or Dove," Kubert said. "We're the big guy fighting the little guy and the American has always been for the underdog."

Can you imagine? The dream job. The scripts were not perfect at all, but syndication right, and one that Kubert felt connected to. He felt in tune with the men he met, the Green Berets themselves. But meanwhile he began to have doubts. "He began to see we shouldn't be in the war, and [Joe's still drawing The Green Beret]" said his wife Muriel Kubert (I have to live with this guy Bell, Blake 2002 twomorrow) and all the time Joe had more and more issues with the writer Jerry Cap. "Jerry, this isn't supposed to be a political cartoon," Joe said once, as Jerry tried to make the story polemic. This obviously had an impact and so, before the John Wayne film was even released, Joe finished on the strip, his last piece being the 7th of January, 1968.

Timing is everything. DC was waning, Marvel was rising, and so changes were needed at DC. Carmine Infantino led these, and brought in Joe as an editor. While Joe was strong willed and wanted to continue drawing, he was eager not be in the office all day every day, and not wear shirt and jacket. While Bob Kannigher may have been seen as part of what needed to be changed, Joe kept him. As things changed, so did Sgt Rock. Stories shifted to a very anti-war stance, OAAW #196 in August saw Rock on the cover exclaiming, "Stop the War! I want to get off!" OAAW #200 shows a ballad-singing soldier, festooned in flowers, with long locks, singing "Ode to Rock." Then we have OAAW #233 "Head Count," a clear Mỹ Lai allegory, asking if a GI is a murderer, asking whether Rock killed one of their own who had gone astray, and adding the Make War No More roundel.

Robert Kannigher and Joe Kubert had made Rock relevant, of the moment, conscious of what was going on, tired, war weary, and facing challenges like had been seen in the papers and news reports of the time. When asked about "Head Count" by *The New York Times*, Kubert said "Sgt Rock has become an actuality to readers over the past decades."

As he oversaw *Our Fighting Forces* (OFF), *Star Spangled War Stories* (SSWS) and *Our Army at War* (OAAW) all with multiple stories and titles morphed into reflecting the popular lead characters (The Losers, Unknown Soldier, Sgt. Rock, and Enemy Ace), there was a new angle: war stories had emotion, character; nothing was straightforward or simple.

One has to consider that while Stan Lee was taking no stance on the Vietnam War, Joe Kubert added the "Make War No More" roundel to the DC war comic line up from OFF cover date May/June 1971. This means it was on the Newstands about March. This was quite a clear step. In June, we see "Head Count" in OAAW # 233 and it continued there. The peak of U.S soldiers killed (16,899) came in 1968, but 1970 saw 6,179 U.S. soldiers killed, and continued news coverage of the amount of death in Vietnam.

One might say that Sgt Rock never glorified war, but this was an active effort to make a statement. The contextualisation though is really important. These comics were not just being read by children, and when one looks at *Our Army*

At War, for instance, there were many issues where the Letter Column contained letters from Vietnam.

One must mark *Our Army at War* 233 "Head Count" as an important comic. For sure, *Blazing Combat* some years before had set out a true picture of Vietnam, and was shut down for such a brave and principled stance, but times had changed. Even so, "Head Count" was a World War II story, acting as a metaphor for Mỹ Lai, with the town of Alim. But this is not just a children's comic. In this issue, both a student and a WWII veteran sends complimentary letters.

Letters are a vital part of understanding who was interacting with and reading comics, and some of note appear in issue 237, where there is mention of Carmine Infantino, Curt Swan and Denny O'Neil on Counterpoint on April 25th 1971. Issue 240 references issue 236 and also has another letter, both I share here.

The duffel bag and the flashbacks without dialogue in 22 Hours to S.F." all add up to superior entertainment that is really realistic (I remember my own departure involved a mortar attack and I didn't know anyone who "bought it") and underlines a message: Make War No More." Same for "No Beginning no End." I can't understand why man kills his brother. Make war vicariously with Sgt. Rock.

Jess Williams Austin, Texas

Dear Jess:

"22 Hours to San Francisco" was a tour-de-force by John Severin (of whom there ain't no better than). Mike Friedrich wrote it. "No Beginning end" was beautifully done by Frank Thorne (Tomahawk) and written by Bob Kanigher.

Dear Joe:

I write to you not only for myself, but for the entire Mortar Section of 2nd battalion. 26th Marines, 9th M.A.B. Hotel battalion-60m.m.

We are in Vietnam and most of us have seen quite a bit of the bitter battle. We are proud of our country and the fact that we are Marines fighting for that which is precious and valuable to all of us. But the following is why I write to you today.

Over here we have found a "hero" in Sgt. Rock. We get a kick out of his exciting adventures. His daring heroism and spirit seems to express the true valor of the American Soldier. Although he is in the Army, to us he's 100% Marine.

We only hope that we are fortunate enough, as in the past, to be able to continue receiving these stories from home.

Again our congratulations on the great stories of our number one man. Sgt. Rock.

Yours faithfully.

P.F.C. Kidd, P.F.C. Angel Cpl. Campbell, P.F.C. Butler, P.F.C. Soto, P.F.C. Stiller, Cpl. Moore, P.F.C. Glowacki L/Cpl. Newton, P.F.C. Roe, P.F.C. Hogan, L.Cpl. Lees

Gentlemen:

There are few things that have been so personally rewarding and satisfying as the receipt of your letter. Rest assured that all our efforts will be put forth to live up to your accolades.

Difficult stories do appear featuring Rock. He is captured and treated very badly as a prisoner. The cover features him tied to a chair, at gunpoint (OAAW #245), ultimately escaping and appearing initially really damaged. Rock is shot in the neck, striped in the snow, and his wound bandaged, but he still escapes using German uniforms (OAAW #246). Then Rock and Easy company are tasked with executing Americans in (OAAW #248, August 1972).

Even though Sgt Rock would end in 1988, Joe went on to found The Kubert School in New Jersey, encouraged by how much Europe loved his work.

David Anthony Kraft's Comics Interview #53 notes that Joe Kubert turned down a place on the Eclipse Comics' *Real War Stories* in 1987, which worked to address the wrongs of war. One might think that Joe had enough of war perhaps, but some of his most poignant works were ahead of him. He confronted head on the siege of Sarajevo and sought out to bring Ervin Rustemagić's story to readers in comics form. *Fax from Sarajevo* was published in 1996 and won an Eisner and Harvey Award, proving that his portrayal of real life during war was both accurate and beautifully brilliant within the sadness of the story.

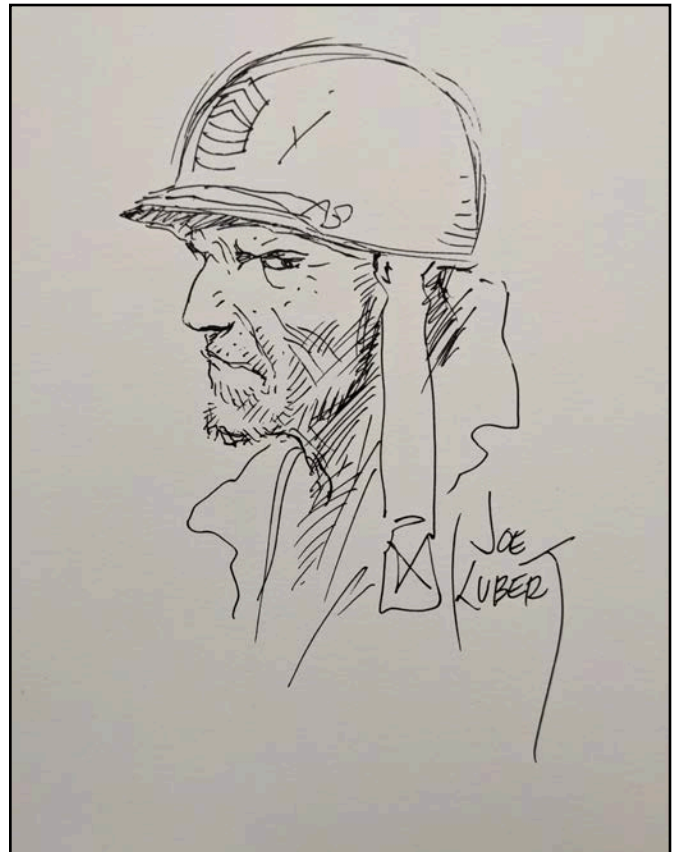
He then looked at the Holocaust, taking a sidewise step in time, setting out what might have been, had he not been brought to Brooklyn, but instead lived as a teenage Jew in Nazi-occupied Poland: the Warsaw Ghetto, the horror of losing his family, the knowledge of the camps, the Ghetto Uprising. *Yossel, April 19th, 1943*, released in 2003, is unique in how Kubert understands what was missed, feels and places a different personal self into such a traumatic place in time, linking to comics, as he would as an artist. It is a stunning work.

Joe returned to Sgt Rock also in 2003, with Brian Azzerello doing the story. *Sgt Rock: Between Hell and a Hard Place* challenges what it is to be a soldier, as we see a harsh and gritty inward looking situation, where one of Easy Company may have committed a war crime. This book showed that the skill was alive, and the Rock had tales to tell. Then Kubert went on to *Prophecy*, a six part series in 2006, which Kubert wrote and drew.

Then in 2010, there is a return to Vietnam. At this point, his work had moved towards realism aimed at adults, recognising the importance of being true. He undertook considerable research and spoke with those Special Forces Green Berets he had felt a comradeship with forty years previous. He sought out those who had fought on a mission to Dong Xoai, and the testimony of these soldiers formed

Kubert's *Dong Xoai Vietnam 1965*, which is a very poignant and thoughtful book.

The testimony, in many respects, takes one back to the letters of soldiers. We can see that Kubert was doing his best within what he felt he could do. I would contend Kubert was against the War. While it was hard to portray the utter atrocity that was Mỹ Lai, much was changed with "Head Count" (no offending officer, no clarity of Rock killing Doe, a lesser brutality) Kubert was aware and did what he could. He went through different phases, but as an oeuvre, it is a stunning amount of work to consider. Joe Kubert frequently does a fine job of asking what is right, placing the reader into the question, making one think.



Man of Rock by Bill Schelly was vital for this piece. A great read.

<http://matттаuber.blogspot.com/2008/03/interview-with-joe-kubert-about-robin.html?m=1>

To a Brighter Future

by Brenda Noiseux

When I learned Vietnamese-American actor Kelly Marie Tran was going to be in a Star Wars movie, I was stunned. It felt like an acknowledgement that yes, we're here and we're in science fiction, too!

One of the most well-known speculative fiction authors writing with Vietnamese perspective is Aliette de Boddard. She's written several award-winning space operas and fantasy novels, such as *Fireheart Tiger* and *The Tea Master and the Detective* inspired by Vietnamese culture.

In the last couple years, more authors with connections to Vietnam are enriching our options with cyberpunk thrillers, clone conspiracies, and historical fiction. T.R. Napper's *36 Streets* is set in the Old Quarter of Hanoi where he lived for several years. The novel has a distinctive feeling of place, including a note regarding the formatting of diacritics on Vietnamese words in the book. Similar to why I love watching science fiction shows from other countries, the nuance around culture plays an integral part into the story, rather than just trappings. *36 Streets* rides through the complexity of post-war violence, crime, and even features a disturbing "addictive immersive simulation of the US-Vietnam war".

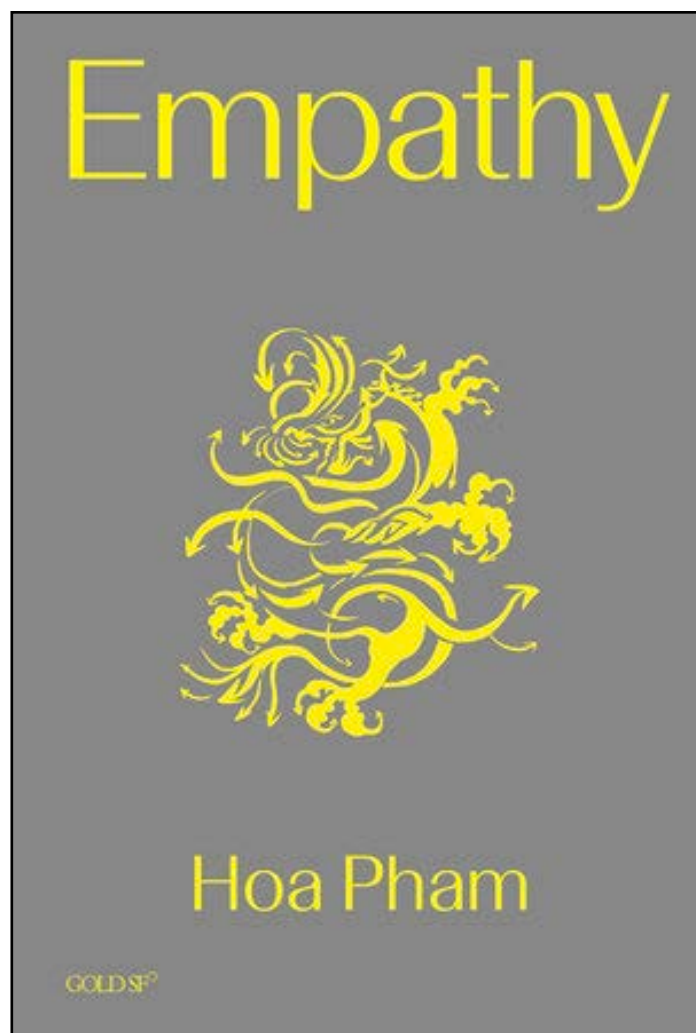
For the cat lovers, Doan Phuong Nguyen's book *Mèo and Bé* is a historical fiction following the young woman, Bé, in 1960s Vietnam. Her secret kitten, Mèo, provides comfort during the darkest of times, not only to Bé, but others

devastated by the war as well. In the author's note, Nguyen says, "Most novels about the Vietnam War revolve around South Vietnamese refugees fleeing the country after the fall of Saigon, or they are from soldiers' perspectives. These novels are heavily focused on the war after America entered the conflict. However, I wanted to tell the story from a different perspective."

Empathy, from Australian-Vietnamese author Hoa Pham, exposes readers to the bioethical questions and connections for pharmaceutical giants, illegal cloning, and street drugs. As *Locus* reviewer Ian Mond points out, "it's refreshing (and sadly still a novelty for mainstream novels published in the West) to read a science fiction novel that prioritises a non-Western perspective...rather than Europe or America, at the heart of the action, Pham does something similar with shadowy, "deep-state" conspiracies by having the Vietnamese Government pull the strings." I love this call out because it challenges who the "big bad" can be and why they are the "big bad", i.e. not necessarily the "bad" in the way a Western perspective would make them.

As I start to bask in the bright future of Vietnamese perspectives in sci fi and speculative fiction, all I can say is more, please. I look forward to reading what comes next.

<https://locusmag.com/2023/03/ian-mond-reviews-empathy-by-hoa-pham/>



Star Wars: An Allegory For the Vietnam War?

I am not so sure...by James Bacon

In 2018 James Cameron interviewed George Lucas and headlines since then have rung out: “*Star Wars* a Vietnam War Allegory” and “*Star Wars* was secretly George Lucas’ Vietnam protest.” I am very sceptical.

This all-American film, drawing on so many aspects, presents a challenge, because if it was an allegory for Vietnam, it does a poor job. The Empire is America, and the Vietnamese are the Rebels...where are the communists, and capitalists? Is that too obvious? That could be awkward or uncomfortable for some, right? The Imperials as Americans might not be so good, but then thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands (?) fans dress up as Imperials all the time, many for the best of reasons. I have been there when a cancer-aided child is delighted to see Vader and Co., These fans do it for the love, and no one sees them helping the parents with funds, nor the cleaning and preparation they undergo when they do hospital visits. It must be soul-destroying. Such an irony. These are good-hearted fans.

But Vietnam?

For sure, James Cameron’s *Aliens* felt like a science fictional Vietnam redemption film, wasn’t it? Grunts fighting gloriously against detestable Xenomorphs while the corporate scum look to make money out of it; Drop Ships that look like they have a morphed Huey UH1 and Cobra cockpit; Marines in M1 helmets. Sure, one can see that. But *Star Wars*?

I feel *Star Wars* was a return to a more simplistic Good Vs Evil story, which makes sense after the Vietnam War. It draws on the simpler fights: dog fighting in the skies and Stormtroopers in the trenches from the First World War; the Nazi Sturmabteilung, the grey and black jackbooted uniforms of the Germans; a behind the lines resistance attempt to get information and a final run like the Dambusters of WW2. Lucas has been clear that he based the films on old serials like Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon, and drew heavily on Akira Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai* and *The Hidden Fortress*, as well as Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. I am not sure where Vietnam sits in this very clear fight. America loves the underdog, let’s be honest. The Americans who died in Europe died in the fight against pure evil. This is not to denigrate those who served, or had no choice in serving elsewhere, but it was a very clear cut case with WW2.

We all love Rebels, but in many respects in 1940, Britain was the rebel in Europe, fighting against the might of an all-destroying Nazi regime, technological, industrial and efficient, their Blitzkrieg crushing so many countries. Of course Rebels fighting an evil Empire, like the Resistance, Irish rebels, or War of Independence rebels, connects to many fights against the British, their colonial greed, and hierarchy of aristocracy and royalty. The British crushed other countries like the Empire destroyed planets; they were evil too, using, plundering, raping, subjecting, happy to cast aside carelessly problems they created.

It took forty years for a resistance story that felt real, one that showed the complex mess it can be, as we see in *Andor*.

Lucas was heavily involved with *Apocalypse Now*. He was going to direct it, but it didn’t come to fruition at that time. Francis Ford Coppola was well aware of Vietnam, and Gary Kurtz, who worked so closely with Lucas on *Star Wars* and *Empire*, served in the Marines in Vietnam and was a cameraman. They were fully aware of the complexities of Vietnam, that is for sure.

I struggle. I get that an artist will leave interpretation to the viewer, but you would think that George Lucas would have made some reference to Vietnam at the time. Yet, we had to wait nearly 30 years before we got a hint.

With the re-release of *Return of the Jedi* in 2004, Lucas included an audio commentary in an attempt to justify his changes to a good film. In this commentary, he says that the Việt Cộng served as his inspiration for the Ewoks, who used their primitive weapons to defeat invaders.

Lucas then said in 2005 that the film “was really about the Vietnam War, and that was the period where Richard Nixon was trying to run for a [second] term, which got me to thinking historically about how democracies get turned into dictatorships. Because the democracies aren’t overthrown; they’re given away.”

OK, I thought as I read this in the *Chicago Tribune* 18th May 18, 2005. Sure, there may have been some background influence. If Nixon the Emperor, interesting. Who is Vader then...?

In *The Making of Star Wars*, J.W. Rinzler notes that in the 1973 draft for “The Star Wars,” Lucas mentioned an independent planet named Aquillae that was compared to North Vietnam, and that the Empire was “America 10 years from now.” This I totally get—sure influences at the fringes.

This view of some influence is confirmed when Micheal Ondaatje spoke with Walter Murch in an *Art of Editing Film* book: “Originally George Lucas was going to direct [*Apocalypse Now*], so it was a project that George and John [Milius] developed for [American] Zoetrope. That was back in 1969. Then, when Warner Brothers cancelled the funding for Zoetrope, the project was abandoned for a while. After the success of *American Graffiti* in 1973, George wanted to revive it, but it was still too hot a topic, the [Vietnam] war was still on, and nobody wanted to finance something like that. So George considered his options: What did he really want to say in *Apocalypse Now*? The message boiled down to the ability of a small group of people to defeat a gigantic power simply by the force of their convictions. And he decided, All right, if it’s politically too hot as a contemporary subject, I’ll put the essence of the story in outer space and make it happen in a galaxy long ago and far away. The rebel group were the North Vietnamese, and the Empire was the United States. And if you have ‘the force,’ no matter how small you are, you can defeat the overwhelmingly big power. *Star Wars* is George’s transubstantiated version of *Apocalypse Now*.”

“*Star Wars* is George’s transubstantiated version of *Apocalypse Now*.” Do I believe that? Well, it’s a fascinating view.

James Cameron interviewed Lucas for his 2018 book, *James Cameron’s Story of Science Fiction*, and wow, Cameron leads him when it comes to Vietnam. We should note that the text printed in the book is not a transcription of the TV mini-series Cameron created that accompanies the book (2018, AMC). The text version published is edited to omit Lucas’s admission that the film was about the Vietnam War. Our editorial team spotted this and updated the transcription to match Cameron’s mini-series interview with Lucas:

GL: That’s what THX is saying. The tagline on it is “the future is here.” When I eventually got to *Star Wars*, [I set the story in] a galaxy far, far

away, a long, long time ago. Because once you say it has a relationship to us, then people start getting their backs up. But if you can look at it [as being completely detached from the world we know], you can get the message without fighting it. And kind of enjoying it. But the message is still the same.

JC: But you did something very interesting with *Star Wars* if you think about it. You created this lens of a distant future or past or faraway place. The good guys are the rebels. They're using asymmetric warfare against a highly organized empire. I think we call those guys terrorists today. We call them Mujahideen, we call them Al-Qaeda.

GL: When I did it, they were Việt Cộng.

JC: Exactly. So, were you thinking of that at the time?"

GL: Yes.

JC: So, it was a very antiauthoritarian, very kind of '60s, against-the-man thing nested deep inside of a fantasy...

GL: Or, we're fighting the largest empire in the world, and we're just a bunch of hayseeds in coonskin hats that don't know nothing. And it was the same thing with the Vietnamese. The irony of that one was that, in both of those, the little guys won. And the big, highly technical empire—the English empire, the American empire—lost. That was the whole point.

JC: That's a classic [case of] us not profiting from the lesson of history. If you look at the inception of this country, it's a very noble fight of the underdog against the massive empire. You look at the situation now where America is so proud of being the biggest economy, the most powerful military force on the planet—it's become the Empire from the perspective of a lot of people around the world.

GL: Well, it was the Empire during the Vietnam War. It was the Empire. What we never learned

from England or Rome or a dozen other empires that went on for hundreds of years, sometimes thousands, we never got it. We never said "Wait, wait, wait. This isn't the right thing to do." And we're still struggling with it.

JC: And they fall because of failure of leadership or government, often. You have this great line, which is, "So this is how liberty dies; to thunderous applause."

And here is the video of James Cameron's interview with George Lucas: <https://youtu.be/NxI3IoHKQ8c>

Lucas had a focus on making money, this is not a bad thing. Both Jim Henson and Andy Warhol created art from the dollar symbol, after all. Earning money from what one loves is great; it gives security, comfort and can buy things, and Lucas was shrewd, business-like, and clever with it. A common discussion centres around socialist messages in the film, but I am not sure where socialism fits into *Star Wars*. There is some contempt from Leia for Han when he collects his reward, but that is a moment to strengthen his redemption when he returns, swooping in to destroy the tie fighter to save the day.

At the time, George Lucas didn't really do a good job of saying that Vietnam was an important influence. He didn't until recently, which leads me to think that wasn't where he was going. I met Gary Kurtz at conventions a few times, and I am sorry I never thought to ask this question. He was such a gentleman and so thoughtful with fans.

In the 21st century, it would be nice to say, "*Star Wars* was an allegory for Vietnam, *Star Wars* are the Good Guys," but I feel it is inaccurate, a stretch, and hides an important simplicity. Sure there are without doubt aspects of the Imperials that are detestable, just as there were acts by the US in Vietnam that were likewise. I am sure there are no shortage of Englanders who would be happy to throw shade on the view that the Empire is Britain. Such is unavoidable.

Overall, I think Vietnam, as is the case for many artists, would have been an influence at most for Lucas. Art is complex, like life. In January 1937 the Spanish Republican government asked Picasso to paint a mural for the 1937 Paris World's Fair. But it was only after he heard of the bombing of Guernica, which occurred on the 26 April 1937, that he found both inspiration and energy for the commission, which he began in May and unveiled in July.

Star Wars is no Guernica.

I think Lucas wanted to take people away from Vietnam, not bring it closer.

Commentary on Star Wars as an Allegory

Allison Hartman Adams

Is *Star Wars* an allegory for the Vietnam War? Well, I suppose the word choice here—*allegory*—comes down to intent. The evidence does not show that Lucas consciously set out to create a play-by-play recreation of the Vietnam War. As James suggests above, the parallels don't really line up. And yet, it is absolutely possible that George Lucas, an adult American man during the height of the War, tapped into the cultural zeitgeist and processed his own frustrations and worries out onto the screen. The war was still going on while he was writing, and a reasonably comprehensive timeline of the events wouldn't necessarily have been available. Did Lucas, in the 1970s, possess expert knowledge of the intricacies, battles, commanders, and non-acting states in the proxy war between the US and the USSR that would have been necessary for a true allegory? Doubtful. But he, like all of us, *did* possess expert knowledge of the classic David and Goliath story that we see played out on the screen, in Vietnam, and in so many other conflicts between imperialists and insurgents.

I think of the intention behind other works that have been stripmined for meaning by scholars and fans over the years, as *Star Wars* has. George Orwell consciously wrote *Animal Farm* as an allegory of the Russian Revolution, whereas Bram Stoker did not explicitly intend to infuse *fin-de-siècle* English anxieties into his *Dracula*. Can *Star Wars* be “about” the Vietnam War, the same way that *Dracula* is “about” the fear of female sexuality, modernity, and technology? I think so, yes. Lucas's late-in-the-game claim that his films are an allegory feels forced, and is likely a product of distance and wisdom. It's been nearly 50 years, and the Vietnam War has become yet another lens through which to view our most beloved cultural touchstones.

Film, like literature, is a kaleidoscope: pick it up in 1977 and you see one story. Pick it up again today, and you see something completely different. The tiny mirrors and shards of glass haven't changed; they've only been rearranged. You, too, have been rearranged, and you see anew.

Mark Slater

Weirdly, at the top of the article the very idea that it drew any inspiration from Vietnam had me going ‘Huh?!’, and by the end you had convinced me it was definitely in the mix. Sure, it's certainly not *Apocalypse Now*, but given the themes and when it was made, it *had* to have been on their minds to some degree, and the broad idea of the North Vietnamese being the plucky rebels against the evil Empire of Nixon's USA doesn't seem that much of a stretch to me now.

But is it also WWII, with jackbooted Nazis and trench warfare? Absolutely! Is ‘The Force’ a load of left over 60s hippie mysticism? Yup, ‘fraid so—which is probably why Lucas then tried to fob us off with that Midichlorian post-hippie rationalisation. Like many of his generation, he was probably embarrassed and disillusioned by such simple sentiments.

It's always worth remembering that *Star Wars* is a fable—and like all fables its ideas and values do give a sense of being grounded in the real world and real events. You can take away a lot of sense and wisdom, but without having to get too hung up on the details.

Can *Star Wars* be taken as an allegory for the Vietnam War? Sure, you've convinced me that it can. Was it intended to be? Not consciously I don't think, but it was certainly in the wind when it was made, and don't many wars boil down to similar themes—a plucky band of rebels against a near unstoppable behemoth. I don't have much respect for Cameron as either a filmmaker or a human being these days, but as he suggests, whether you label the smaller of those

two forces as ‘rebels’ or ‘terrorists’ very much depends where you are standing, and what emerges in the fullness of time.

I agree the influence is likely slight—indeed unconscious given that Vietnam, and the lessons of Vietnam, were in the zeitgeist at the time, and it doesn't come much more slight than that.

A lot of post-rationalisation from Lucas for sure, probably influenced in part by the ton of critical dissection and speculation that he would have been swimming in, and can't help but have assimilated elements of, in the years since it was made—and prompted by Cameron's leading questions in that particular interview.

Pat M. Yulo

My understanding of the citations was that George clearly wanted the movies to be an allegory for the Vietnam War. That allegory was most obvious in *Return of the Jedi* and not as clear in *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. Those two movies more heavily rely on World War II imagery and tropes to convey their images of war. To be fair, during World War II, Filipino fighters used guerilla tactics to defeat the Japanese, which could also have been another influence on *Return of the Jedi*, but was not mentioned by any source.

What I actually got out of reading this article was not about how the Vietnam War did or did not influence the making of *Star Wars*, but how the good guys (rebels) and bad guys (empire) of history ebb and flow. In *Star Wars*, the Empire is clearly portrayed as British. The actors at the time were all British extras and retained their original voices. The British actors portraying the rebels were dubbed over with American accents. It's a clear allusion to the American War of Independence, when the Americans and British were not allies (unlike World War II when they were). Historically, the British performed many atrocities on other countries, and in turn were also the lynch-pin savior during World War II. The U.S. was also a good guy during World War II, but committed countless war crimes during the Vietnam War.

In the end, I don't think *Star Wars* is an allegory to the Vietnam War. It's an allegory about ALL wars. What creates an evil like Sheev Palpatine? He could easily be compared to and influenced by the likes of Hitler or Nixon. Palpatine could also easily be an amalgamation of other historically evil leaders, including Napoleon and Julius Caesar. The rebels could be any band of fighters that fought against an evil ruler—the Indian fight for Independence, the Philippine War of Independence, even the Vietnam War, if we look at before the misguided interference of America.

The point is not whether *Star Wars* was influenced by World War II or the Vietnam War. What the story is trying to say, and which *Andor* now says so well, is that the underdog must always fight the oppressor for freedom. And THAT is a story universally told through history.

John Vaughan

Personally I think he is haunted by it. He wanted to be in the military (he tried to join the Air Force but was rejected on health grounds) the crew on his student film version of THX1138 was made up of U.S Navy trainees he was teaching at USC, (some of them would later become combat cameramen) and of course the insanity of the fact that John Milius and Lucas originally planned to film what would become *Apocalypse Now* in Vietnam while the War was on, only stopped by the studio deciding that they'd get themselves killed. Even his first “feel good” hit *American Graffiti* ends with the reveal one of the characters is still MIA in Vietnam, I personally think it's an influence but an allegory, I would agree

with you. Still it also shows what a good filmmaker he was—you leave the audience to decide what the subtext is.

James Mason

I never really thought about it being allegorical to the Vietnam war. I was aware that the "Rebels" would be classed as terrorists in this day and age. But they did keep their tactics fully on the Empire's military (Kevin Smith Clerks gag aside for *ROTJ*). There is a compelling case here, while the War of Independence would be similar also.

Kenneth Marsden

I can't see any similarities between *Star Wars* and Vietnam at all. You can say, well it's the rebel North Vietnamese or Viet Cong against imperialist US forces. But that's lazy. Let's not forget also that the NVA were heavily aided by both China and the USSR.

It's much easier to reference WW2 as a direct influence on *Star Wars*. Lucas used dogfight footage from the war in early drafts of the film. If it was Vietnam based he surely would have used air combat footage of Phantoms and Migs.

Tied in with his boyhood Flash Gordon serials and the Saturday afternoon movie matinees GL has already clearly referenced his influences for *Star Wars*. There's no need to try shoehorn in a different battle entirely.

Craig Miller (Director of Fan Relations for Lucasfilm from 1977–1980)

I'm just at the age where I was well aware of the war but not "involved." I came of draft age just after the U.S. ended the draft so never had that hanging over my head. Personally, as an adolescent/teenager, I was opposed to the war and never felt we had a reason to be there.

And as to *Star Wars*, I never discussed the relationship of Viet Nam to the film with either George Lucas or Gary Kurtz. There was certainly some discussion in the press and even in Fandom about the parallels. It's a war, a rebellion, little guys against a big overwhelming government so that there are parallels is obvious. But were they deliberate? I don't really think so. I think the comparison comes more from good storytelling. You tell stories about defeating overwhelming odds, not how you sent your giant army to defeat a weaker opponent. And if any real war or combat influenced George and Gary in the writing and making of *Star Wars*, it was World War II.

George was raised by a politically conservative father (I don't know how his mother leaned) but George always seemed apolitical. His views in the 1970s seemed more concerned about Big Brother and losing rights and individuality—see "THX 1138"—than on a global political scale.

Gary Kurtz was a Quaker by choice and was opposed to war. He joined the Marines and served in combat in Viet Nam as a cameraman, and did so unarmed. His lieutenant insisted he wear a sidearm and Gary complied. But it wasn't loaded.



(Re)Discovered Loss

by Brenda Noiseux

It's a strange realization that you owe part of your existence to a war. So many things are lost to you. In my ongoing reflection on what it personally means to be a Vietnamese-American, two particular stories have exposed edges I didn't even know were sharp.

In the graphic novel memoir *The Best We Could Do*, Thi Bui documents her own family's life in Vietnam during the war, their harrowing escape, and their lives in America. The author uses the lens of her own family to glimpse what was lost of Vietnam as a country and the loss carried by those who lived through it. The graphic novel documents her own family's life in Vietnam during the war, their escape, and their lives in America.

In a beautiful line, Bui writes, "if I could see Việt Nam as a real place not a symbol of something lost, I would see my parents as real people and learn to love them better." The sense of loss is an indescribable void, the juxtaposition of youth, entrepreneurship, and optimism clashing against a backdrop of assimilation, colonialism, and an ever looming presence of death. Living in Southeast Asia during both the Indochina and Vietnam Wars (which left over 2 million Vietnamese civilians dead) her parents are seen constantly moving in and out of safety as the lines on maps were redrawn and changes in political regimes meant death.

The uncertainty and looming follows them into America, a trauma that cannot be escaped, even as Bui and her siblings begin their journey to American life. It's a crucial part of the Vietnam War experience that often is overlooked; the ongoing feeling of that nebulous void that the War left us; the family that was killed or disappeared, homes created and shattered, hopeful futures turned upside-down, countries left, and the overwhelming unease that nowhere may be safe. In the line "My parents escaped Việt Nam on a boat so their children could grow up in freedom. You'd think I could be more grateful," Bui shines a light into that void so that we may better understand the depths of how Vietnamese resettlers and their children have been, and continue to be, deeply affected.

Ken Liu's short story, "The Paper Menagerie" offers another view. Though it is about a Chinese mother and her

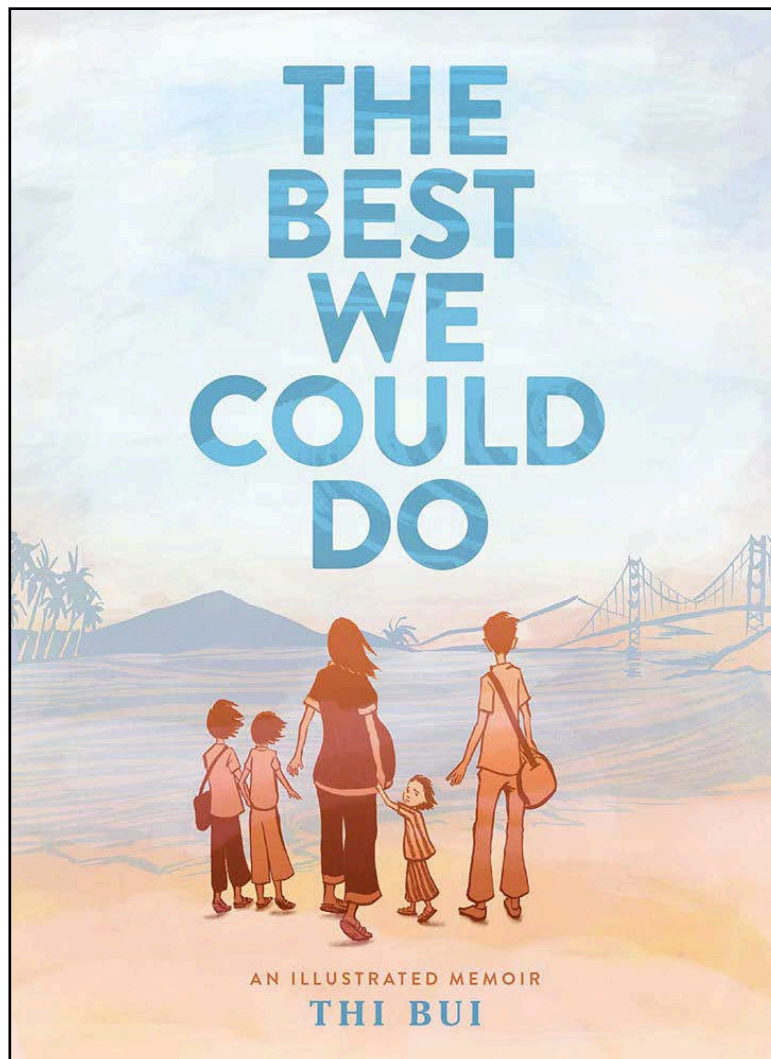
American born son, there are so many parallels to a particular Vietnamese-American experience, that of the American soldier, Vietnamese wife, and American-born children.

The American father in "The Paper Menagerie" selecting a Chinese woman to buy as a bride is not such a stretch from the GIs who brought Vietnamese women home to marry. Many of their relationships had underlying tones of care and responsibility, but not necessarily the ideals of romantic love that dominate American culture.

Growing up in a town with seemingly no Asians other than his mother, the protagonist feels the desperate need to fit into American life. It isn't just the normal need of a teenager to not be different, it's part of the subtle and overt gestures from the non-Asian people in his life that things associated with being Asian are negative. This desire for assimilation turns into his personal erasure of language, culture, and connection that he can't get back.

Only years after his mother's death does the weight of what he's lost hit him. He's lost the understanding of his parents as people, his connection with his mother, any potential connection to her home country, and the language she best communicated love with. This harkens back to Bui's work, the intensity of regret for what can never be gotten back.

As Vietnamese-Americans we are still greatly affected by the Vietnam War. It's shaped us, even for those like myself who have never set foot in Vietnam. There's a void that we carry that's hard to put into words, but these stories are a fine start.



What the War Left Behind

by David Ferguson

Growing up in the 1980s, my knowledge of Viet Nam was framed by the American War. Movies like *Good Morning, Vietnam* influenced my young mind, quite rightly, that the whole thing was a bad endeavour. Even my favourite TV show as a kid, the *A-Team*, hinted at this. So when I visited the country in 2018, the images of war were at the back of my mind. I had asked my husband, Senja, about the war prior to visiting as I was interested in getting to know more about the history and culture from his side. He was raised in Hai Phong, a northern city that is southeast of Hà Nội, the capital of an independent North Viet Nam from 1954 and now capital of the re-unified Viet Nam. His city was subject to heavy American bombardment during the war, as it was North Viet Nam's only major port. Despite this, Senja has little interest in the war save to say that he is not a fan of the side that won. It puzzled me then why he chose to bring me to certain sites but he pointed out 'they are tourist sites' and I guess that's as good an explanation as any.

I started my visit in Hà Nội. Senja had arrived weeks earlier to visit relatives and wanted to show me the city before we ventured further. It was here that North Vietnamese leader Hồ Chí Minh spent his final days. The Presidential Palace is not open to the public. However, it is said that Hồ Chí Minh refused to live in the grand structure for symbolic reasons and his Vietnamese stilt house and carp pond behind the palace are open to all. The symbolic effect of such a traditional house is, to me, weirdly offset by a display of his collection of expensive cars. I did get to feed his fish though. I decided not to visit his mausoleum despite having somewhat of

a morbid curiosity about it. There is a cult around 'Uncle Ho' with 'facts' like his being able to speak 29 languages. Senja called these facts 'lies' and has a few unflattering ones to replace them.

From Hà Nội, we flew into Đà Nẵng International Airport. The name felt familiar to me but I assumed I was conflating it with The 'Nam (a common American abbreviation of Viet Nam). Upon doing some research for this piece, I discovered that the airport was a major base used by the Americans and the Southern Vietnamese. The hustle and bustle of an average of 2,595 aircraft traffic operations daily during the war has been replaced by the hustle and bustle of tourists arriving to enjoy the city or stopping off on their way elsewhere. A former hub for military aircraft now acting as a hub for tourism to sites like the picturesque Old City of Hội An, which we immediately escaped to upon arrival, and the Imperial City of Huế, our destination after that. The Imperial City was my first face to face with the American War.

The Imperial City's construction began in 1804. Nguyễn Ánh had become Emperor in 1798 and proclaimed Huế, the ancestral seat of the Nguyễn Lords, as his capital. It was the seat of power until the French took over in the 1880s. After that, it existed mostly to carry on symbolic traditions until the Nguyễn dynasty was ousted in 1945. Once empty, it suffered from neglect and weather damage. Its major damage, however, came from war. Major losses occurred when the Vietnamese, rebelling against French rule, seized the area in 1947. The six week battle damaged many structures and the core of the city, including the Imperial Palace, was burned. During the American War as part of the infamous Tet Offensive, the North seized most of the city of Huế. In the ensuing Battle of Huế, the American troops were initially ordered not to bomb the city as there was a fear of destroying historical sites. However, with mounting casualties, these orders were soon waived. Out of 160 buildings, only 10 remain because of this battle. As I walked through the shell of an ancient city, I was in awe of what remained and, looking at the photographs and historical images throughout, tried to imagine how impressive it had once been.

Flying south to Sài Gòn (officially Hồ Chí Minh City), I discovered the biggest remnant of the war: Independence Palace (also known as Reunification Convention Hall). The home and the workplace of the President of South Viet Nam during the war and the site of the end of the war (during the Fall of Sài Gòn in 1975) standing as preserved as it was surprised me. Part of it *had* been destroyed in 1962 during a bombing by dissidents from the Republic of Viet Nam. Then President Ngô Đình Diệm survived this and ordered it rebuilt (he didn't see the construction finished as he was assassinated the following year). Photographs on the walls give you the historical context to the perfectly preserved meeting and banquet rooms, which saw visitors like President Richard Nixon. We explored everything from the underground bunker, with period technology intact, to the roof where the last people clambered aboard helicopters to escape the Fall of Sài Gòn. It was all kind of surreal. As I walked through underground halls, I imagined other historical bunkers, which added to the surrealness. However, nothing quite hit me like the sight of the Helicopter UH-1 (or 'Huey'), something straight out of a Hollywood movie, sitting on the roof. Next to it were two yellow circles. A nearby plaque tells you that this was where the palace had been bombed on

HELICOPTER UH-1 (HUEY)

There was always a helicopter placed at the ready for the President's use. The craft on display here is the same model as the one used by President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu.

The UH-1 helicopter, known familiarly as a 'HUEY', was launched by the US firm Bell in 1959 and deployed for use in Việt Nam from 1962 onward. Designed to land and take off from any kind of terrain, it was used for combat, training and reconnaissance missions, and medical evacuations. Vice President Nguyễn Cao Kỳ also used this landing for his helicopter flights.

The two circles painted on the helipad mark the spot where a bombload was dropped on the Palace by pilot Nguyễn Thành Trung on 8 April 1975.

April 8th 1975. Pilot Nguyễn Thành Trung, a Viet Cong member working in the South Viet Nam Air Force, is named as the person responsible. It only caused minor physical damage but was a big propaganda win for the North. His plane, an F5E fighter plane, can be seen outside the Hồ Chí Minh Campaign Museum alongside other military vehicles. We stumbled upon these as we walked through a nearby park after visiting the palace. I wondered what it said that these remnants of war were left outside to the elements, some showing signs of decay.

What I described was only a small part of my visit to Viet Nam, a visit that completely reframed my image of

the country. I now think of the landscape, the ancient temples and the people. I see it as a real place. These have been the ramblings of somewhat informed westerner whose opinions have been coloured by a husband who has very little interest in the American War. He does recommend picking up one book that is about the war. The novel *The Sympathiser* (2015), by Nguyễn Thanh Việt, tells the story of members of the South Vietnamese government from 1975 to their lives in exile in Los Angeles, through the eyes of a North Vietnamese spy. The author also escaped from Viet Nam. The book isn't sold there but that's a whole other article.



A Not So Private Little War: *Star Trek's* Muddled Vietnam War Protest Episode

by Ryan Britt

One of the most important episodes of the 1960s *Star Trek* is also one of the hardest ones to sit through today. When “A Private Little War” first aired on February 2nd, 1968, it provocatively depicted a science fiction allegory for the Cold War struggle which was then causing needless death in the Vietnam War. But, the hard-hitting political allegory isn’t why it’s rough to rewatch this episode. Most of this story is utterly dominated by three things: a self-described witch who acts as a seductress toward Captain Kirk, Spock experiencing a little light BDSM from Nurse Chapel, and an infamous attack from a horned, razor-backed white gorilla monster known as the Mugato. “A Private Little War” has a runtime of just over 50 minutes, and the scene in which Nona (the witch) cures Captain Kirk of Mugato poison, complete with orgasmic writhing, is roughly about three minutes long. Meanwhile, the serious commentary on the negative impacts of the Cold War occurs in a conversation between Bones and Kirk toward the end of the episode, and is just barely a few seconds longer than Kirk’s sexy poison exorcism.

So, why do Trekkies and armchair sci-fi scholars remember “A Private Little War” as so progressive? Is it? Did *Star Trek: The Original Series* really carry a strong anti-war message? Writing in 2005, in his paper — Cold War Pop Culture and the Image of U.S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek Series* — Nicholas Evan Sarantakes argues that in the 60s, “They [the writers of *Star Trek*] intentionally designed some episodes to critique U.S. foreign policy,” and that “in part... *Star Trek* was a running effort to reshape the foreign policies of the United States.” While it’s a bit of a bold claim to say *Star Trek* had an impact on Cold War policy, it’s not nuts to think that relative to feelings about the Vietnam War, “A Private Little War” was very politically significant for its time, and certainly made it clear that Captain Kirk was a left-of-center guy when it came to his true feelings about military intervention.

That said, in the context of both the fictional reality of *Star Trek*, and real life, the anti-war message of “A Private Little War” isn’t so much a *point* that is being made, but rather, a debate that is recontextualized. If it’s been awhile, here’s what happens in the episode: The *Starship Enterprise* returns to a planet Neural, which we learn that Kirk visited when he was a younger officer (and not yet a captain) twelve years prior. We’re told that the planet is divided between the “hill people” and “villagers”, the latter of which are sadly not called “The Village People,” because this is still the 60s and not the 70s. (Still, there’s something to be said for the now-offensive, but heart-in-the-right-place brand of tokenism in both the line-up of The Village People and the classic *Star Trek*. Something for another scholar to discuss, certainly!)

The crew have now returned to Neural not to check-up on its people, but rather to facilitate some random planet research, of which, the fewer questions asked, the better. Soon, Kirk is horrified to discover that the villagers are now armed with flintlock firearms, which technologically is a jump similar to someone from the Bronze Age suddenly having tech from the 17th century. Uhura later points out that there’s no reason to assume that every planet will develop technology (or weapons) at the same rate — a highly intelligent and cool science fiction idea, which is quickly made moot because we discover that the Klingons are supplying the villagers with the weapons, and teaching them how to

forge them. Thematically, the episode eventually evolves into a story about Kirk weighing the moral implications of also arming the hill people, so they have a fighting chance against the villagers. In the big cave debate toward the end of the episode, Kirk says: “Bones, the normal development of this planet was the status quo between the hill people and the villagers. The Klingons changed that with the flintlocks. If this planet is to develop the way it should, we must equalize both sides again.”

The hill people become the de facto representatives of South Vietnam while the villagers become the Viet Cong. And just in case you missed what the episode was trying to say, Kirk and Bones lay all out:

KIRK: Bones, do you remember the twentieth century brush wars on the Asian continent? Two giant powers involved, much like the Klingons and ourselves. Neither side felt they could pull out.

MCCOY: Yes, I remember. It went on bloody year after bloody year.

KIRK: What would you have suggested—that one side arm its friends with an overpowering weapon? Mankind would never have lived to travel space if they had. No. The only solution is what happened back then: balance of power.

MCCOY: And if the Klingons give their side even more?

KIRK: Then we arm our side with exactly that much more. A balance of power. The trickiest, most difficult, dirtiest game of them all, but the only one that preserves both sides.

Notice that Kirk’s solution is, essentially, in-line with the US policy of the time. And by the end of the episode, Kirk does order Scotty to manufacture and beam-down a hundred firearms for the hill people, but then, flippantly changes his order to “a hundred serpents...for the Garden of Eden.”

After the 1960s *Star Trek* gained a reputation for depicting a hopeful, optimistic future; an unfortunate simplification partially perpetuated by *Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry himself in the 1970s and 80s. The strength of “A Private Little War” isn’t that it’s preachy, or that the crew comes up with a kumbaya solution. Instead, the episode presents the opposite of a solution: It says that Kirk, as a representative of the system and *the man*, is *making* the same decision that the powers-that-be were making at the time.

But, the crucial difference is Kirk feels *bad* about it. It’s not his fault, exactly, but the consequences of Starfleet arming the hill people also feels deeply personal for Kirk. Say what you will about William Shatner, but this is a big episode for him and an underrated one at that. In a way, it’s less of a classic *Trek* episode, and more like a James Bond story with a conscience. Imagine if Sean Connery’s Bond suddenly felt bad about messing with a smaller nation’s economy and then got depressed about helping insurgents fight against communists, because he knew the result was going to be bad either way. That’s essentially what “A Private Little War Is,” and Kirk’s role in it is closer to that of a sad James Bond, than of an idealistic Starfleet captain.

Now, it's at this point where even the casual *Star Trek* watcher may be wondering why the *Enterprise* interfered with this planet in the first place. What the heck was Kirk even doing there twelve years ago? What about the "Prime Directive" — that famous *Star Trek* rule that says that members of Starfleet would avoid interfering with "lesser" developed planets? Well, even in 1968, even though the Prime Directive had been mentioned previously in the episode "Return of the Archons," the rules of *Trek* were still very much in flux throughout the run of the classic show. Here, the Prime Directive barely holds up in the backstory, as we're led to believe that Kirk *probably* never truly revealed himself as somebody from being from outer space back then, and the people of the planet thought he was just a traveler from a far away village, or something.

But, despite making the history of Starfleet's non-interference directive a bit inconsistent, the backstory of "A Private Little War," is actually the first indication that this episode is about anti-war attitudes, which were being expressed in real life, in the form of protests by people at least a decade younger than Kirk and Bones. By establishing that he hung out with these peace-loving "Hill People," Kirk is automatically *cool*. He may be the authority figure of the episode, but when he was younger, he was basically in the space version of the Peace Corps. If the episode was trying to make Kirk's political cocktail more nuanced than any military space commander in TV science fiction before, it succeeded.

"A Private Little War" was written by one of Gene Roddenberry's fellow former-police officer buddies, Don Ingalls, but was later rewritten by Roddenberry so significantly that Ingalls asked to have a pseudonym — Jud Crusis — used instead. In Allan Asherman's book *The Star Trek Compendium* (1981), it's indicated that earlier versions of the Ingalls's version of the script would have had even more overt Vietnam War references, including depicting one of the Klingons as a "HỒ Chí Minh type."

It's not known whether Roddenberry's rewrites upset Ingalls because he toned down the overt Vietnam parallels or if Roddenberry changed the meaning of the episode. Because Roddenberry presented himself as a moderate to the networks and studios — but operated as much more liberal in reality — it's possible that Ingalls objected to Roddenberry making the script more left-leaning than it had been initially. Then again, the final result, is, as mentioned, beset with a lot of the sexual innuendo that pervaded much of classic *Trek*, to the point where it's possible a writer could have been embarrassed with all the sexy stuff in caves. In fact, when "A Private Little War" was presented to NBC prior to airing, the biggest controversy was how much skin actress Nancy Kovack could show in her scenes as the witch-woman, Nona. Two producers of *Star Trek* — Robert Justman and Herb Solow — later recalled that *this* fact was what cen-



sors were focused on, not the Vietnam analogies, which, apparently, went over the heads of the NBC officials. From their book, *Inside Star Trek: The Real Story* (1996): "Surprisingly Stan Roberston [NBC network censor] never seemed to realize that the story was supposed to be an allegory about the growing 'police action' in Vietnam. In fact, no one at NBC made the connection and took us to task. But the audience did, we got letters. Lots of them."

In the end, the legacy and reputation of *Star Trek* — from its earliest episodes to its most recent — tends to matter more than its actual content. Like a lot of allegorical science fiction, what *Star Trek* is "really" about is often more relevant and passionately discussed than whatever it purports within its literal science fiction world. In this way, "A Private Little War" is the ultimate 60s *Star Trek* episode; there's a space monster, so racy sexual imagery, and Kirk preaching about what *should* happen on a planet versus what *will* happen. It provoked a reaction from TV viewers of the time, who also disapproved of the Vietnam War and, it also created a template for how science fiction TV could smuggle-in these kinds of allegories, right under the noses of network executives and TV censors.

Ultimately, it didn't matter if the story had a satisfactory resolution, or if the episode itself wasn't one of the better instances of great sci-fi on *Star Trek*. What mattered with "A Private Little War" is that it had the guts to say *something*. In retrospect, it doesn't seem like much, and the details of this episode (Mugato!) almost feel incongruous with its reputation. But, if the idealism of *Star Trek* is a kind of intellectual paradise, then what "A Private Little War" reminds us, thanks to Kirk's honesty, is that there is no true utopia in smart science fiction because the world is just too messy to make an actual utopia seem real.

Sarantakes, Nicholas Evan. "Cold War Pop Culture and the Image of U.S. Foreign Policy: The Perspective of the Original *Star Trek* Series." *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2005, pp. 74–103. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26925852>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2023.

'I love the smell of burning flesh in the morning. It tastes like cooked breakfast': Teddy Bears' Picnic and Britain's Vietnam War

by Jim O'Brien

A fascinating counterfactual short story that asks us to imagine Britain rather than America fighting (and losing) the Vietnam War, *Teddy Bears' Picnic* by Kim Newman and Eugene Byrne was first published in sci-fi magazine *Interzone* in 1997.

Teddy Bears' Picnic was in fact just one, later entry-segment in a much broader alternate history story cycle in which Byrne and Newman explored the ramifications of the Communist Revolution of 1917 occurring not in Russia but in America, with the whole of 20th Century history subsequently reshaped by this one massive diversion from experienced reality. Collected together as *Back in the USSA* (1997), the stories move backwards and forwards through time and space, exploring amongst other things the sweeping away of the old plutocratic America by Eugene Debs' Red Revolution in 1917, the rise to power of a very Stalinist Al Capone in the 1930s and the implosion of the USSA in the post-Cold War 1990s.

Teddy Bears' Picnic covers the tale of the alternate 20th Century between 1965 and 1969 but with a heavier emphasis on what happened in Britain under this new world order than is the case in the other stories. And Newman and Byrne follow through with precision and thoroughness on their basic premise of the UK rather than the US fighting against communism in Vietnam. This now being a British war, there are of course none of the Americanisms so readily associated with the Vietnam conflict – indeed, although the name Vietnam is used, the country is as often referred to as 'Indo' or 'Indochina,' the old imperialist European name for the region. The enemy isn't given the American-originated nickname of 'Charlie' but (in a neat double reference to the Vietnamese Mekong Delta and to Dan Dare's green skinned nemesis) the 'Mekon' or, simply, 'Treens.' Choppers are 'wokkas' and t-shirts are 'vests.'

Not content with just swapping out America for Britain in Vietnam, Newman and Byrne then develop their fantasy further by peopling their narrative of the Brits at war with a host of sitcom, film and book characters from the period. Thus while there are plenty of genuine historical figures in the story, the main protagonists are Bob and Terry from seminal 60s sitcom *The Likely Lads*, here featuring as young

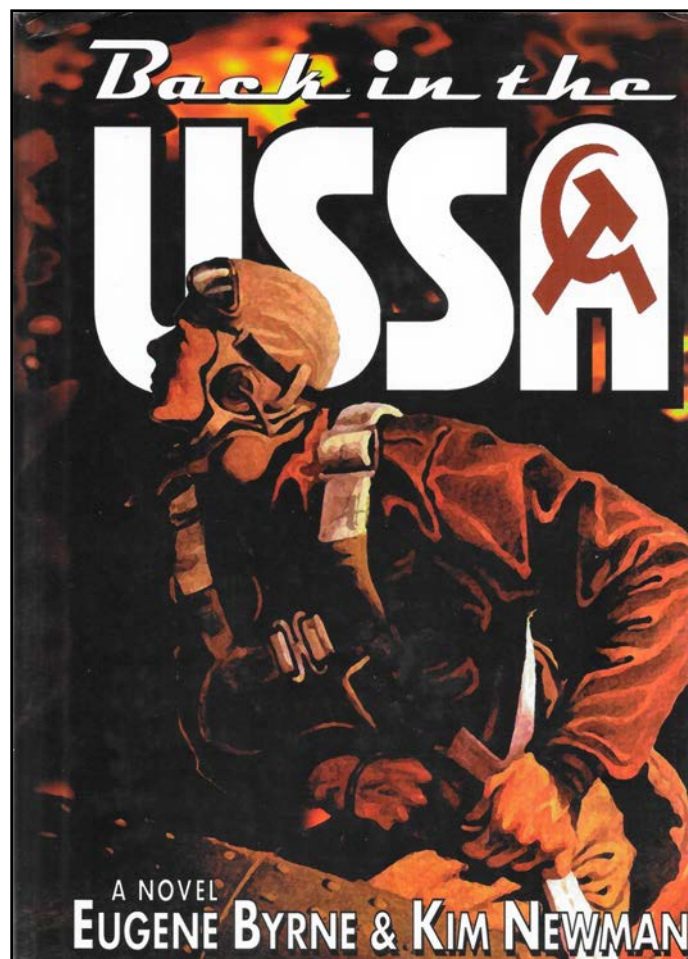
recruits called up to fight for King and Country. And they are kept company by Frank Spencer from *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*, Stan Butler from *On the Buses*, William Brown from the *Just William* Books, Billy Casper from *Kes* and the Reverend Noote from sitcom *All Gas and Gaiters* to name just a few of the many, many fictional characters who pop up in familiar-yet-slightly-different guises in the story.

Being a war story, military fictional characters and sitcoms are given particular prominence, with Brigadier Lethbridge Stewart (Pertwee era *Doctor Who*) and Sergeants Grimshaw (*Carry on Sergeant*) and Williams (*It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*) also making appearances.

All of which might sound way too clever-clever and meta to be any fun to read but which, like Alan Moore's similar scripting on his *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* books, is so deftly done that you can read the story knowing virtually none of these characters and still enjoy *Teddy Bear's Picnic* as a well-paced war story and/or scorching satire on Vietnam and its insanities.

The authors' encyclopaedic knowledge of film and TV gets used in a further way too: as suggested above, the core narrative of *Teddy Bear's Picnic* lies with the experiences of likely lad Bob Ferris in Vietnam and of the subsequent publication and filming of his war

memoir – called (of course!) *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum*. But if its title comes from Perry and Croft's wartime concert party comedy, the 'plot' of Bob's memoir is essentially that of *Apocalypse Now* – an anglicized *Apocalypse Now* admittedly, and one made not by Francis Ford Coppola but by Michael Powell, in Newman and Byrne's world a figure in disgrace following the release of *Nutter* – a very British version of *Psycho* that had bombed with critics. The idea of pastiching *Apocalypse Now* in this way evidently appealed to Newman; he repeated the trick in the same year as *Teddy Bear's Picnic* by blending Coppola's war movie with the director's later, less compelling take on the Dracula mythos, reframing *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) as if had been *Apocalypse Now*. Nothing to do with 'Nam, but it too is a must-read story!



It's Not a War Story: Filmmaking and Rebirth in Modern Vietnam

by Allison Hartman Adams

Eirene Tran Donohue is adamant: “Vietnam is not a war story. It’s a love story.”

Writer of Netflix’s *A Tourist’s Guide to Love*, Eirene is one of many born near the end of the War who offer a unique perspective on their parents’ struggles. “We were not directly injured by it,” she says, “but we live with the scars of it. We are the echo generation.” These echos continue to reverberate, but today the message they carry has morphed. Eirene is among the increasing number of writers who explore what comes next for the Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American communities, instead of retreading well-worn ground in an effort to understand. “If you go today,” Eirene says, “Vietnam is a crazy, modern, thriving culture and economy.” She concedes that the scars of the War still are visible, but “it’s not what Americans think Vietnam is—not anymore. I wanted to celebrate that.”

Released last April, Netflix’s *A Tourist’s Guide to Love*, a rom-com starring Rachael Leigh Cook and Scott Ly, does just that: it celebrates. The scenery is vibrant and lush. The characters are happy (eventually). The themes touch on family and memory, taking opportunities, and experiencing life to its fullest. Best of all, the frames barely contain the abundance of color and music. After hundreds of hours of documentary battle footage and Hollywood takes on the Vietnam War, where so much is made of ash and anger, watching *A Tourist’s Guide to Love* feels like Dorothy stepping into Oz.

At the Vietnamese premier of the film, both the U.S. Ambassador and the Vietnamese Minister of Culture commented on the fact that this movie will do more to change the image of Vietnam around the world than anything else since the War. Eirene admits that she didn’t set out to do this. “I was just trying to write a rom-com,” she says “I didn’t think about any of that big stuff.” She was most excited about being able to pay her rent, work with Rachel Leigh Cook, and maybe getting a free trip to Vietnam. She didn’t realize until later the impact the film would have on her community.

This film is—pointedly—not about the War, and will allow American audiences to finally see Vietnam as something more than war-torn, burning, and crumbling.

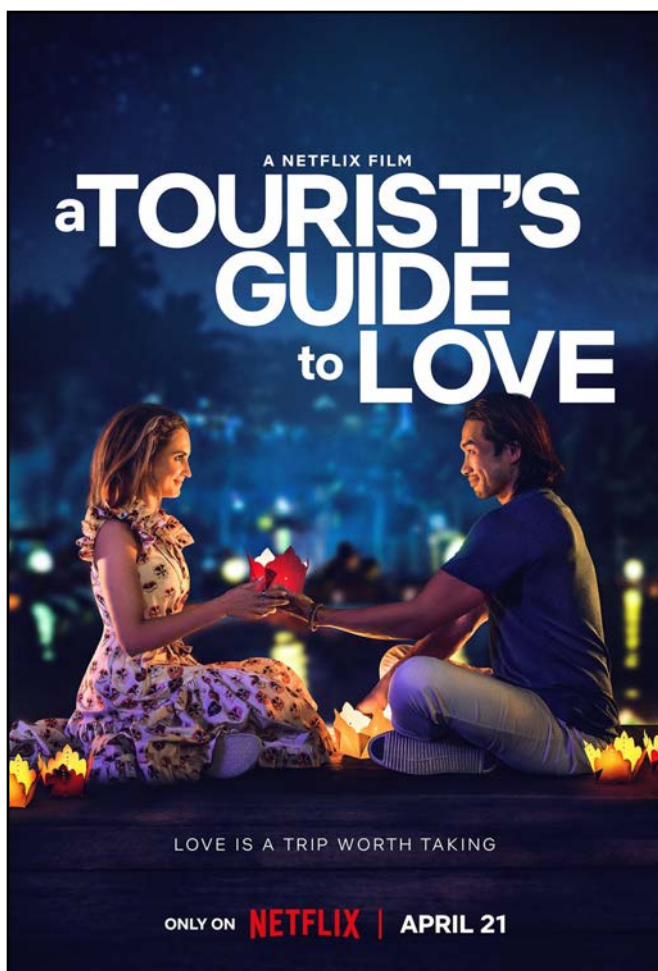
The roots of this film are intertwined with those of her Vietnamese and American heritage. Her family’s tale is long and winding. It spans decades, and as often happens, repeats itself in the best ways. Also, it encapsulates the profound complexity of a fractured nation struggling to reinvent itself. Her family’s tale defies classification, and is a good lesson for all of us who are tempted to sort Vietnam War stories into the simple, polarizing categories of heroes and villains.

The Tran-Donohue family’s story starts, as many do, just as Vietnam began its struggle for independence from the French. Eirene’s mother Mai was born a “bad luck girl” in Thong An Ninh village in the Quang Ngai Province around 1945. Her exact birthdate is unknown—the year of the monkey, her mother once told her. After the Việt Minh murdered her grandfather, father, and her two uncles, Mai’s life deteriorated. The family lived in poverty until Mai was forced into an arranged marriage at 14. She escaped her abusive husband after the birth of their son, but Mai was unable to care for the child alone and returned to her village in disgrace. The father spirited away their son, who Mai would not see again for decades.

But “bad luck” was no match for Mai. Forced to move to Saigon, Mai survived working as a maid and nanny. She taught herself English. She opened her own soup stand and ice cream shop, and, like so many others during the War, she laundered black market money on the side in order to survive.

“She’s a total badass,” Eirene says of her mother, whose memoir, *Crossing the Bamboo Bridge*, is “all about growing up and fighting the patriarchy in Vietnam.” Eirene has thought about adapting the memoir for the screen, but the political situation around filming in Vietnam makes that tricky, if not impossible. While her mother’s story is one of salvation and love, her family’s tale is in no way free of the vagaries and complexities typical of the Vietnam War. One of Eirene’s uncles fought for the North. Another fought for the South. Her father is a former U.S. Naval officer, with whom her Vietnamese mother fell in love. Eirene can’t take a side, and she refuses to watch Vietnam War movies, the very same that show “[her] father killing [her] uncle.”

Once in America, her mother embraced her new country with a fervor for the American Dream that made conversations about what she escaped hard to initiate. “She wanted us to be American,” Eirene recalls, and as a result, Eirene didn’t connect with her Vietnamese heritage until enrolling at Brown University. “There were other people like



me [at Brown]," she says. "I could embrace that part of my identity for the first time."

Eventually, threads of her heritage appeared, knitting the past and present together. In 1993, Vietnam opened its borders. Mai told the family about her first child, who she and Eirene's father had fostered just after the war, but who remained estranged thereafter. Mai began cooking Vietnamese food from her childhood again, and Eirene's father, a poet before the War, resumed writing and traveled to Vietnam to write a novel. Eirene's sister decided to hold her wedding in Vietnam, and eventually, Mai reconciled with her first child, Eirene's half-brother.

Upon arriving in Vietnam for her sister's wedding, Eirene was overcome. "It was mind blowing. It was incredible," she says. "It was that feeling of coming home, but you've never been there, and family suddenly being family even though you don't speak the same language." But all was not easy. This experience triggered for Eirene the unfortunate worry of not being "Vietnamese enough." Vietnam's landscape, coupled with a new understanding of her family's rich history, made Eirene keenly aware of what she'd missed out on as a result of the silence the trauma of war invariably inspires.

Reclaiming the joy she felt at meeting her Vietnamese family is, in part, the inspiration for the filming location for *A Tourist's Guide to Love*. This isn't just another rom-com. This is a movie about Vietnam itself. Historically, American films that take place in Vietnam, especially movies about the War, are filmed in Thailand, the Philippines, or Hawaii, as the Vietnamese government forbids any public media critique of the Communist Party. Also, films available to western audiences focus almost entirely on the War and adjacent stories. Filmmaking is America's therapy, after all. All our anxieties and regrets play out on the silver screen obsessively for generations until the moral complexity is processed by the public, and in some cases, forgotten.



So the viewer will be surprised—even delighted—that tortured conversations about the War are absent in *A Tourist's Guide to Love*. What is abundant, however, is the Vietnamese characters' desire to remind the world that their country is joyful and vibrant. "You couldn't have faked my movie in Thailand," Eirene says. The film is "centered around the beauty of Vietnam and the landscape and landmarks. You can fake jungle and rice paddies and some city scenes, but you can't fake the Hanoi Opera house." The film shows a slice of truth instead of a memory discolored by trauma. And for Eirene, stories of her family are stories of love. "My parents fell in love there," she says. "I fell in love there. I wanted to show the love I have for Vietnam to the world. I wanted people who are Vietnamese to be able to see their country and culture represented in a way that is joyful and positive, where they're not victims or villains." Indeed, the majority of the population of Vietnam today was born *after* the War, and while the Vietnam War affected millions in this



generation, telling a story that reflects their current reality only makes sense.

But the "aftershocks" of the War, as Eirene calls them, are still present. And it is perhaps the presence of these aftershocks that has made the reaction from the Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American community so startling and vocal. Many have reached out to thank her for showing their country in a positive light. In addition to the U.S. Ambassador's and the Vietnamese Minister of Culture's enthusiastic reactions, the filming of *A Tourist's Guide to Love* was marked by a pronounced excited, positive vibe, communication and cultural issues notwithstanding. The film brought millions of dollars into the economy. Now, Eirene's film has paved the way for other international production companies, legitimizing Vietnam and its community of film professionals for the world. And, much to Eirene's surprise, who insists that she's "not important" because she just writes in her laundry room, this September, the Vietnam Society sent her to speak at the Kennedy Center's event, *Breaking Through the Bamboo Ceiling: Evolution & Future of Vietnamese Cinema*.

These days, her family is confronting and embracing their history. Her parents have begun talking about their experiences in the War. Her mother is now a well-known Vietnamese chef and motivational speaker. Her once-estranged half-brother and his wife and children are an integral part of the Donohue family. In almost cinematic kismet, Eirene and her husband met by chance in Vietnam, the country for love, solidifying forever the importance of place and memory for their family. "Be careful who you sit next to at a bar," she says, laughing. "It was supposed to be a holiday fling. That was 23 years ago." And, now, Eirene has brought her young daughter to Vietnam to visit ancestral graves and play on the same fields where her own mother played as a child.

Eirene recognizes this as a unique gift. Because of logistics or politics, much of the Vietnamese diaspora were unable to maintain links with their families back home. But Eirene's family connections in both countries are thriving. She has what feels like "a million cousins" in Vietnam, and she recognizes her good fortune. "The fact that I still have that connection to the family home is rare. Even though I don't speak Vietnamese, we're all laughing together."

She wants to pass this joy on to the next generation. Aware that her daughter doesn't necessarily "look" Vietnamese, and wary of her own memories of not feeling "Vietnamese enough," Eirene is careful to remind her daughter that Vietnam belongs to her, too. "No one gets to decide how Vietnamese you are," she tells her. "This is a part of you, this is your history, your family, your culture."

In many ways, the story of any war, of any diaspora hinges on this sense of belonging—to each other, to ourselves, and to the world. Vietnam has long felt alienated from the rest of the world in large part because of the influence of American cinema. The enthusiastic response to Eirene's film

speaks to a sense of otherness within the international community and a desire to see that end. The intensity of this pain is perhaps best understood through an experience Eirene herself had in Vietnam.

She was in a coffee shop with *A Tourist's Guide to Love* swag bag. Her waitress commented on how much she enjoyed the film. "Oh, I wrote it," Eirene told the waitress. Then, Eirene recalls, "she grabbed me and hugged me and started crying."

"Thank you so much for writing this movie and showing the world how beautiful my country is," the waitress said through her tears. "And for me being able to see it up on the screen being celebrated—you have no idea what that means."

This is the tenor of the accolades Eirene is getting from around the world: *Thank you for representing Vietnam as it truly is*. Eirene is hopeful as a result: "I feel like we really are moving into a moment where fresh stories can be told... [where] we can share with the greater audience, beyond the Vietnamese community, the joys and beauty of Vietnamese culture."

Of course, the audience is younger now and more willing to receive this message than our parents and grandparents might have been. As much as Eirene loves amplifying the voices of her community, she's grateful for what it's brought her, too: a sense of belonging. "I finally feel like I'm embracing and connecting with my Vietnamese identity," she says.

And, closer to home, new roads and relationships are being formed, as well. Eirene's mother Mai—the woman who fought for her right to survive, who escaped and persevered, whose heartbreak kept her from returning to her homeland and who couldn't bring herself to speak of her past to her own children—feels healed by it.

"Now," after so long, Eirene says, "my mom wants to go back to Vietnam."

Eirene Donohue's excellent and warm romantic comedy, *A Tourist's Guide to Love*, is available on Netflix.

Read more about Eirene's mother Mai Donohue's incredible life, her cooking, and her new adventures at her website, <https://maigoodness.com>, or by reading *Crossing the Bamboo Bridge: Memoirs of a Bad Luck Girl* and her cookbook *Mai Goodness: Vietnamese Home Cooking*.

Advertising for Vietnam

by James Bacon

The June 1968 issue of *Galaxy Science Fiction* ran opposing adverts. One page read: "We the undersigned believe the United States must remain in Vietnam to fulfill its responsibilities to the people of that country;" followed by 72 names of established members of the science fiction and fantasy community. The second page read "We oppose the participation of the United States in the war in Vietnam," signed by 82 members of the same community.

On Page 6, editor Frederik Pohl's editorial begins, "If you skipped the two pages of ads just before this page, turn back and look at them..."

Thus begins an editorial that states that the Vietnam War is unfortunate for everyone, but "most of all it's unfortunate for America." There is a refusal to debate the issue, because neither side will win. While Pohl acknowledges that the choice has been made into a binary, polarised debate, he goes on to propose alternative options for the reader.

The \$500 *Galaxy* collected from the two adverts, Pohl explains, is going to be divided up into five sets of \$100 to be awarded to the most immediately provocative ideas from readers on what "we *should* do about Vietnam that, in fact, we *can* do." These proposals would then be submitted to a "Quasi Delphic" committee of experts to debate, after which *Galaxy* would publish the results. Pohl concludes with the following: "And when we've done all this, will we have

anything useful to show for it? We don't know. All we know is that it seems to us to be worth a try."

This editorial is complemented by a Page of Rules, setting out the challenge to the reader.

This complicated moment in the science fiction and fantasy community began when Judith Merrill and Kate Wilhelm sought support for an advert calling for the end of US involvement in the Vietnam War. I understand that, in response, Poul Anderson was spurred on by awareness of this to seek support for an opposing advert, which instead advocated for democracy in Vietnam.

What motivated Poul Anderson and what motivated Fred Pohl? Was the former trying to encourage others to advertise against peace? Was the latter trying to find a solution, desperate to bring his community together as he watched them divide? I should note that editor of *Galaxy*, Fred Pohl, was at one point married to Judith Merrill, but at this stage Fred was married to Carol Pohl, so it is unclear what the connection personally may have been.

These adverts also appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in March 1968, although some pages apart. When they ran in *Galaxy* three months later, they appeared in the closest of proximity, as we have done here. Facing one another. Opposing.

Paid Advertisement

We the undersigned believe the United States must remain in Vietnam to fulfill its responsibilities to the people of that country.

Karen K. Anderson	E. A. Lafferty
Poul Anderson	Robert J. Lenan
Harry Bates	C. C. MacApp
Lloyd Biggle, Jr.	Robert Mason
J. F. Bone	D. M. Melton
Leigh Brackett	Norman Metcalf
Marion Zimmer Bradley	P. Schuyler Miller
Mario Brand	Sam Moskowitz
R. Bretnor	John Myers Myers
Fredric Brown	Larry Niven
Doris Pittkin Buck	Alan Nourse
William E. Burkett, Jr.	Stuart Palmer
Elinor Busby	Gerald W. Page
F. M. Busby	Rachel Cosgrove Poyes
John W. Campbell	Lawrence A. Perkins
Louis Charbonneau	Jerry E. Pournelle
Hal Clement	Joe Poyer
Compton Crook	E. Hoffmann Price
Hank Davis	George W. Price
I. Sprogue de Comp	Alva Rogers
Charles V. de Vet	Fred Scherhagen
William B. Ebern	George O. Smith
Richard H. Eney	W. E. Sprogue
T. E. Fehrenbach	G. Harry Stine (Lee Correy)
E. C. Fitzpatrick	Dwight V. Swain
Daniel F. Galouye	Thomas Burnett Swann
Raymond Z. Gallun	Albert Teichner
Robert M. Green, Jr.	Theodore L. Thomas
Frances T. Hall	Rena M. Vale
Edmond Hamilton	Jack Vance
Robert A. Heinlein	Harl Vincent
Joe L. Hensley	Don Walsh, Jr.
Paul G. Herkart	Robert Moore Williams
Dean C. Ing	Jock Williamson
Joy Kay Klein	Roscoe E. Wright
David A. Kyle	Karl Würf

4

Paid Advertisement

We oppose the participation of the United States in the war in Vietnam.

Forrest J. Ackerman	March Laumer
Isaac Asimov	Ursula K. LeGuin
Peter S. Beagle	Fritz Leiber
Jerome Bixby	Irwin Lewis
James Blish	A. M. Lightner
Anthony Boucher	Robert A. W. Lowndes
Lyle G. Boyd	Katherine MacLean
Ray Bradbury	Barry Malzberg
Jonathan Brand	Robert E. Margroff
Stuart J. Byrne	Anna Margie
Terry Carr	Arday Marshall
Carroll J. Clem	Bruce McAllister
Ed M. Clinton	Judith Merrill
Theodore E. Cogswell	Robert P. Mills
Arthur Jean Cox	Howard L. Morris
Allan Donag	Kris Neville
Jon DeCris	Alexei Panshin
Miriam Allen deFord	Emil Petaja
Samuel R. Delany	J. R. Pierce
Lester del Rey	Arthur Porges
Philip K. Dick	Mack Reynolds
Thomas M. Disch	Gene Roddenberry
Sonya Dorman	Joanna Russ
Larry Eisenberg	James Sallis
Marion Ellison	William Stribos
Carol Emshwiller	Hans Stefan Santesson
Philip José Farmer	J. W. Schatz
David E. Fisher	Robin Scott
Ron Goulart	Larry T. Shaw
Joseph Green	John Shepley
Jim Harmon	T. L. Sherred
Harry Harrison	Robert Silverberg
H. H. Hollis	Henry Slesar
J. Hunter Holly	Jerry Soli
James D. Houston	Norman Spinrad
Edward Jasey	Margaret St. Clair
Lee P. Kelley	Jacob Tromsø
Daniel Keyes	Thurlow Weed
Virginia Kidd	Kate Wilhelm
Damon Knight	Richard Wilson
Allen Lang	Donald A. Wohlheim

Contributions to help meet the expense of future ads are welcomed, and should be sent to:
**Judith Merrill or Kate Wilhelm Knight
P. O. Box 79
Milford, Pennsylvania 18337**

5

We should start by looking at what they are arguing. Note that the “pro-war side” doesn’t argue for war in the statement: “We the undersigned believe the United States must remain in Vietnam to fulfill its responsibilities to the people of that country.” They are supportive of the democratic Vietnamese people. The names that appear below, though—many are no surprise at all, but some, Gosh Wow!, really, was it their service history speaking? Did they believe what the US had said without doubt? Why would they be for war? Surely, by June 1968, the colossal monstrosity that was occurring was clear, or maybe only to half the people.

In the November 1968 issue of *Galaxy*, the editorial was entitled “Vietnam Revisited” and Pohl notes that the adverts were an “Odd and distressing phenomenon.” Pohl makes mention of the prizes and states “Now the results are all in and the prizes have been awarded.”

The magazine received 500 pieces of mail. Over a thousand individual entries. Suggestions seem to have been wide ranging, from the impossible, to dropping H-Bombs, to derogatory injunctions. But many were solid—one had a 30 page printed booklet in support, others maps, citations, stats. There were “interesting suggestions,” methods to win, interdicting Haiphong Harbour, strategies like the guerrilla tactics of the British in Manila, and ways to exit, to disengage safely, others suggested the UN. Responses came from far afield: Finland, El Salvador, Portugal, and also troops in Vietnam. Yet

the situation of the Paris Peace Talks and Lyndon B. Johnson’s decision to not run for president leaves Pohl to say that “By the time you read this... it is even possible the war may be over.” There is mention of the 47 ideas going to a Delphic Panel, which will be reported on in 1969, but for now, the 5 winners were announced: Poul Anderson, Don Gollub, Kirk W Halliday, Gary Pratt, and Mack Reynolds.

Galaxy changed hands in 1969 and Fred Pohl resigned. What happened after this is unclear. We have yet to ascertain if the ideas were published, or ever saw the light of day, and whether the changes that seemed to be apparent to Pohl manifested. The war did not end for another six years. The names on both lists might not be a surprise, or maybe they are, but one would have loved to ask them all ten years later about what their view was then. We missed that unfortunately, but with great respect, it was an important stand to be made at the time against the war. What is clear is that there was a strength of feeling in the community about the matter.

If you know more about *Galaxy*’s call for solutions to the War, please reach out to us at journeyplanet@gmail.com

Martha Rosler – Bringing the War Home

by Chris Garcia

Few other artists have had the effect on my art practice that Martha Rosler has had without me even knowing who she was.

And I can't think of another artist who better called out America for its attitude towards the Vietnam War.

I've always loved collage. For a guy who absolutely can not draw a single damn thing, I've always found the ability to use established images and compose them in new environments to be incredibly freeing. I spent years working with collage, scissors and glue sticks at first, and then going fully digital in the 2010s. I got pretty good at all the tricks, which was a big part of the fun.

But there was one image that always got me.

Back in my early days of looking into the Art World, there was a book that every art nerd seemed to own. It was the book *The Story of Art*. While you had to wade through all the garbage art from before World War II, there was a section on Pop Art that I loved. It started with the classic collage image by Peter Hamilton "What Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?" And then there were a couple of Warhol and Rauschenberg images.

But then, in a block of text, almost as a throw-away, was an image that haunted me all these years.



It was a modern kitchen, well, Mid-century Modern Kitchen, and in it, out of scale with the rest of the room just a bit, were men in fatigues, clearly on the hunt for someone. It was clear the message to this piece; Vietnam was here, in our homes, and we're pretending that it's business, and kitchen design, as usual. It was powerful, but since I didn't have a copy of the book of my own, I didn't know who had

created such an incredible piece.

Years later, when I started looking into the women of Pop Art, I came across a different image, one of a Vietnamese father carrying his clearly dead child. I recognized the image from a *LIFE* magazine retrospective issue my Mom had, but I had never seen the image that it had been added into. The father was made to look as if they were carrying the dead child up the stairs of a very 1960s house.

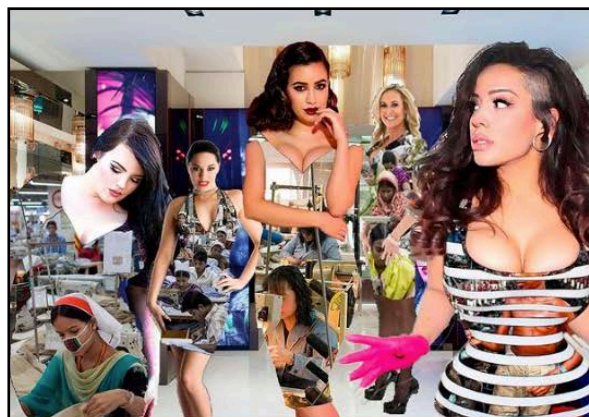
This was clearly the same artist, and this time, I found the name – Martha Rosler.

Martha Rosler was a somewhat later Pop Artist, and while she was working in the gallery world, the collages I had so appreciated were not in them. Instead, she'd sent them to zines, and sometimes for use as protest posters. That was a unique idea, but one that was principled because she did not want to gain monetary advantage from the images. I searched up the rest of the images (almost all of them are in the New York Museum of Modern Art) and was blown away.

They were exactly what I had been trying to do with my collages since day one!

Now, many of you will think anything I do is inherently apolitical, but alas, this is not the case.

The image I call "The Clothes Make the Woman" is an example of my somewhat political statement side, making a clear call-out of sweatshops and how they feed the modern fashion industry.



The way America responded to the Vietnam War was strange. There was a general sense of negativity towards the war, though this was far from universal, with the youth being largely against the war, as well as being the ones who were doing most of the fighting overseas. The war was the lead news item on nearly every news program, and many magazines were leading with images of the war. The American people, though, for the most part, simply kept on with their day-to-day lives, which many younger people saw as unconscionable, and many artists as well. There were many other young artists doing work that directly commented on Vietnam, but few commented on the role of those at home, tuning in to see the effects of the war without doing anything about it.

Rosler returned to these themes in recent years, juxtaposing the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with the internet, cell phones and other modern forms. These have a similar feel to them, perhaps even slightly more surreal than the 1960s works, but they tap into the same idea; that war is a big deal that we need to acknowledge more fully.



The American War in Vietnam in Marvel Comics During the Vietnam War up to 1975

by James Bacon

Comics are a form of escapism. Like any literature they can excite you, take you away, make you think, motivate you, disappoint you. War comics, good war comics, can be entertaining, thoughtful, and insightful of the human experience at war.

Comics are a publication and will reflect the bias, politics, and possibly propaganda of those who control it, so it is no surprise that in a comic shop in the Netherlands, framed on the wall, is a story paper page, with five informational illustrations, drawn comic-style, entitled 'Kampf um Rotterdam.' This doesn't mean *struggle*, it means *battle*, and as I look at it, it is explained that this is the 'Nazi' propagandised view of course, The Rotterdam Blitz was appalling, and so this leads to one looking at 'Kraut' by Peter Pontiac, which gives a different perspective.

In World War II, the enemy was clear for Captain America. Even while the U.S. was neutral, the portrayal of good versus evil may have contributed to a preparedness to go to war. Cap's creators, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, were both Jewish and would be alert to Hitler's evil. With the revelations about the appalling atrocities of the Nazi evil, the Holocaust, the death camps, those who had served or who had family who served or suffered, Joe and Jack would have felt that this was a war that they were right to get involved with. America's isolation would have been a disaster. We were the good guys and had to step in to stop true evil.

The pivot to fight against Sovietism seemed to happen quickly. One has to question how devastatingly brilliantly America as a nation went from hating Nazis to hating Socialism, to such a degree that now many misidentify what socialism is, yet alone social responsibility. The Red Menace was a tool of fear (while Stalinism was appalling, for sure).

How comics portrayed the War in Vietnam at the time is interesting, and while a reader now may accept that there was a level of nationalism or propaganda required about publications, I have attempted to be objective and look at these comics as stories.

Marvel Comics during the time of the Vietnam War had a huge resurgence. The Silver Age of comics had begun in October 1956, so by the 60's DC was taking strides with the Justice League. Jack Kirby with Stan Lee created The Fantastic Four in November 1961 for Marvel. The success that occurred led to much more, and so we had *The Incredible Hulk* #1 in May 1962, *Journey into Mystery* #83 with Thor and Spider-Man in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, both in August 1962, Iron Man appeared in *Tales of Suspense* #39, March 1963, The X-Men debuted in their first issue in September 1963, The Avengers followed with Captain America returning in issue 4, March 1964, and *Daredevil* #1 came out in April, 1964. What a period of time.

There was a legacy to comic book super heroes: they had fought against the Nazis and Japanese in World War II. But you'd be mistaken to think that readers would see them going to Vietnam. Sentiments in the U.S. were incredibly split, and rightly. The U.S. government had lied to its citizens about the conflict, but at the time, Stan Lee, the opportunistic businessman, was not inclined to upset readers by entering Vietnam politics. His anti-bigotry stance was very clear in his Stan's Soapbox, but on Vietnam, the politics was deftly avoided. Still Vietnam featured occasionally.

In the 1950s, Timely/Atlas had produced a plethora of 'war comics' including *Battle*, *Men's Adventures*, *Young Men*

on the Battlefield, *War Comics*, *Combat Kelly*, *Battle Action*, *Battlefield*, *Battlefront*, *Men in Action*, *War Action*, *Combat*, *Battle Brady*, *War Adventures*, *War Combat*, etc. As sales dipped, these were cancelled. There was no market. The Justice League, Flash, and superhero sales in the late 50's pointed in another direction, and so in 1962, we had Marvel Superheroes and the Fantastic Four. Marvel's first foray back into war comics was Sgt. Fury in 1963, a successful title that ran for hundreds of issues. Still, these dealt with a 'safe' Second World War, mostly. So we come to the Vietnam War and Marvel Comics.

***Tales of Suspense* #39** (March 1963): Iron Man's origin story occurs in Vietnam. Tony Stark is testing weapons in Vietnam and gets blown up and captured by Red Guerrillas led by the 'Tyrant' plunderer Wong-Chu. He demands that Tony build him some powerful weapons. Instead Tony builds a suit with the help of a Chinese physicist Yinsen and defeats the guerrillas.

***Tales of Suspense* #54** (June 1964): Iron Man fights the Mandarin in Vietnam. Tony Stark is summoned to the Pentagon and is informed of the disappearance of Stark's newest observer missiles in Vietnam. Stark is captured by the Mandarin, but shows his defiance and loyalty to America. In the next issue, he duly escapes and lands one of his missiles in a U.S. base, in an unnamed location, but one assumes Vietnam.

***Tales of Suspense* #61** (January 1965): Captain America travels to Vietnam to seek out a captured pilot, who is a POW and brother of a WWII veteran who helped Cap. Cap has to fight a Sumo fighter, who is the champion of a Vietnam General. Cap betters the Sumo wrestler and he and Barker escape and in doing so effectively run away from the challenging politics that surrounded the American War in Vietnam for over five years.

***Journey into Mystery* #117** (June 1965): Thor travels to Vietnam. Loki has used some magical gems to unfairly best Thor, and so Odin allows Thor the chance to find them, to prove Loki guilty. Loki has hidden the Gems in an underground artillery shell magazine, and so Mjolnir leads Thor to Vietnam. He gets shot at by Anti-aircraft fire and shelled, and thought dead, a local family takes him in. This family is starving, which allows for a nice twist, as one of the family is serving as an officer with the 'Merciless red tyrants.' The language is strong, and it seems odd to see Thor say things like '...the communist foe is so many and so cunning' and 'I shall return to aid those who fight against the tyrants.' This clearly indicates who the enemy is, and indeed the story ends with the tyrannical brother blaming communism and committing suicide. The story continues into issue #118 as Thor delivers the only surviving member of the family, Kim, into the hands of airborne GI's.

***Patsy Walker* #122** (August 1965): In a Vietnam-related story, Patsy Walker learns that her boyfriend, Buzz Baxter, is in hospital injured, and that he had not run off with another woman, but actually had gone to serve in Vietnam. Buzz enlisted in the Army in issue #115, the cover featuring her sadness as he departs on a train to join the army. This presented a sequence of romantic stories, as Patsy loves Buzz, misses

him and encounters other men who desire to be suitors. He is a Private, and in issue #117 we see Patsy meet Buzz at his training camp. Then letters don't reach one another, and so in issue #122 we see a dejected Buzz, injured in hospital, refusing to see Patsy. Issue #123 we see that matters have resolved and Buzz recovered and is heading off again, giving us Patsy on the Tarmac at an airport saying farewell to Buzz again. Issue #124 is the last issue in the run, and there are 3 stories, one about an infidelity that Patsy is upset about, and the worry she has for Buzz in Vietnam. This story ends with her writing, and the narrative encourages writing from home. At this stage, *Patsy Walker* came to an end. It reads like a romance comic for these issues, but of course Patsy Walker is also Hellcat in *Avengers* #144 (February 1976). Buzz returns too in the same issues, which revealed his time in Vietnam had changed him, leaving him with anger issues that led to the break-up of his and Patsy's marriage, and ultimately to him becoming the supervillain Mad Dog.

Amazing Spider-Man #47 (April 1967): Flash joins the Army. Gwen Stacey notes that they are throwing a party and 'Doing it for Flash! We want him to get a great send off into the Army.' Flash then says at the party, 'Hey! This is too much! Someone must've told you I'm going to win the war single handed.' At the end we see Peter reflecting very hard on his relationship with Flash, as he thinks 'He was probably my greatest fan...if only I could have told him who I really am... Just once.' The final words come from Spider-Man: 'But why am I thinking of him in the past tense!? He'll come back! He'll make it...somehow! The good guys always win...Don't they?' That is quite an end in 1967, full of questions and nuance, and not a mention of Vietnam by name. It is a really very thoughtful and poignant ending.

Sgt Fury and his Howling Commandos King Sized Special #3 (August 1967): 'A 43 page Battle epic destined to become a collectors classic...This is the Big One! Its soul searching saga you thought you'd never see...The Howling Commandos in Action Today!' The story shows Fury in Vietnam fighting 'Charlies and Jungle Bunnies' as they take on the Yankee Imperialist. We then go back 48 hours onto the Helicarrier where Fury and Shield seniors welcome a very accurately drawn President LBJ with a fantastic Texan style of speaking. LBJ is worried about North Vietnam having a Hydrogen bomb, and so reforms the Howling Commandos, all of whom get a little back story. The Howlers go on their clandestine mission behind enemy lines, destroy the hydrogen bomb, Fury gets captured (but is rescued when his orders are overridden), and the team get back to the Helicarrier, sworn to secrecy. A scrap book of the Howlers makes up the story. It never truly feels soul-searching or anything rather than a simple, jingoistic story. This is the closest Marvel would get to a dedicated Vietnam War comic in this era.

Tales of Suspense #92 (October 1967): This story, which continues in #93 and #94, contains the Iron Man story, 'Within the Vastness of Vietnam!' Iron Man is in Vietnam with U.S. forces testing weapons, but the real mission is in a castle, where U.S. intelligence think a weapon is being made. Iron Man heads into battle and attacks the castle, where he meets a new foe, the communist Half Face, and ends up fighting Titanium Man. Iron Man is defeated by Titanium Man who is then tasked with destroying an innocent village and making it look like American bombers did it. Iron Man successfully defeats both villains before this occurs, but once again, we see the ills of communism through a series of reminiscences from Half Face.

Iron Man #1 (May 1968): The previous December, both *Captain America* #100 and *Iron Man* #1 were released with *Tales of Suspense*. The vehicle for Captain America and Iron Man had ceased with issue #99 in November, and thus both characters got their own titles. In *Iron Man* #1, we have a three-page story by Archie Goodwin and Gene Colan retelling the Vietnam-based origin story of Iron Man again. While this origin story is shown repeatedly over the years, it is later adjusted for the movie audience in 2008 to the U.S. War in Afghanistan.

Daredevil #47 (December 1968): Daredevil is a USO-type performer, entertaining troops in 'Nam, but the real story is that of Willie Lincoln, a blinded soldier who Daredevil meets. This is a more thoughtful story of the time. Willie is an ex-NYPD cop, who was sacked for nefarious reasons. The mob stitches him up and frames him, and upon his return—now blind—is faced with serious challenges, including attempting to clear his name with Matt Murdock, while the mob tries to intimidate him. This sees Daredevil step in when Willie. Willie is a fighter in many ways, and his resolve and bravery come through. Perhaps the best Vietnam Story Marvel did at the time of the war.

Captain Marvel #16 (August 1969): This issue has a single frame depicting the Vietnam War as part of an American-centric sequence of history, including Columbus, the Civil War, World War I, the New Deal, etc. What is interesting is that panel is followed by another showing protests and banners, the largest one saying 'Make Love not War,' and then "No More Wars,' 'Equal Rights,' 'Ban the Bomb' and 'Fair Wages.' It is an interesting choice of order.

Captain America #125 (May 1970): By Stan Lee and Gene Colan, the same team as *Daredevil* #47. Cap is distraught after breaking up with Sharon Carter, and so again we go to Vietnam because he needs something to do. Cap seeks the kidnapped Dr. Robert Hoskins. He is captured when he parachutes out of a B-52 and is taken to the Mandarin's Castle—Iron Man's foe. Although he defeats the Mandarin and escapes with Hoskins, which eventually helps all involved get back to peace talks, the final panel is full of woe, but for the last line where Cap says 'and the knowledge that one day, even Captain America must surely face defeat.' This really felt like a subtle commentary on America's ill advised adventure in Vietnam, that saw so many, loose so much.

Avengers #80 (September 1970): Vision stops Red Wolf, Marvel's first Native American superhero, from getting a man. In a fleeting mention, William Talltrees explains that he was nearly killed half a world away, and we see a Vietnam scene.

Amazing Spider-Man #106, #107, #108, and #109 (March 1972-June 1972): As Flash returns from Vietnam, we have a story across multiple issues. Issue #108 is titled 'Vengeance from Vietnam.'

In issue #106, Peter meets Gwen Stacy, and she suggests they call into Flash who 'hasn't looked well since his return from Vietnam.' Flash is well out of sorts, and while Peter is initially peeved at Gwen's interest, when she explains she is worried, he recognises that he is being a jerk, and so later goes to find Flash to see if he can help. Spidey is busy during these two issues with a Jonah Jameson storyline, fighting against Smythe's Spider-Slayer robots. So in issue #107, when Flash meets Gwen, she explains her affection for Peter and how she only wants to be friends. Flash would like more, but is troubled by something else. Peter sees them arm in arm, but then Flash 'looks scared' as he is asked by military and civilian clothed men to come with them. The issue ends with the

tagline 'Back to Vietnam.' In issue #108 we see that Flash is 'Marked for Murder' in the 'Vengeance from Vietnam' story. Flash is ambushed, trapped by gun-toting attackers and an especially giant Chauffeur. Spider-Man intervenes and rescues Flash. Spider-Man asks Flash why he was being attacked by 'Chinese in gas masks,' and Flash begins the story of his time in Vietnam.

While Flash was serving in Vietnam, wounded and separated from his platoon, he sees a temple that's not on any map. Later, he awakes to find himself well taken care of by the residents of the temple, an unidentified older man and younger lady. After he recovers, Flash reluctantly leaves, but not before the lady notes a place in her heart for him. Flash finds his way back to base, only to find that Sector B, where the temple is located, will be bombarded. His commander won't believe him that there's a temple hidden there, so Flash returns to warn them, but to no avail and the shelling is carried out. Flash awakes in his camp and soon finds that the hidden temple was a cherished place by locals, and while his commanders are apologetic, the 'Natives' have targeted him as the one who revealed the temple's location, and so he is 'followed by silent staring hostile men—men with naked hatred and loathing in their eyes.'

Spider-Man brings Flash to the government types, and then meets Gwen. But he is troubled about whether her care for Flash is friendly affection or if 'her feelings for him go deeper.' He knows now that Flash wants Gwen, and this also worries him. When Gwen and Peter go out, he sees The Giant One, the Vietnamese Chauffeur. Peter slips away and fights the Giant One, but the Vietnamese set off an explosion and capture Flash. Peter reunites with Gwen but wants to chase after Flash, only to be challenged by her asking him to stay. She tells him he is never around when there is danger (of course, he is as Spidey), and how the others 'call [him] a coward.' Finally, she says, 'If you love me—stay with me.' Peter is in a quandary now: save Flash or 'Admit that I'm Spider-Man' to Gwen. It is slightly gripping stuff.

Issue #109 begins with 'You think you have problems? C'mon, let's tune in to Peter Parker's...' and, I'll admit, I laughed out loud. Apparently it is Asian monks who have captured Flash.

Peter figures a way to get away without letting down Gwen, and then he encounters the astral form of Dr. Strange. Strange shows Peter a vision of Flash, captured and kneeling in front of an elderly Asian priest. We learn that, with Flash's death, the High Priest's spirit will be freed. The Asian lady Flash met in Vietnam enters, introducing herself as Sha Shan, daughter of the priest. Even though Flash pleads with that she knows the truth about the shelling of the temple, she will not intervene. He is imprisoned until the Holy Hour, and so Strange and Spidey go seek him.

Meanwhile Sha Shan sneaks in to see Flash. She explains that the monks 'so strongly thirst for vengeance that they would not believe her' and although she brought him to safety after the shelling, the monks wanted the 'Fair Haired Occidental' (*Occidental: a 14th century term for Western people*). She raises a knife as if to kill Flash, but is thwarted by the monks who are appalled that she would deny the ritual. Meanwhile Aunt May and Gwen have a row after Peter's ploy to pretend Spider-Man had abducted him. Both women love him and both are worried about him.

Spider-Man and Strange get to Flash's location, and as Spider-man fights the monks and Giant One, Strange starts chanting. After pages of fighting and chanting, we see all the monks in a huge web, and the High Priest alive. We then see that Sha Shan was only going to cut Flash's bindings, not kill him, and he says 'I knew I wasn't wrong about you.' One might think a relationship is blossoming here.

Strange notes that 'Violence breeds violence—and murder will out! Only in peace is victory won.'

Sha Shan seems to disappear, unfortunately, but would return in 1977 in *Spectacular Spider-Man* #3, where she and Flash eventually date. The relationship does not work out, as he has an affair with Betty Byant, which we learn of in *Amazing Spider-Man* #275 in 1986, subsequently in *Amazing Spider-Man* #622. In 2010, Harry Osborne and Peter seek out Sha Shan Nguyen (giving her full name), to help Flash walk with prosthetic legs. Later Flash who is now Agent Anti-Venom is trying to get help for Ultimate Spider-Man, Miles Morales, at Columbia Medical Center, and he meets the fully named Dr. Sha Shan Nguyen, who cannot believe Flash is a hero. He says he will explain later, but in a subsequent battle with Red Goblin, Flash is killed. At his funeral, in ASM #800 (2018), Betty Bryant gives a eulogy, and Sha Shan is there.

OK. Initially there is little agency to Sha Shan. Initially, we do not even learn her name, and there is some interesting misdirection, which is not uncommon. The fact that the U.S. was bombing and shelling Vietnam endlessly is of course a meaning that is not missed, and so why would Vietnamese *not* show hatred for the U.S? There is something compelling about the story, that is for sure. I felt there was a really under-utilised character here, especially given the compelling continuous drama of Spider-Man and his friends. Sha Shan could have been an excellent part of that. Meanwhile ASM #121 and #122 comes to a very sad point for Spider-Man, unconnected but notable.

Without doubt, one could read Dr Strange's words in many ways: 'Violence breeds violence—and murder will out! Only in peace is victory won.'

Creatures on the Loose #16 (March 1972): This tells the story of Gullivar Jones. In the original 1905 prose tale, Jones was an American soldier, but Marvel's adaptation made him specifically a Vietnam veteran.

Avengers #112 (released in March 1973, but dated May): By issue #114, we learn that Mantis meets Swordsman in a bar in Saigon, Vietnam. Mantis (Brandt) would continue to appear in well over 100 comics. The American War in Vietnam ended at the end of March 1973. U.S. troops withdrew, although support for Vietnam would continue for another two years. Vietnam would continue to show up in Marvel comics, especially in *Iron Man*.

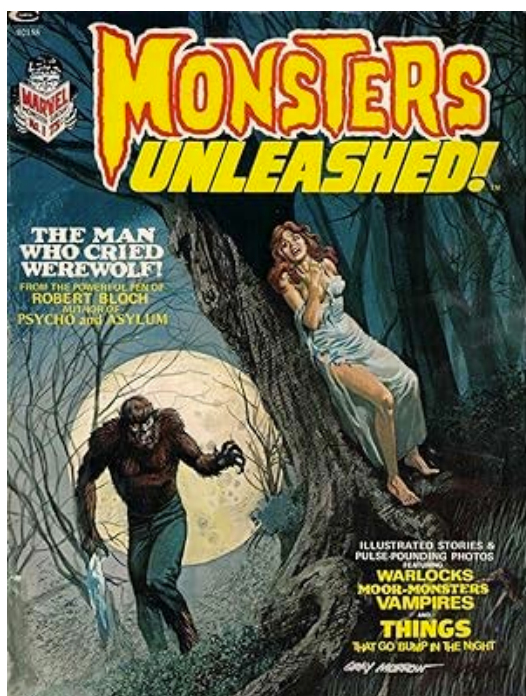
Amazing Spider-Man #129 (October 1973): This issue features the debut of The Punisher. During the encounter between him and Spider-Man, pitted against each other by the scheming Jackal, the Punisher tells Spider-Man that he 'spent three years in the Marines.' Later when Punisher and Spider-man fight again, Spider-Man beats Punisher and starts to realise they both have been set up. In typical fashion, Spider-Man quips, 'You said you were a Marine—so how come you're fighting over here?' to which the Punisher responds, 'That's my business super-hero...' implying that the Punisher should be 'over there,' although US troops had withdrawn at this stage.

Iron Man Vol. 1 #68 (April 1974): On the last page, we see a letter for Tony Stark from his girlfriend Roxie Gilbert. It appears that his friend, Eddie March (who has just featured in this issue) has learned that his brother Marty is 'MIA in Nam' and that Tony might let Iron Man know so 'he could look for him now that the war is at least officially over' as the Army has given up on him. Roxie also suggests that it is a chance to see what damage the war has caused first hand, close up. The final panel has a map of South East Asia and a character, Sun Fire.

Iron Man Vol. 1 #69-#72 (August 1969-January 1972): In Issue #69, Iron Man seeks out Marty and engages with Vietnamese soldiers. It's a convoluted story, and Roxie is with him. Sun Fire gets involved, re-building on behalf of Japan. Meanwhile Unicorn helps the Mandarin regain his full being, and so a fearsome battle ensues between Iron Man and the Mandarin, and meanwhile Roxie avoids jets bombing a village in breach of the truce, where Marty eventually finds her. In Issue #70, Sunfire and Iron Man take on the Mandarin and Ultimo. During this time, we learn that Marty has lost an arm in Vietnam, feels he has no purpose and no job back in America. He shows Roxie a hidden underground city that he has been working on. In Issue #71 Iron Man battles Yellow Claw, and we see Kuon Set (who Marty worked for) betray him—he has used Marty, and wants him dead. The last narrative, excitedly for me, warns of 'Convention of Fear' and 'Surprises and Guest Stars as Shell Head journeys to the eventful San Diego Comic Con 1974.'

Issue #72 is a cracking issue as villains and Iron Man confront one another at SDCC. We see creatives in the comics. Iron Man does lament not knowing how Roxy is, and in fairness she is quite the adventurer. Issue #73 shows Tony resolving matters stateside, but then going to Vietnam where Marty and Roxie are captured, and where Alex Nevsky, the Crimson Dynamo, swears to kill Iron Man, but alone, refusing the help of Titanium Man and Radioactive Man. The stories converge; we see that Roxy is rescued, but only in an attempt to trap Iron Man. There is a battle twixt Iron Man and Crimson Dynamo, where a village gets hit by napalm. Shara the niece of Kuon Set saves Marty, and Roxie continues to be a strong character, the day is won. Marty decides to stay in Vietnam with Shara and that is it. Even though Vietnam is very much a background element, there are hints about the realities POW/MIA's faced even after the War ended.

Monsters Unleashed #1 (August 1973): This is a magazine format with a mix of articles and comics and one story World of Warlocks by Gardner Fox and Roy Thomas with art by Gene Colan see's PFC Brian Morgan whipped from a rice paddy near the Tam Hiep river in Vietnam to a fantastical other world, a planet called The World of Warlocks and we follow a fantasy story, that moves well, but leaves Vietnam behind in that initial frame.



Avengers #121 (December 1973): Here we learn a little more detail about Mantis and Swordsman's time in Saigon, which has very little to do with the war. This continues into **Avengers #123**, in which the story 'Vengeance in Vietnam' shows Libra from Zodiac informing Mantis and the Avengers that he is her father. He explains that while he 'is occidental,' in 1953 he was a mercenary soldier with the French forces in Vietnam where he met and married a Saigon lady called Lua. This upset the King of Saigon's underworld, Monsieur Khrull, who was Swordsman's employer (mentioned in Issue #121). Mantis loses her temper and is held back from killing him. The story moves to Vietnam and we see Swordsman go after Kjrull. In **Avengers #124**, while Khrull is defeated, it appears worse is to come.

Vault of Horror Vol. 2 #1 (May 1974): Here we have a Vietnam story entitled 'Nightmare Patrol' set in 1969. The story is well told by Gerry Conway and art by Ernie Chua. It builds some pretty intense drama and could be set in any army, in any war, as it is about internal tensions and, indeed, an internal problem with one of the men. I really enjoyed it but apart from looking smartly done, it could be set anywhere.

Avengers #129 to #135 (September 1974-February 1975): Swordsman and Mantis are part of the team now, and so there are mentions of Vietnam. Indeed #130 features Saigon in the title, as the Avengers try to help Mantis understand her personal history, which features strongly in #134. During this span, Vietnam changed considerably in a way, in short order.

Marvel Premiere Vol 1 #23 (April 1975): This comic features Iron Fist and the return of the Vietnam Vet Warhawk, except it is a new Warhawk, Mitchel Tanner. Warhawk is not well. He is delusional about still being in the War. He is convinced that Colleen Wing is his wife, and attacks Iron Fist and abducts her. Iron Fist tracks him down. The sadness to the ending reflects on the Vietnam war, as Warhawk refuses help and is swept away by the sea. This comic would have hit shelves in April 1975, and not very much later, Saigon fell.

Marvel Comics Present #2 (April 1975): this is a whole magazine-sized publication dedicated to the Punisher, with the main story written by Gerry Conway and drawn by Tony DeZuniga. Here, The Punisher meets a fellow Veteran he knows, so we learn his Military history, complete with his list of honors: a Medal of Honour, Silver Star, Bronze Star and four Purple Hearts. We learn that the Punisher is a nickname he had in the Marines, and we then get his family back story. There is also a David Kraft interview with Don Pendelton, author of the Executioner novels, as well as a couple of images from previous appearances.

When one reflects on the portrayal of Vietnam in Marvel comics during this era, it is not that strong.

What is important to look at is the contextualisation that letters, or editorials offer, and so if we look at Stan's Soapbox, which had started in the spring of 1967. We can see what Stan's view was:

Stan's Soapbox, October 1967

Many Keepers of the Faith have demanded that we take a more definite stand on current problems such as Viet Nam, civil rights, and the increase in crime, to name a few. We've a hunch that most Marvel madmen pretty well know where we stand on such matters—and we've long believed that our first duty is to entertain, rather

than editorialize. Of course, you've probably noticed that it's not too easy to keep our own convictions out of the soul-stirring sagas we toss at you—but, in our own bumbling fashion, we do try. Anyway since it's YOU who are the true editors of Marveldom, it's time for another impassioned poll! Should we editorialize more or less or keep things in their present fouled-up form? We'll announce the verdict as soon as one of us learns to count so we can tabulate the votes. But, till then, in case you haven't noticed, we've got a little suggestion for you. Namely THINK MARVEL! That's it, Believer!

So we can see that stepping away from politics was prioritising sales, evading any direct indication of sentiment.

Stan's Soapbox, October 1968

This month we're gonna yak about something that has nothing to do with our mags! Over the years we've received a zillion letters asking for the Bullpen's opinion about such diverse subjects as Viet Nam, civil rights, the war on poverty, and the upcoming election. We're fantasmagorically flattered that our opinion would matter to you, but here's the hang-up: there ISN'T any unanimous Bullpen opinion about any thing, except possibly mother love and apple pie! Take the election, for example. Some of us are staunch Democrats, and others dyed-in-the-wool Republicans. As for Yours Truly and a few others, we prefer to judge the person, rather than the party line. That's why we seek to avoid editorializing about controversial issues—not because we haven't our opinions, but rather because we share the same diversity of opinion as Americans everywhere. But, we'd like to go on record about one vital issue: we believe that Man has divine destiny, and an awesome responsibility, the responsibility of treating all who share this wondrous world of ours with tolerance and respect judging each fellow human on his own merit, regardless of race, creed, or color. That we agree on and we'll never rest until it becomes a fact, rather than just a cherished dream! Excelsior! Smiley

This is a very fair piece, indeed it is decent, and open about the potential politics in a workplace.

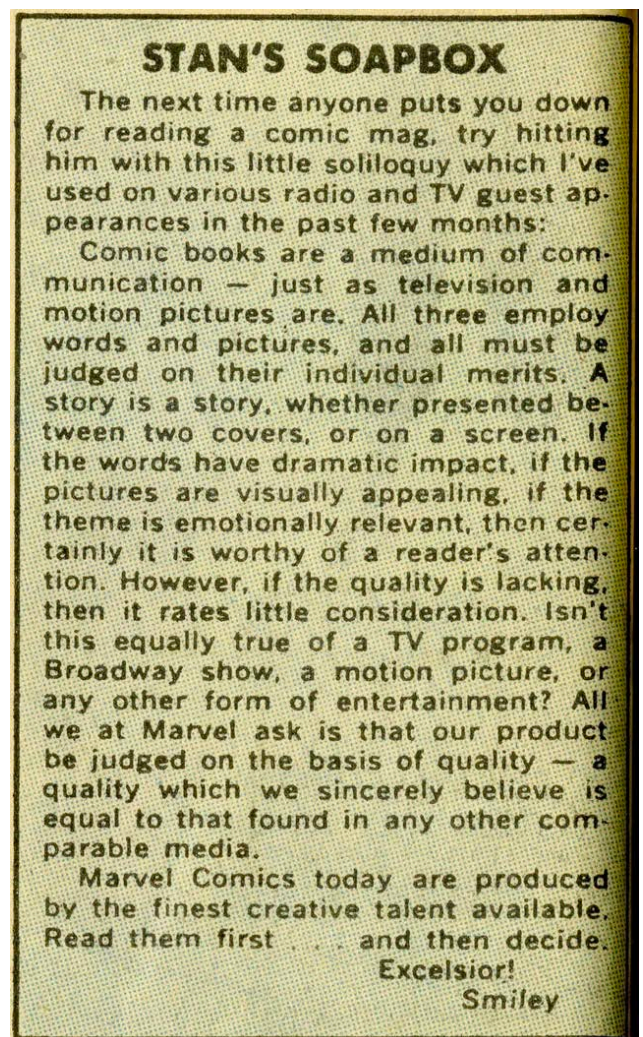
Stan's Soapbox, December 1968 (an important one)

Let's lay it right on the line. Bigotry and racism are among the deadliest social ills plaguing the world today. But, unlike a team of costumed super-villains, they can't be halted with a punch in the snoot, or a zap from a ray gun. The only way to destroy them is to expose them to reveal them for the insidious evils they really are. The bigot is an unreasoning hater, one who hates blindly, fanatically, indiscriminately. If his hang-up is black men, he hates ALL black men. If a redhead once offended him, he hates ALL redheads. If some foreigner beat him to a job, he's down on ALL foreigners. He hates people he's never seen people he's never known with equal intensity—with equal venom. Now, we're not trying to say it's unreasonable for one human being to bug another. But, although anyone has the right to dislike another individual, it's totally irrational,

patently insane to condemn an entire race—to despise an entire nation, to vilify an entire religion. Sooner or later, we must learn to judge each other on our own merits. Sooner or later, if man is ever to be worthy of his destiny, we must fill our hearts with tolerance. For then, and only then, will we be truly worthy of the concept that man was created in the image of God, a God who calls us ALL His children.
Peace and Justice, Stan

More research is required, but it was definitely a strange time for US comics. While quite wonderful, there was a clear anti-communist approach in titles that addressed the Cold War, but did not touch on the Vietnam War. We had *Crimson Dynamo*, which first appeared in *Tales of Suspense* #46 in October of 1963, which was a suit, and was worn by Soviets fighting Iron Man. Then Natasha Romanov, Black Widow who was a cold war spy, first appearing in *Tales of Suspense* #52 in April, 1964, with Iron man and Alexei Shostakov as the Red Guardian, in *Avengers* #43 in August, 1967. There was no shortage.

Suffice to say that Vietnam was not dealt with in as much detail; little attention was paid to it one way or the other, as one might imagine, given that Stan Lee was cultivating the teenager and student markets, young people as opposed to children, many of whom saw the War with much contempt.



Many thanks to Stuart Vandal for his support with this article.

Fiction as Truth Telling in Dương Thu Hương's *A Novel Without A Name*

by Allison Hartman Adams

"That dissident slut."

This is a badge of honor, Dương Thu Hương says, bestowed on her by Communist Party Secretary Nguyễn Văn Linh in the 1980s.



Communist wartime heroine turned disenchanted critic of the Vietnamese government, Dương Thu Hương's conviction is the stuff of legends. Unlike many of her contemporaries who engage in only the most subtle of political commentary in order to ensure their livelihoods and liberty, Dương Thu Hương does not hide behind clever metaphor or discrete allusions. In her stories, there is no coded language that shields her reader from feeling the full force of her condemnation. Western readers who yearn for an insider's uncompromising look at how good intentions can go so wildly wrong would be well-served.

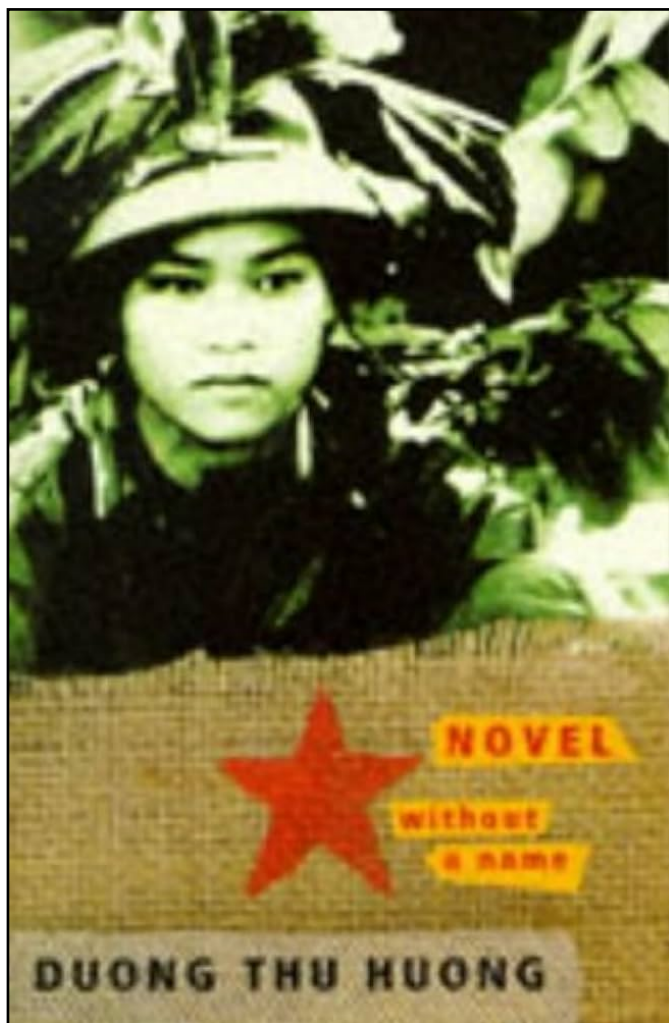
In Dương Thu Hương's fiction. At times, her work borders on Orwellian, at others almost absurdist. How could the Party officials in her novels be so cartoonishly evil? How can her main characters continue participating in a system that (in her view) has lost course and focus? Her pursuit of truth through the lens of fiction has led to Dương Thu Hương's censorship, imprisonment, expulsion from the Communist Party, and finally, her exile in France.

In a conversation with Robert Stone (PEN World Voices series), Dương Thu Hương explains that she joined the Party in an effort to "fight for those who were voiceless." Despite years of working to change the system, in 1990 she was expelled from the Communist Party following the tightening of the liberties brought on by of Đổi Mới (a period of economic growth in Vietnam that also saw freer forms of artistic expression). Ironically, the Party's democratic vote for her expulsion ended in a tie. But in what can only be described as a profoundly baller move, Dương Thu Hương cast the final tie-breaking vote, and voted herself out of the Party.

When Dương Thu Hương was born in 1947, her mother was a teacher, and her father was a member of Hồ Chí Minh's Việt Minh, fighting for liberation from the French. In 1967, two years after U.S. Marines landed in Đà Nẵng, Dương Thu Hương left her studies in art and music at the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture's Art College to join the North Vietnamese Women's Youth Brigade. She served for

seven years in the heavily-bombed Central Highlands. There she and dozens of other volunteers sang, performed, cared for the wounded, and buried the dead. Her mission was to "sing louder than the bombs." Out of forty volunteers, she was one of the three who survived.

Dương Thu Hương calls her evolution into dissidence a "journey." It didn't happen quickly for her, but her path was clear when she encountered POWs who were not American, but Vietnamese. She found that underneath the "American War" was her own country's civil war. In an interview with *The New York Times*, she remembers that they "were being bombed all the time by the Americans, but they were high in the sky and [she] never saw them. [She] only saw Vietnamese." Her disillusionment was solidified in 1975 when she arrived in Saigon as part of the North Vietnamese "liberating" forces. People there were not what propaganda had promised: oppressed, frightened, destitute. Instead, Dương Thu Hương saw well-stocked book stores and people laughing and talking freely in the streets. While her fellow volunteers were celebrating the victory over the Americans and South Vietnamese, she recalls "I was crying as if my father had just passed away, because I thought that the war had



been a cruel joke by history...I felt that I'd lost my youth unjustly."

In 1977 she was hired to write propaganda screenplays for the Hanoi Fiction Studio. Translator Nina McPherson notes that during this time Dương Thu Hương first experienced censorship when one of her scripts was adapted into a satirical play and subsequently banned. She protested the ban and began to look to writing as a means of expression. The themes of her novels and short stories center around political and romantic embitterment, and the villains are not foreign invaders, but the Party members themselves. In a 2000 interview with *TIME*, she remarks that the government has exploited the memory of the war and that "in the war the Vietnamese were brave, but in peace they are cowards" and yield to authoritarian rule.

Dương Thu Hương plays with this tension in her *Novel Without a Name* (1995). The main character Quan, a platoon commander in the North Vietnamese Army, is far from a coward, but his bitterness deepens with every step he takes in his wandering, Odyssean, 10-year journey through the war. He began the war much as Dương Thu Hương did: idealistic and full of patriotic energy. He and his fellow soldiers were "drunk on [their] youth...marching toward a glorious future" in which Vietnam "had been chosen by History." Quan tells the reader that "this was not simply another war against foreign aggression. It was our chance for a resurrection." The Vietnamese people, Quan believes, would finally "hold a rank apart...be respected, honored, revered."

With this certainty in his heart, Quan quickly becomes a successful leader, always helping his men take one more step, live one more day. At the start of the novel, Luong, a childhood friend now an officer at division headquarters, asks Quan to find their mutual friend Bien, who has been labeled insane and imprisoned by the army. What feels like a quest for the hero turns out to be fruitless, meandering efforts to make sense of the trauma of the war. Yes, Quan finds and rehabilitates Bien, but afterwards, Quan returns home to find that his spiteful old father has forced Quan's brilliant and kind younger brother into the Việt Cộng, where he is killed. He encounters Hoa, his childhood sweetheart, who has become pregnant with another man's child and is shunned by the village—and, to a certain extent, Quan. In a particularly memorable scene, Quan witnesses two Party officials on a train loudly debating the various methods the Party uses to dupe and cow the populace into submission. Quan watches them, seeing not the self-satisfied officials, but a magician who creates a marionette for the people to worship:

Billions of men prostrate themselves and begin to pray. Billions of eyes opened wide in fear and adoration. Billions of lives wait for the signal to jump into the fire, into hell...I am one of them, they are my kin, all those who are dear to me. And seated behind this curtain, I see this little man, this dwarf magician with his pug nose, grinning, puffing on a cigarette..."

The officials are so brazen that they don't even bother to speak in hushed tones in an overcrowded train car. This absurdity is underscored when a military officer attempts to arrest the two men for criticizing Karl Marx and is subsequently intimidated into inaction by the higher-ranking Party officials. Fear, not political conviction, is what ends this scene, and everyone on the train simply looks the other way.

By the end of the novel, much of Quan's childhood idealism has evaporated. All those he loved are lost. Bien dies, Hoa is out of reach, his brother is dead, his father an angry shell. The cost of the war is too high, and Quan finally understands that the "People," the ones he and army have been fighting and dying for, don't really exist. Kha, a soldier who

was caught destroying confiscated American supplies, delivers the final blow to Quan's wavering sense of Party loyalty. "The people," Kha says, "that's my mother, my father, your parents, the soldiers. None of them will ever get a crumb." When Quan protests and feebly attempts to remind him of the Party's great and noble cause, Kha frames it a different way:

"You see, the people, they do exist from time to time, but they're only a shadow. When they [the Party] need rice, the people are the buffalo that pulls the plow. When they need soldiers, they cover the people with armor, put guns in the people's hands. When all is said and done, at the festivals, when it comes time for the banquets, they put the people on an altar, and feed them incense and ashes. But the real food, that's always for them."

Quan feels as if he is "drowning" after this, and even victory over the Americans can't restore the idealism of his youth. "There is no way back to the source, to the place where the pure, clear water once gushed forth," he thinks. This is deeper than the feeling of never being able to "go home again." This is the realization that everything he worked for was based on lies.

In the closing scene, Quan speaks to another soldier, who begins fantasizing about how quickly he will climb the ranks in the North Vietnamese Army now after their magnificent victory. But Quan does not join in, as he has concluded that there is no road back—not to idealism, not to patriotism, not to the home with Hoa he once dreamt of. Worse, there will be no resurrection or glorious future.

As the other man natters on about what comes next for the reunified nation of Vietnam, Quan watches him silently. "Soldier," he thinks, "the dawn is icy. You fall under the bullets. On the white of the parachute cloth, I see your blood spreading."

Dương Thu Hương now resides in France. Lucky for us, she continues to write, but has pulled back from the prickly and dangerous life of a political dissident. However, she still believes it's important to tell her truth about the Vietnamese government. In her conversation with Robert Stone, Dương Thu Hương points out three reasons for the survival of the totalitarian regime. First, the Vietnamese are good at fighting the foreign invader, but not each other. She also believes that suffering leads to a need for basic survival, blinding her people to other possibilities for the country. Lastly, is pride. Vietnam won against America, the great superpower. But now the Party clings to the shadow of that victory, leveraging it to shepherd the people into compliance.

"[The Vietnamese] have no other credibility than to sleep with dead corpses," Dương Thu Hương says. "We have the responsibility to tell the truth about the war and the stupidity in continuing to dig up this dead corpse to smell it."

Box me up and ship me home: Tim O'Brien's Vietnam

by Jim O'Brien

Introduction

Of the Vietnam veterans who went on to put the conflict at the heart of their creative lives, author Tim O'Brien has been one of the best known.

O'Brien was born in 1946 in rural Minnesota and was drafted in 1968. Arriving in Vietnam in 1969, he served in the 3rd Platoon Company A, 5th Battalion the 46th Infantry regiment, part of the 23rd Infantry division. It was this division that had contained the unit that had perpetrated the Mỹ Lai Massacre in March 1968, roughly a year before O'Brien landed on Vietnamese soil. Although he was entirely unaware of them at the time, the events in Mỹ Lai affected O'Brien profoundly and feature at several points in his writing. Wounded in 1970, O'Brien was honourably discharged and returned home to the US, the holder of seven service medals including the Purple Heart.

O'Brien appears to have begun writing about Vietnam even whilst still serving in south-east Asia but following his return to civilian life he began to write more extensively about his experiences of the war, publishing a variety of largely autobiographical essays in titles such as the *Washington Post*, *Playboy* and the *Massachusetts Review*.

In 1973 he published his first full-length book, a highly praised war service memoir titled *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, which wove together several of his previously published essays plus new material as one volume. This was followed in 1975 by the novel *Northern Lights* and a further novel, *Going after Cacciato*, in 1978. *The Things They Carried*, a collection of short stories about Vietnam, and probably O'Brien's most celebrated title, came out in 1990, with novel *In the Lake of the Woods* then appearing in 1994.

These five titles are a mix of fiction and non-fiction and range quite widely in terms of settings, characters and genres but can perhaps best be looked at as two distinct if overlapping groups – those that are chiefly set 'in country' (*If I Die in a Combat Zone*, *Going after Cacciato*, *The Things They Carried*) and those that mainly deal with the lives of veterans post-Vietnam (*Northern Lights*, *In the Lake of the Woods*).

In Country

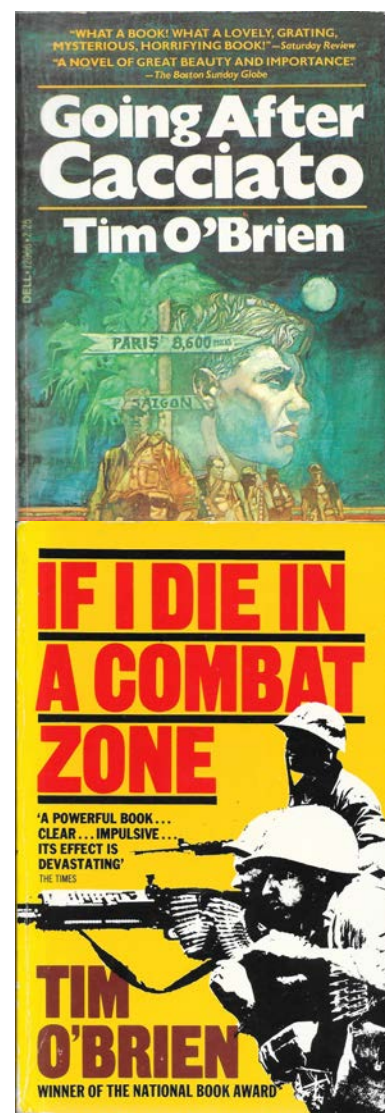
If I Die in a Combat Zone gets its title from a blackly humorous US American marching song (second line: 'Box me up and ship me home') no doubt sardonically chanted by O'Brien and his fellow GIs as they headed out nervously into the paddy fields and steaming jungles of South Vietnam, every sense alert for the shadowy presence of black pyjama-clad Viet Cong fighters hidden along the trail. The book presents a more or less chronological account of the author's time in Vietnam, from draft board and basic training to combat and a final return home as a decorated veteran. O'Brien doesn't attempt to provide a complete history of his service, instead offering snapshots of the best and worst moments he and his comrades endured as they tried to stay alive through a year of heat, squalor, violence and fear. Many of these snapshots focus on visceral action – ambushes and night fighting, the loading of wounded men onto helicopters whilst under heavy fire – while others are more contemplative, exploring what it means to be courageous in a situation that is deadly and beyond your control, how it felt to take part in a war that even at the time seemed unjustified and unjustifiable. Hovering in the background of several sections of the book is the knowledge that the forces and emotions that allowed an event like Mỹ Lai to happen lay very close beneath the surface even in

men who were otherwise moral and decent human beings.

Going After Cacciato looks from its cover as it might cover similar ground to *If I Die* but in fictional form. Its story is told from the point of view of Private Berlin (in many ways, you feel, an analogue for Tim O'Brien himself). Berlin recounts the tale of fellow soldier Private Cacciato who, pushed to the edge, goes AWOL and attempts to walk out of the green inferno of Vietnam all the way to the peace and tranquillity of Paris. Berlin and his platoon embark on a mission to find Cacciato and bring him in before he's shot for desertion. Which may make the novel sound as if it's a straight-up men's adventure title when it is in fact anything but. In common with much of O'Brien's writing, *Going after Cacciato* is highly experimental and here quickly veers off into

psychedellic, magic realist territory with Berlin and the others 'falling through a hole', Alice in Wonderland-style, and pursuing Cacciato not just through Vietnam but right across the globe from Laos and Mandalay to Delhi, Kabul and (finally) Paris itself. The novel is structurally innovative, with some events presented non-chronologically and with interlude chapters that step outside of the main narration to present alternate views of events or to allow a different point of view – features which, as we shall see, recur in O'Brien's later writing too.

Dispensing with the genre-bending experimentation of *Going after Cacciato*, *The Things They Carried* returns to the format and style of *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, with O'Brien here using fiction to construct a similar narrative to that laid out in his memoir. Indeed, some of the 'stories' – the meting out of casual violence to blind old villager who had stopped to help a group of GIs wash at his well; the death by drowning of an infantryman friend of O'Brien's caught by gunfire in the deep mud of a rice paddy at night – are near enough identical save for name changes (where in *If I Die* O'Brien used pseudonyms for his comrades, in *The Things They Carried* he uses peoples' real names) and some rephrasing to cast events as stories rather than fact. O'Brien uses both *The*



Things They Carried and his other books to set out ideas about how stories – especially war stories – get told and developed and retold and changed and retold and so on until it's hard to distinguish between reality and story yet still have both be 'truthful' to the feelings and meaning of the event. You could say that *If I Die* is a set of true stories while *The Things They Carried* is a fictionalised memoir.

Vietnam Vets

Northern Lights was Tim O'Brien's first novel, published in 1975, and concerns two brothers, Paul and Harvey Perry. Having served in Vietnam and lost an eye, Harvey comes home to a hero's welcome in the Minnesota town of Sawmill Landing but finds it difficult to talk about his experiences, and clearly struggles with what he has seen and undergone overseas. Older brother Paul was not called up in the draft due to his age and has a guilt complex about not serving, feeling himself to be weaker than his kid brother (in flashbacks, we learn that the boys' austere preacher father was very tough on the 'softer' Paul in the past). Paul is married to Grace but both he and Harvey lust after the flirty Addie. In the second, longer section of the book, Paul and Harvey plan a three-day cross country skiing hike through the wild and remote landscape of the vast Arrowhead reserve. It's a bonding exercise that goes badly wrong when the pair are caught in a violent snowstorm. They struggle to survive as Harvey goes down with pneumonia and their supplies run out, but Paul rises to the challenge and gets them through.

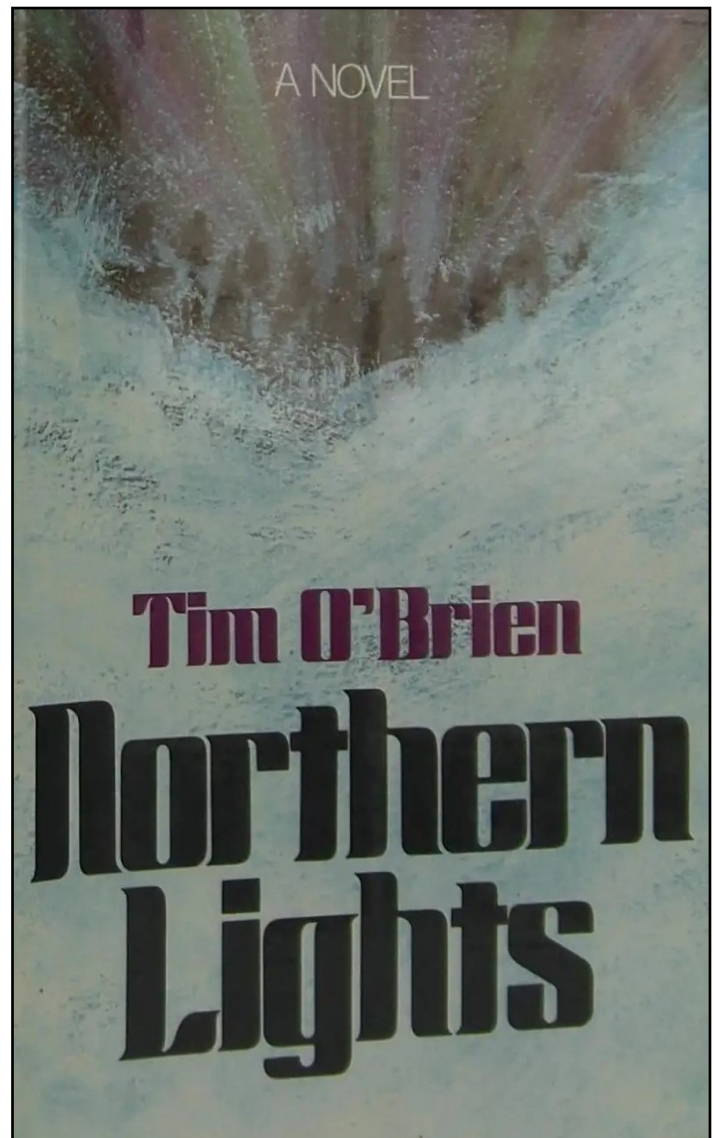
Heavily autobiographical in places (Sawmill Landing and its nearby lake are based on the town of Worthington where Tim O'Brien grew up), *Northern Lights* – particularly in its second half – reads like a men's adventure backwoods survival novel and is sometimes blurbed-up on its cover very much as a thriller. Nevertheless, while it is much more naturalistic than *Going After Cacciato*, its prose style is still emphatically literary, with heavy use of repetition for sonic effect, and is much more concerned with Paul's interior world rather than with the events the brothers go through in the woods as they battle the elements.

While what Vietnam has done to Harvey (and to Paul and, by implication, to the whole community and country from which they come) is key to what happens in the book, the novel contains no direct flashbacks to the war. Not so *In the Lake of the Woods* from 1994, where O'Brien again tackles the story of a veteran scarred by his time serving in Vietnam but here uses sections of the novel to go back and describe what those events were. The book won the James Fenimore Cooper Prize in 1995 and is as structurally ambitious as any of O'Brien's work, with a narrative that moves back and forth in time, and which adopts different story telling modes or devices as it goes – narrative chapters presented in sequence but also the above-mentioned flashbacks and further sections listing Evidence and Hypotheses in the mystery that forms the heart of the book.

The book's central 'plot' focuses on Kathy, the dissatisfied wife of an ambitious Minnesota politician named John Wade. Kathy disappears one night from the couple's holiday home at the Lake of the Woods on the Canadian border after an argument that has followed hot on the heels of John's heavy defeat in the race to become state governor. John and others search in vain for Kathy before John takes a boat out onto the lake and also disappears.

The novel features multiple flashbacks to John's childhood and youth, to his and Kathy's courtship and marriage and to his early political career. Crucially, they also reveal details of John's time in Vietnam and his participation in the Mỹ Lai/Thuan Yen massacre. It is clear that John suffers from PTSD and has been further traumatised by not talking through what happened to him overseas.

The often simple and very direct stories set out in *If I Die in a Combat Zone* and *The Things They Carried* remain the best of Tim O'Brien's Vietnam writing – incisive, honest and compelling. His novels linked to Vietnam are formally far more challenging but lack the punch of his fine essay and short-form writing.



DC Comics and the American War in Vietnam

by James Bacon

Here we look at the contemporary comics of the American War in Vietnam, although we move forward and backwards a little, and end with some recommendations.

Action Comics #156 'Pipeline in Peril' (May 1951)

There are a series of stories in this issue of *Action Comics*, and one is about Congo Bill, originally appearing *More Fun Comics* #56 in June 1940, wherein he was a military veteran and adventurer. By 1951, he is employed by insurance companies to investigate fraud, and in this story we are introduced to the French Foreign Legion, who are stationed in Indo-China and Congo Bill, who is in Saigon after solving a case for World Wide Insurance. He sees an old comrade, Villers, who is attacked and Congo Bill steps in to help him. Surprised by the danger, we learn that oil is being syphoned off by criminals, and the Legionnaire Captain Veuvery has decided that he will summarily execute a 'Native' for every barrel stolen. Bill suggests he joins Villers as a recruit to try and figure out the situation. They travel by train to Hue, 500 miles towards Hanoi, where we meet Veuvery and his Sergeant Neihof. Bill watches later as Neihof kills two locals, one of whom had attacked Villers, and then they get assigned to a patrol, with a delayed booby trapped jeep. Bill sets about gaining the help of locals, and uncovers the captain and sergeant's plan of the syphoned oil. Thankfully a local summons a Colonel who comes upon the scene and so the six page story comes to an end.

There is much irony in this story. The French had effectively stolen back their colony of Indo-China, threatening the US and UK if they didn't get them back after WWII. The corruption of the French Legionnaires and the importance of oil is not lost on readers in hindsight. While it does not feature the American War in Vietnam, or French Indo China War, I felt this was a story of the time and a welcome addition to this list, an example that the country existed, even if those of Vietnam have little or no agency and are portrayed poorly.

Blackhawk #41 (June 1951)

This story starts off with a seriously fantastical view: we see Tanks with wings flying and attacking one another. The caption reads: 'Civil War rages in a remote and little known corner of the Eastern World! But is it only a civil war, or is there some other, more sinister meaning to this struggle of Brother against Brother? How else explain the deadly menace of the sky tanks—'

The Blackhawks are flying over 'a small country in southeastern Asia' and discover the remnants of Ho-Lin's

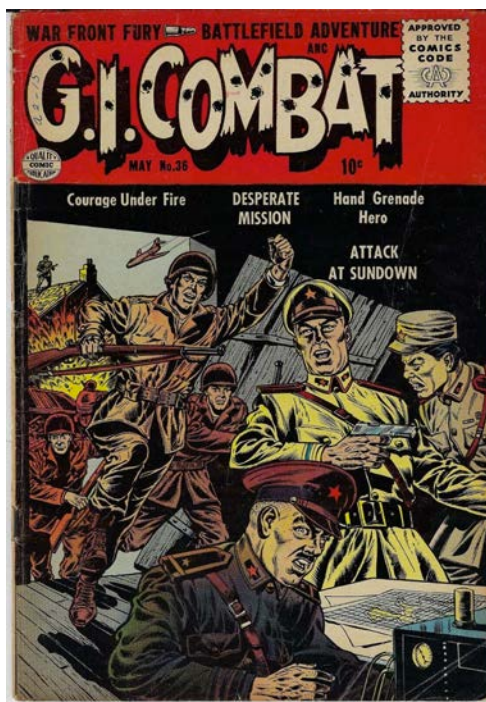
army, who were mostly wiped out by a tyrannical government.

Emissary X arrives in support of Ho-Lin and his second in command Soo Yat. He convinces them to accept support, and so they are supplied with Sky Tanks to attack the government. The Blackhawks decipher the message for Emissary X and realise he is working for another tyrannical government who wish to betray Ho Lin. This is not a neat story, and I admit I liked the complexity. Ho Lin and Soo Yat are good characters, which is a real juxtaposition with the appalling racist portrayal of fellow Black Hawk 'Chop Chop' (complete with buck teeth). Generally speaking, all the tropes of Asian characters that are used are shameful.

It is a convoluted and complex story. Soo Yat says that the Blackhawks are usually on the side of Liberty, and it is hard to know what they are exactly doing. SooYat gets killed, as she tries to prevent her own troops from shooting the Blackhawks. The Blackhawks and the rebels fight, the Sky Tanks are beaten, and Emissary X and the invading government leader is killed. This seems to create some instantaneous cohesion, and in the span of 3 panels, we see the previously tyrannical government vow to change through democracy working with the rebels.

One struggles to see the metaphor here for what might have been happening in Vietnam, but with the Blackhawks supporting the rebels maybe. Is the Invading government a hint at China? Is Ho Lin close to—at least influenced by—Hồ Chí Minh?

GI Combat #36 (May 1956)



'The Desperate Mission' finds Capt Joe Kendall and his squad of Paratroopers downed by a storm in their plane in 'Indo-Chinese Jungle behind enemy lines.' The story goes back to a POW meeting between Col. Du Li and Americans in 'Free Indochinese territory' and about US troops captured at Điện Biên Phủ, which he denies. Du Li is portrayed as a pot bellied, smoking ugly character as well as a 'Red,' a very clear visual distinction with the upright handsome Americans. They are on a swap with a 'Free Vietnam' paratrooper squad touring the US, implying they are not combatants, per se. As the US troops seek to protect themselves and draw 'Red' patrols away, they come across a POW camp, and so Capt Kendall and his men attack the POW camp and find the troops captured at Điện Biên Phủ and rescue them. As they come under sustained attack by growing forces, they defeat the Reds when freed troops and 'Native Prisoners' start to help in the fight. The 'Vietnam Prisoners' are happy to hike to 'Free French Indo-Chinese Territory' while the Americans all fly in the same direction. Two of the other 3 stories are set in Korea, the third a contemporary story set in Greenland where US troops confront the 'Reds.' The sentiments are clear in the story, although the evasive nature of seeing US troops

fight and engage is clever, and while not nuanced, can be seen with an ironic eye now.

Our Army at War #170 (August 1966)

Behind the Sgt Rock cover and long story, we have 'Somebody Down There's Laughing' that opens with a splash page identifying a 'Second Looie' going down fighting, with a nice big 'Pow! Pow!' 'And 'BRRRRP!' effects. Air Force jets arrive to 'Sting the Con' and then the pilot instructs 'Spray everything that moves! Nobody seems to be alive in our outpost! If it is moving it is a Victor-Charlie!'

We learn that Lieutenant Roy's brother Tommy has been killed. The only reason he was on this assignment was because Roy had gone AWOL and was having a loving time with a Vietnamese lady in Saigon. Tommy volunteered instead. Roy feels guilt for the death of his brother and is assigned to go back to the outpost with a unit of new Viet Volunteers meeting them at Pu Thoc, and to face court martial on his return. The Unit of Volunteers are ambushed and overcome by the Viet Cong. Afterwards, the VC interrogates the one survivor and learns that a 'Yankee' is coming. They plan to deceive Lt. Roy by wearing the Volunteer uniforms, but Roy soon figures out their plan when he notices that they all move like experienced soldiers. Roy tries to alert command, and calls in an airstrike, but then the deceivers attack him and we have five pages of Lt Roy bravely fighting against overwhelming odds. Lastly, after a grenade floors him and he faces death at the hands of the Viet Cong, he notes the noise of jets and so 'The Yank jets let go with a whole ball of Wax...Napalm, rockets strafing runs...Victor Charlie was snared in his own trap. And above the Screaming shells rose the laughter of Lt. Roy!' Below this is Lt. Roy's floating head laughing, the outpost exploding behind him on a 2/3rd page splash.

This is a very odd story. The internal conflict of letting down a brother is good, but to see both brothers then die feels like an unfortunate consequence rather than seeing one survive and learn. The Vietnamese lady was not portrayed as a distraction or blamed for the outcome, but she could have easily been a beer glass. There is little or no agency to the Vietnamese, and the story could have fitted anywhere, during any war. Overall it is a poor job.

Showcase #64: The Spectre 'The Ghost of Ace Chance' (October 1966)

A very unexpected mention of Vietnam in a story that is unconnected. The Spectre is solving crime working with Detective Jim Corrigan. When a gambler dies, his spirit enters Jim. The Spectre and he sense something is wrong, when Jim encounters a sinister energy that feeds off evil deeds. The Spectre decides to enact good deeds to counter this, and so drops into a Peace Corps Officer in Africa, 'doing a good turn for the Natives' to 'a Vietnam Warzone' to a 'Religious Service' and finally to a hospital where he notes that 'all this good shall be used to fight evil' and continues to fight the evil spirit.

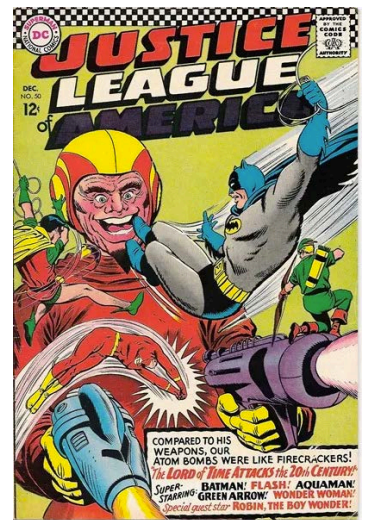
To think that acting in a Vietnam Warzone was a positive and good deed is quite unexpected and ironic, as really it is the worst, but is significant in what thinking might have been by some. This is not totally unbelievable now, in reflection, so worth noting.

Justice League of America #50 (December 1966)

In this issue we have a roll call of Aquaman, Batman, Flash, Green Arrow, Wonder Woman Snapper Car and special guest, Robin the boy wonder, in the story, 'The Lord of Time

attacks the 20th Century.'

We start 'somewhere in the central highlands of Vietnam' watching Sgt Eddie Brent of Special Services, albeit with a green beret, gunning down 'V-C's' with his M-16, protecting injured soldiers. Green Beret is lauded in the narrative by being compared to the Romans' Horatio. We switch to Gotham two months later, where a young Joey Brent waits with Dick Grayson in front of a band and crowd



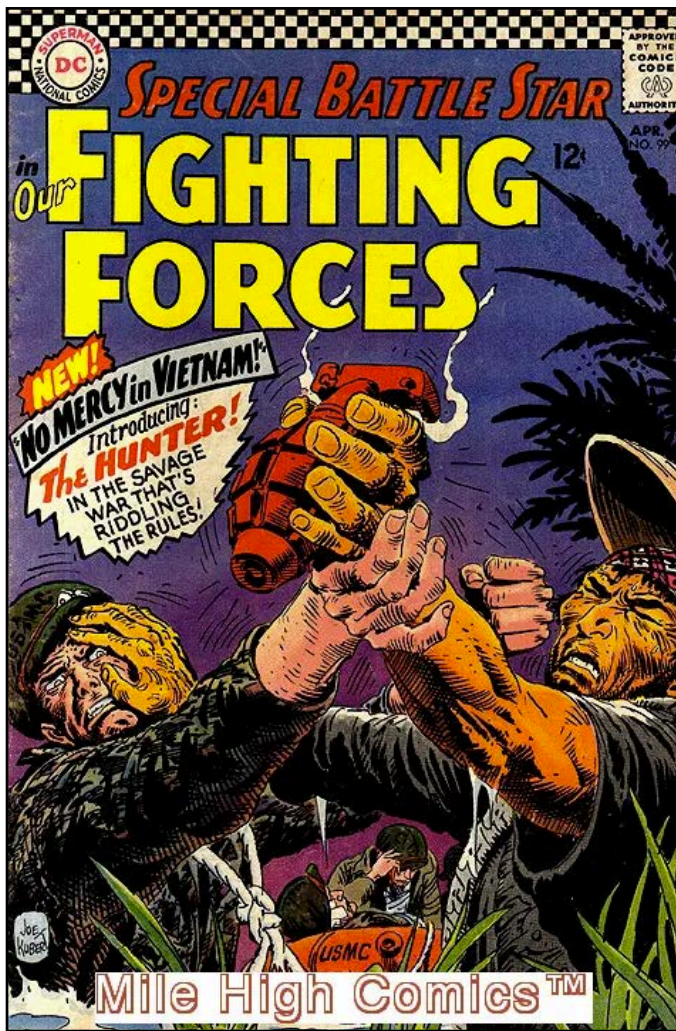
about to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Sgt Brent's return is delayed, however— something has gone astray. Brent went berserk. Batman and Robin track Brent down and find him committing a burglary, which is out of character. He fights them with unexpected weapons, and we learn that Brent doesn't want to do what he is doing, but must 'Obey.' We flashback to when The Lord of Time previously imprisoned Brent in JLA #11. In this issue, he puts Brent under his control, as a soldier to help him loot the 20th century. Brent is forced to wear a uniform similar to The Lord of Time, with a special defence mechanism, and dispatched to commit crimes. In response, Batman calls in the JLA.

Brent does a good job of fighting and evading the JLA, as he steals the items that the Lord of Time wants. Batman and Flash construct a radiation detector and as a team track down Brent and The Lord of Time, and as the Lord of Time uses a weapon to defeat the JLA, Brent throws himself and takes the shot for the team, not realising that he was protected from it.

The JLA overcomes the Lord of Time and Brent offers himself up for arrest. But they see him as a hero. The final full page splash shows Brent at the U.S. Capitol receiving the Congressional Medal of Honour in front of Joey, Dick, and the assembled JLA, bolstered in their ranks by The Martian Manhunter, Hawkman and Superman. It is an odd story, portraying the Vietnam Vet as an innocent. However, with his ability and strength being the perfect 'Soldier,' this story could be an allegory for soldiers having a hard time dealing with PTSD. Hard to know.

Capt Storm #17 (January 1967)

The back up story is called 'Jumping into Viet Cong Hell' in which a paratrooper, who loves his job, even with 'those Charlies below slinging lead at me.' There are some technical aspects and details included, as he carries a mortar base plate and he grenades as he drops, and, once landed, he is deep in mud. He says 'I know what they mean when they call it a dirty little war.' He goes on to battle against the Vietnamese, who remain an anonymous enemy, even in hand to hand fighting. He goes through a sequence of daring do, saving his sergeant and overcoming the enemy, noting at the end that 'I'm a trooper, ain't I?' It is a simple positive one-sided war story, that could have been against Germany or Japan and with the inclusion of the Thompson submachine gun, he could well be. But his comrades have M-16's and the camo helmets place them in Vietnam.



Our Fighting Forces #99-#105, #107 (April 1966 to April 1967)

Our Fighting Forces 99 (April 1966) introduced 'The Hunter' Captain Hunter, a Green Beret in Vietnam. By issue #102, the title was 'Captain Hunter,' and by issue #107 in June 1967 the title was 'Hunter's Hellcats.' The story in issue #102, "Cold Steel for a Hot War" is a good example of just how cliched, and untidy a comic could be. Hunter talks about 'this dirty little war' and his K squad (K for Kindergarten, as they are all so young) four Vietnamese civilians. Phil Hunter re-upped into the military because his brother Nick was shot down, and he has nightmares of Nick being tortured, so he is on a mission to find his brother. The interaction between Hunter and Liu Lin, who is guiding him, is dreadful: her perfume assaults him, he doubts her, he falls into a trap. After this, he forces himself on her for a kiss, as he finds her attractive, yet hates her in case she is a traitor. Generally speaking, he comes across as a psychotic and not at all even. There is an attempt at the message that war destroys childhood, told through a group of children who convince Hunter to help them in their fight against the Viet Cong, who murdered their parents. Hunter feels uneasy with the situation and respects the 'Oriental Brass in his blood.' He ends up working the children as squads, and has moments of crazed, uncontrolled violence. While this may be red mist, it is all seen as fine in the fight against the enemy. The story is really very unsure of itself; it is very oddly done and aggressive in its approach to Vietnam, much more in line with pure propaganda work. But here, the Vietnamese and the American involvement is not the clean cut glorious righteousness of fighting the Nazis.

I am not sure if the issues of fighting and how it impacts soldiers are at all being explored, and if it really comes across as very weak jingoistic lameness. This is per-

haps the most disappointing portrayal of the Vietnam War in DC comics, it does a very poor job, and one is left wondering if Children Fighters and a heroic Capt Hunter really have much to offer.

Superman #216 (May 1969)

Superman appears on the cover wearing an army jacket, and he says he has orders to 'Destroy the G.I. Giant' to save his platoon, even if it breaks his code against killing. And so we have 'Superman Joins the Army in ... The Soldier of Steel.'

The most unsettling aspect of this story is probably that Americans would have loved a Superman to save them from Vietnam, in the way that Dr. Manhattan did in *Watchmen*. How sad is that.

'In war ravaged Vietnam,' a giant G.I. who can pick up and fling US tanks attacks US forces. After considerable damage we see him disappearing into the jungle to meet a 'sinister siren,' a Vietnamese lady officer, and the GI is 'like a gigantic Samson being ensnared by a scheming Delilah' when he receives the reward of a kiss.

Meanwhile, Clark Kent asks Perry White if he can be sent to Vietnam to mingle with the frontline troops and find out 'their beef with Superman,' as his desk is inundated with letters from GI's complaining that Superman is not helping in Vietnam. Clark goes undercover as a medic so as to avoid killing. As he flies in a cargo plane to Vietnam, his plane is shot down by Vietnamese soldiers with 'pitiless eyes.' As the plane goes down, Clark decides to escape in order to change as Superman and save the plane.

He blocks shells, and then takes on five T-54 Soviet main battle tanks, melting their guns and smashing them. Meanwhile, GI Johnny turns back to normal and escapes only to be found by Superman, and so escapes. Meanwhile Lois has shown up and seems to be White Knighting the importance of Superman to Vietnamese.

Further fighting ensues, and Lois sees Clark change to Superman. He then subsequently saves her but is injured and asks Superman for a kiss, and he gives her one. Superman goes to General Morley and they figure out the Giant G.I. is Morley's son, but regardless of this fact, the General orders Superman to destroy him. GI Johnny, who was frightened by the fighting, again gets kissed by the Viet Cong officer, which changes him into a willing giant. She orders him to kill Superman, in doing so he takes on some US M-48 Patton Tanks. Soon Superman is battling the GI Giant and using a Tank track to sling shot him deep into the jungle. He then incapacitates ten Vietnamese T-54's, and Johnny Morley, who has returned to normal, gets a chance to fight against the Viet Cong.

Johnny won't fold again, and Lois thinks she was delirious and discounts what she saw as she recovers in hospital, unable to believe that Clark was a hero. Our story ends with Superman on stage, giving a USO-style performance spinning eight children in the sky, acrobatic style, with his super breath.

A very asinine story, it harkens to the desire that Superman is not in Vietnam, and possibly that fans and readers wanted a Vietnam appearance by Superman. There is one complimentary letter in #219 but containing no reference to Vietnam. There is a challenge in portraying Superman in Vietnam; maybe Americans dreamed of it, and in many respects *Watchmen* brought the idea to a fictional reality, but the story is weak, the portrayal of the Vietnamese officer leaden.

Heart Throbs #125 (May 1970)

Probably one of the more thoughtful stories, 'Two Loves Have I!' is drawn by Lee Elias whose signature is clearly seen,

and edited by Lynn Farrell. One of the stories is set in Vietnam, where we meet an artilleryman called Joe and a Vietnamese lady called Liu. They are in love, but Joe has a girlfriend stateside, Ruth. He is challenged by his affection for Liu and the bond builds as he lives with her family, but when she starts making a wedding dress, he admits he cannot marry her, as he has a lady waiting for him. At this stage, the Việt Cộng attack and Joe is injured, when he comes to, he finds that Liu rescued him and his buddy, but lost her life calling in an artillery attack. The story ends with an odd moment of him over the grave, noting how he is married to Ruth but that he could love two women. It is a thoughtful story, but portrays the Vietnamese lady possibly in a lesser light in a backhanded way, as it is quite romantic and tragic.

Justice League of America #88 (March 1971)

Carter, Siera (Hawkman and Hawkgirl) and Hal Jordan (Green Lantern) are on an excavation when Hawkgirl finds an artefact and gets struck by lightning, with Vengeance and Mu the clues. Aquaman reports minor tragedies in The Gulf of Persia, the Mekong River Delta and the Coast of California, and this is deemed to be a potential worldwide threat. Green Lantern calls upon the JLA. Flash is dispatched to 'The Mekong Delta in Vietnam.' Here we see Lok Lu who appears to be praying, 'her lifebook is a tragedy. Her Husband was killed by those of the black pyjamas... her only child died when the fire-weapons rained from the sky.' Her prayers are devoted to a more menacing artefact than she realises, for it is a machine that brings rains.

The tragedy is a monsoon of epic proportions and so Flash saves the people, creates wind barriers with super speed arms, and builds defences. Batman, Green Arrow, and Black Canary come to Flash's aid, but we return to Lok Lu who destroys her relic and not realising it, brings an end to the storm. Lok Lu, who has lost faith in the gods, now 'must prepare, her face shows no emotion, no change.'

The threat to Earth is prevented, other teams defeat other machines, and the message is that machines cannot overcome the Earth alone. One is left wondering whether there is some heavy nuance here, and why a Vietnamese woman suffered so much loss, and yet has stoic features, unless it is to allow sympathy to her.

Our Army at War #233 (June 1971)

One of the harder-hitting stories about the Vietnam War during this time from DC, but which utilises Sgt Rock of Easy Company in WWII as a metaphor, is 'Head Count.' The cover clearly states 'Does ANY G.I. deserve a medal for murder?' and a G.I saying to Sgt Rock 'I stopped the enemy Rock!' He responds 'B-But they were civilians' as he points to five people, and the GI says 'But none of them got away.'

This is a clear statement on the Mỹ Lai massacre as well as other civilian deaths.

Robert Kannigher is at his best. When the story starts, a body of Pvt. Johnny Joe is brought in and as the 'grizzled vets' of Easy Company watch on, an officer sings his praises for 'outstanding heroism,' but Rock looks out at the reader and says with a cold stare that he is here to tell us 'the story behind Johnny Doe's "outstanding heroism!" Y'see... A medal has two sides! I'm goin to tell you the Gut-truth..The underside of Johnny Doe's decoration'

We see that Johnny took on a Pillbox that was pinning down Easy Company, and then guns down two Germans who appeared to be surrendering. Rock challenges that action hard, but Doe is a slick talker, argues his side as he smokes, and so Rock is left unhappy. But Doe is not chastised, although Rock sees him as trouble, looking to make his

own rules. He notches kills in his Thompson Machine Gun, and notes to Rock that he was an orphan that no one wanted, until the Army did. He volunteers for patrols, and even uses his initiative to go out alone and kill Germans, but in doing so, angers Rock as 'this war' is no excuse for a 'Personal Killin' Kic.'. Even so, the Press show interest in this killer.

Doe takes point voluntarily and he doesn't hesitate when Germans dress as civilians. This is a real challenge to soldier, but he kills them, and Rock challenges him on how he knew, and it is shared that Doe always knew. The fighting continues to Alimy. There is a trap, and Easy Company come under fire from a tank, but Doe takes it on. He continues to sweep the village, clearing it. A German holds a woman hostage, but Doe thinks it is fake, and is determined to use a grenade against the German and woman who pleads that there are other women and children in the house.

Here we have a moment. Rock fires at Doe but there is clear ambiguity as Rock considers 'Did I shoot Johnny Doe? Or did he hold onto that grenade too long? I don't know! I don't want to know.' And then the question is posed to the reader: 'Was Johnny Doe a Murderer or a Hero? That's one question each of you will have to decide for yourselves.' Here we have a 'Make War No More' roundel which Kubert added to the War stories, saying, 'I wanted to make it clear that, despite the fact that I was editing war books, we were not glorifying war.' This is true here.

Of interest is that there may have been a challenge over having Rock kill Johnny, and hence there was a little vagueness. Still the bold question is presented to the reader.

Alimy is a clear anagram of Mỹ Lai. Mỹ Lai was an appalling massacre and atrocity carried out by US soldiers on the 16th of March 1968. 504 civilians were murdered and civilians tortured and raped. Women, children, infants, men. C Company—one can see how that would overlap with Sgt Rock's Easy Company. Lieutenant William Calley Jr. of C Company was found guilty of murdering 22 villagers and sentenced to life in prison on 29 March 1971. The cover up of Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson Jr. and his crew's bravery, who tried to bring the atrocity to an end, as well as the appalling way in which it was all dealt with was a staggering matter for Americans. In 1971 this was not just controversial, but contentious. The single, 'The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley' by Terry Nelson, one of many songs defending Calley, hit No. 37 in the Top 100 on the 1st of May 1971, and sold a million records.

This comic had quite a few letters in its 'Take Ten' column, which Joe answered. I note that one is from a WWII veteran, and another from a Clarion College student. This led me to consider letters in more detail in my piece on Joe Kubert on page 38.

Our Army at War #236 (September 1971)

We follow this wordless story, entitled '22 Hrs. to San Francisco.' It is nicely done. The 3 frames in Vietnam in black and white show PFC Tomasz getting a piece of paper. Then we see a duffle bag on an airport conveyor in colour. Interspersed with this image are finely drawn black and white images of a Huey and a Vietnamese attack on Tomasz. Tomasz fights well, but his upset and disdain at the death is clear as he studies his M16 and then throws it away. At the moment it is unclear what will occur. Is the duffel a lonely bag, is its owner going to be reunited with it? We see a Huey, and a Jumbo jet, and the duffel, then on the carousel, and being picked up by a hand. The final splash sees PFC Tomasz holding a relieved woman in an airport.

A beautifully poignant and well done story that aptly demonstrates how well a comic can tell a gut wrenching and suspenseful story, and where clever pacing and art leaves the reader wondering what might occur next. In many respects

the nice ending is as hard as the opposite, where a bag revolves around and around, and a lonely woman's heart breaks apart watching it infinitely move around, never to be collected. The story warns one of the pointlessness and frustration of war, as well as the potential. It would have been nice to be juxtaposed perhaps with someone at the other side, a Vietnamese person waiting in a similar way,

The 'Make War No More' roundel is ever present now, as it had been for a number of months across all the War titles. This issue also has the letters relating to issue #233. There is no shortage of letters from Vietnam veterans and also active personnel to *Our Army at War*, and issue #233 itself was full of them, including a photo of a GI at a PX.

This issue has six letters. Five complement the story. One states that 'one must ignore all hostages or the enemy will own you' while the other four compliment it, and draw connections to Mỹ Lai, all give US based addresses, and none make mention of service.

Of interest here, and why letters pages are so important, is the editorial response.

From the editor:

The foregoing letters were only a small sample of the reaction the readers had to 'Head Count.' Originally, the situation was conceived along the broadest lines of the Mỹ Lai incident. We have not attempted to reach any conclusion: or determine moralities, but merely to present a series of fictitious events paralleling contemporary thoughts.

However, this much must be said. Mỹ Lai is not a product of the present time alone. Every war back to antiquity has produced its Mỹ Lai, as will every war in the future. Only when the brutalization of war will be no more, will the possibility of Mỹ Lai cease to exist.

Joe.

Wars end?

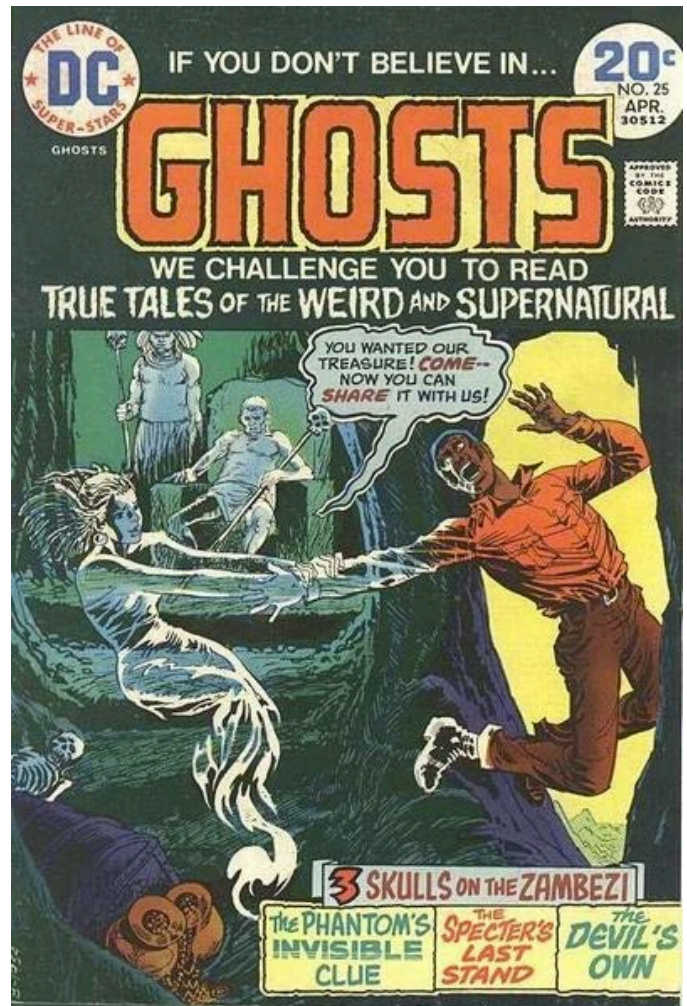
On the 29th of March 1973, the last American troops left Vietnam, thus ending that phase. We know that the War is called the 30-Years War by some Vietnamese. The fall of Saigon occurred on the 31st of April, 1975. On the 1st of May, 1975, the Khmer Rouge attacked Phú Quốc and Thổ Chu, murdering 500 Vietnamese civilians. In 1979, in the War against Chinese expansionism, Vietnam repelled China in the Sino-Vietnamese War, which lasted 3 weeks and six days. I have decided to consider a few DC comics that were after these dates.

Our Army at War # 264 (January 1974)

Following on from the Sgt Rock title story, we have Bob Kanighers Gallery of War 'The Gook' as we see a Vietnamese man carrying mortars on the Hồ Chí Minh Trail. He is attacked by jet planes, bombs falling about. We follow this character as he considers that 'someday I will get close enough to them to see their eyes.' He is then further south, in a rice paddy, and he evades gunfire from a helicopter gunship, and as the whirlybirds had off, he says it again. He is then a soldier, setting an ambush, but he himself is ambushed by mortar attack. As he lies bleeding out, a soldier approaches him and he thinks to himself 'at last I can see their eyes, and they are round,' only for the soldier to say 'This slant-eyes is still alive... he's got a grenade.' The subsequent explosion leaves the two lying side by side, dead and the caption reads, 'Shattered in death - who can tell the difference between

slant eyes and round eyes? 'There is a 'Make War No More' roundel and that is the end.

This could be considered the first anti-war Vietnam comic from DC. It is totally told from the Vietnamese perspective. The dead are shown, and to a degree the Americans assume the faceless or nameless characters who are the enemy. The ending has a message to it; perhaps an attempt to capture the anti-racist attitudes at the time, but it is clearly anti-war. The art is by Ric Astrada, and it portrays the Vietnamese character as brave, determined, committed. In 5 pages we have something that is closer to reality than had been achieved to date.



Ghosts #25 (April 1974)

The Spectre's last stand is a 5-page story, set possibly in 1974. We see that 'out of the summer night swept the enemy hoard some miles outside Quảng Trị, thrusting at the heart of South Viet Nam.' We see Vietnamese contractors disinterring US soldiers from a graveyard, as US troops state that 'families want their kin buried in their own cemeteries.'

The ghost of a soldier laments 'Why don't you leave me be?...I gave my life for these people... this land drenched in my blood...No one will grieve for me...I was a drifter a vagrant...till i found my place in the army' and we see the medivac crewman, who was killed by Việt Cộng 'mixed in with fleeing civilians.'

During the disinterment, an enemy platoon of Vietnamese draws close and the operation is brought to a quick and undignified end, as our dead soldier is dropped, but 'a sight to freeze their own marrow' of the US bodies (albeit unbeknown to be dead ones) deters the attack. Our soldier

rolls back into his grave, as the rest are taken away, allowing the ghost to finally find eternal peace having won 'a raging victory over their mortal foes.'

Phantom Stranger #31 (July 1974)



An unusual story, see's a former Vietnam Veteran Sgt Harry working as a general for an East Asian despot Marshal Feng, preparing a meeting for drug dealers, by harassing monks and using their temple. Feng, who is dealing in drugs and plans to 'enslave a million' as the Phantom Stranger put it, has snared the soldier. We follow the General back to Vietnam where we see a masseuse, Marie, in typical Dragon Lady tropesque style, passing some narcotics to

Sgt Harry to help him relax. Hence he becomes enslaved to Feng, the phantastical occurs, and it appears that everyone is chased by their demons. If anything this is an anti-drugs story, and Vietnam is just the place where Sgt Harry becomes addicted, but the story comes to a conclusion with the Phantom Stranger's intervention.

Our Fighting Forces #150 (September 1974)

The back up story to the Losers main story was called 'Catch,' written by Archie Goodwin and drawn by Ed Davis. This is a short 5-pager; we read and see considerable detail as a platoon walks into a freshly mined trail, killing all the soldiers except for Specialist 4th Class James V. Macklin who calls it in. He is wounded, and the narrative takes us through how quickly the 'Helicopter War' can evac casualties, how close they are to medical centres and hospitals in Japan and the Philippines. This is a hard and honest story, simple, quick, and clearly shows insight.

Weird War Tales #30 'Homecoming' (October 1974)

written by Jack Olek with art by Q. Redondo

'No G.I. has ever liked war, especially a dirty little war like Nam' and so we see replacement 'Saunders' helo'd into a firefight, who shirks getting involved and so then is put onto a patrol, his sergeant considering him a coward. Saunders and Pierce, another replacement, fall back when their patrol is decimated. They spend some time in the jungle. Saunders is panicked, eating all his rations, while Pierce appears pragmatic. Then, as Saunders seeks to survive, he turns the gun on Pierce for his rations. The story then takes a lovely turn, and I enjoyed the rest of this quick paced tale. Of course the reality is that the cowards were not those who were sent to fight and who feared going, but instead those who lied and sent them there in the first place.

Swamp Thing #16: Night of the Waring Dead (May 1975) written by David Michelinie

Swamp Thing ends up jumping with a hijacker out of a plane, washing up on an island Lalo Pago, brought to consciousness by High Priestess Laganna who is leading the People's Liberation Army. The army is staging a revolution against a military dictatorship that recently overthrew a democratic government and murdered her 'people.' He meets a Vietnam Veteran Adam Rook, who is also fighting for this revolution. We learn his backstory, that of a Veteran misadjusted to life back in the world, who fails to keep work, brawls, and travels, all despite his heroism in Vietnam and medals. He is a dutiful Lieutenant to Laganna, and while the story gets phantastical, and we see them leading a very interesting army, ultimately they are defeated. Even though Laganna can escape, she stays with her wounded Adam, possibly out of affection or love, and we see Swamp Thing shamle his way off into the jungle, two gunshots ringing out in the background.

It is an interesting portrayal of a veteran. There is some sympathy for him, and the story, primarily focused on Laganna, does feature him strongly. What is noticeable is Swamp Thing's uselessness.

Sgt Rock #311: 'A Song for Saigon Sally' (December 1977) written by Val Eads

A squad is ambushed, and they get talking about their loved ones. The sergeant says he can't think of any women except the last one he saw, who was 'Saigon Sally,' and shows them a photo that causes surprise and envy. The firefight continues, and the squad is getting evacuated, but they fail and get gunned down. As the Vietnamese come out we see one, a woman, ordering the men to take the guns. We zoom into her face, and she says 'I heard my husband's voice, I have not seen him for five years yet I heard his voice in the Jungle.' The narrative closes the story with 'In the Lull between battles, the warrior thinks of Home... family... of a beloved.'

This is definitely an interesting perspective. It takes the 'Dragon Lady' stereotype and twists it nicely, depicting the Sergeant as uncaring and uninterested, and the Vietnamese soldier as a warrior, thinking of her love. More thoughtful, as time since the war grows.

Unknown Soldier #211 (January 1978)

Larry Hama and Russ Heath 'In Country' Vietnam Scrapbook has an informational approach to it and it goes into telling a story about a soldier called Luther, nicknamed as such because he had a shaved head, that 'gave him more than a passing resemblance to Superman's Arch Enemy.' Luther is a truck driver, who is on point on a convoy running from Nha Trang to Lan Chi on Highway 3 through the Central Highlands. All the time there are explanations, and asterisks, even 'Charley' gets an asterisk to 'Victor Charles - Viet Cong.'

An ambush takes place, RPGs causing damage and leading to the narrow pass, blocked front and tail, but Luther is beyond the trap and so can escape, leaving those behind with 'one way tickets to Arlington.' But Luther reverses, clearing blockages and helping overcome the attack. Our narrator talks about how he wanted to thank Luther who was short, but it was never mentioned.

I love how this is presented, depicting notebooks and a photo, a very epistolary aspect initially, full of details and a level of accuracy that is really missing elsewhere. The accuracy is especially evident in its depiction of weapons, armoury, and the 2 and 1/2 ton truck, which were frequently modified and adjusted by their operators, as this one was. It left me wondering if Larry Hama was drawing on his experience in Vietnam for this story.

Ghosts #82 (November 1979)

We follow Lt, then Captain, then Colonel Mark Cullen through a variety of wars, as he encounters visions of important persons, preemptive spirits that will soon be killed, which he bottles up. The story moves to Vietnam, where he is a combatant, and he laments to his son in a letter that he has become an actor and not joined the Army. The twist in this story is quick and neat, but really it could be any war setting.

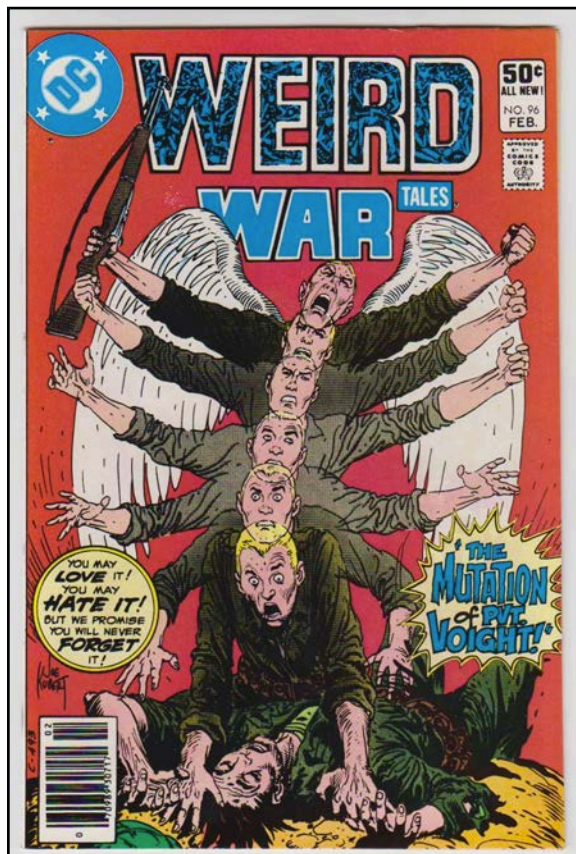
Ghosts #91 (August 1980)

Simple one-page story about Phantom Soldiers, seen from World War II to Vietnam. The Vietnam example is Wayne Berger on the 24th of February, 1969, calling in help on the Walkie Talkie, even though he was dead. One pager throw-away story.

Vietnam as a subject for fiction became huge. The 1980's saw more comics about Vietnam than the previous 3 decades combined. At this stage, I thought it was important to highlight stories I would recommend to readers. Please note, these stories are still of their time.

Weird War Tales #96: Mỹ Lai massacre story (February 1981)

It is unfortunate that, as stories developed about Mỹ Lai, the realities of that situation were really not confronted. The scale and brutality and sheer horror of U.S. officers ordering men onward and murdering and raping women and children was maybe never going to be something that would come out. In this issue, we see a soldier who is in Vietnam and does get involved in an atrocity, but it is dealt with—weirdly. 'The Mutation of Pvt Voight' is a sanitised story, even though it does portray some scenes that were inspired by Mỹ Lai.



Rob Hansen Noted: In the Vietnam War era of the early 1970s, Jack Kirby featured a conscientious objector in (DC's) *NEW GODS* #6 (December 1971) who, when the chips are down, resorts to violence. Then Steve Englehart featured a conscientious objector in *CAPTAIN AMERICA* #163 (July 1973) who, when the chips are down, refuses to resort to violence. I've often wondered if the latter comic was a response to the former. Interestingly, both Kirby and Englehart treat their characters sympathetically, though Englehart's is a vet who turned against war while Kirby's was a lifelong pacifist. Also possibly germane to this is that Kirby was a combat veteran where Englehart isn't. A fair bit to unpack there, I think.

Recommendations

Cinder and Ashe by Gerry Conway and José Luis García-López was a 1988 4-issue mature readers title. In it, Vietnam Veteran Jacob Ashe and Cinder DuBois, the daughter of an African-American soldier, and a Vietnamese woman work as private detectives. While we get to see their shared history and relationship develop, we also see a darker, brutal side of the war. I thought the story worked well as a different perspective, and that Cinder had agency, albeit there were some tropes deployed.

Preacher #18 and #50: Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon take a couple of issues where they look at Jesse Custer's father, John, and his time in Vietnam. Issue #18 'Texas and The Spaceman' explores Jesse meeting Billy 'Spaceman' Baker at JFK. Spaceman shares some stories about John (this is nicely told reflective storytelling). Spaceman shares some serious thoughts, mindful of the experience, while sharing elements to the story overall. Issue #50 begins at the memorial in Washington DC, the statues, which I myself have stood and looked at. It is a special place. Jesse meets Spaceman again, but now he wonders how his father, John, received a Congressional Medal of Honor. Spaceman shares a story that demonstrates humanity under duress and stress, as well as bravery and determination. It ties in nicely with the greater *Preacher* story.

The Other Side by Jason Aaron and Cameron Stewart was an Eisner nominee in 2006 and shows Marine Pvt. Bill Everette and People's Army of Vietnam Vo Binh Dai in a parallel story. We see them join up and progress through a hellish experience, looking at the horror but also considering the impact on both men. It works fairly well to share this dual perspective and to give voice to a Vietnamese soldier. It works hard to give a mature and balanced view, ensuring the U.S. side resembles closer the nasty nature of reality.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

by Chris Garcia



In my life, I've been incredibly lucky to get to meet many artists. From the amazing ceramicist Robert Arneson to Pop legend Robert Rauschenberg to weaver Ruth Asawa to the great architect Robert Venturi. I've been blessed. None of them, though, approach Maya Lin when it comes to understanding how to make the political into something heart-breaking.

Because the approach she took to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was 100% political, as was the entire process of getting it made, the effect has always been so powerful to me personally, partly because I've got family with their name on that wall.

It was 1979, and four years had passed since the fall of Saigon. In the years since, America had changed. Watergate had happened, and America had lost its spirit. Recession didn't help. The Bicentennial helped a bit, and the bitterness over Vietnam and the protest movement had ebbed. This was also the start of the Yuppie movement, where the going got weird and the weird went pro. This was the time that former vets had started thinking about putting together a memorial to their fallen brothers in DC.

Now, there were smaller local memorials all around the country already. San Jose supposedly had one as early as 1970, and I think for a while it was at History Park. These faced massive backlash, and as I understand it, few survive.

The group that came together to build it, the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Fund, had members who were connected up-and-down the chain in DC, and they could attract supporters early on like H. Ross Perot, one of the richest men in America. They lobbied Congress to allot a piece of land on the National Mall for use as the Memorial, giving it a prime position in the consideration of the nation. At the time, there were no major memorials for America's other wars on the Mall. It is the heart of American memory, with the memorials to Lincoln and Washington anchoring the two ends (and Martin Luther King's memorial now adorning the site). It is a place of both contemplation and consideration. It reflects and amplifies emotion, somehow. There's a reason Dr. King's speech was so full of impact; when words of such importance and beauty are set in the nation's most precious area, they live long beyond their sounding.

The VVMF held a contest and more than a thousand entries came in. These entries included some of the biggest names in American arts and architecture. Andrus Burr, whose Burr & MacCallum architecture firm have designed some absolutely incredible homes in New England, submitted an interesting, spoked-wheel design. W. Kent Cooper, the architect who would eventually work on realizing Maya Lin's design and who would design the Korean War Memorial, submitted an elegant design of glass columns. Southern artist

and architect Samuel Mockbee did a statuary memorial concept that would have felt out of place in the 1980s, but has a certain powerful elegance in the surviving drawings. A tower and compass rose submission from Chester Alfred Paxon was also behind the times, though would have worked in years gone by. Bruce Northwood White submitted an entry that I think showed promise; a spiraling white nautilus out of the grass. My second favorite of all the entries I could find in the Library of Congress collection has to be Raymond Scott McCord (a Navy man dating to 1973) who submitted a massive covered walkway, with a triangular suspended roof which would have appeared to be suspended in air over the visitors, as if it could fall at any moment. This played in the realm where sculptors like Richard Serra often tread.

There were some terrible ones. A peace sign submitted by J. Stuart Pettit missed the point entirely. Many of the sculptural submissions show American servicemen in heroic poses, several of them saving Vietnamese civilians. These are difficult to comprehend with what we knew of the war at the time, not to mention the difficulty of treading the meaning of the war to so many in America.

Having looked at many of the entries, there is no doubt that Lin's was the clear best. It did not play in the fields of honoring heroes, nor did it attempt to say anything overt about those who had been a part of it. The memorial design was a wide v-shaped portion cut into the earth. The wall would be of black granite with the names carved into it. The names would be listed on the wall chronologically. It was a minimalist design, but one certainly influenced by the work of environmental and earth artists like Robert Smithson. Maya Lin, then 21 and a student at Yale, had designed something that was half way between urban planning and architecture. It was a remarkable piece that said nothing, but almost forced the mind to consider the connection to the time, the place, and especially the people.

The fact that it is underground and made of black stone separates it from nearly all memorials up until that

point. We were not too far away from the opening of the Gateway Arch in Saint Louis, first considered an eyesore, then hailed as a masterpiece of American monument work. Even Mount Rushmore, then only 40 years old, was seen as a marvelous example of American memorialization. This was none of those things, not in concept, not in positioning, and not in color.

And many latched on to that once she was announced as the winner.

A TV movie was made about the building of the Memorial in the 1980s. In one scene, during a public meeting, a white veteran says, 'Make it above-ground and make it white! It's black, the color of shame!' A black vet snaps back at him, 'I am sick and tired of calling black a color of shame.' Apparently, in real life, those words were uttered by one of America's highest-ranking African-Americans. This dramatization has stuck with me, and apparently it mirrored the actual response of so many. Two of the major early backers, including Perot, pulled their support. Many veteran groups spoke against the design. A compromise was made where a statue of soldiers would be placed at the intersection of the 'v' meaning that the wall would serve as more of a background. The architects, with Lin as head consultant, moved it off to the side, as if the three soldiers are looking at the memorial from a short distance off.

And that is such a powerful moment.

The three soldiers, one clearly Caucasian, one African-American, and one who seems ethnically ambiguous but could well be Hispanic. If they had been at the intersection, they'd have been the dominant feature, dispelling the power of the wall itself. Here, these three, symbolically survivors, are present, standing and looking across the way at their fallen comrades, their expressions, well, I've never been sure. I've heard some describe their looks as shell-shocked, others as contemplative. I dunno, it's a look that seems to be understanding of their moment, but what that moment is might be lost to us. It is a timeless look, and that can be difficult to capture.

Later, in 1993, a Vietnam Women's Memorial statue was added, which portrays a scene of a nurse holding a wounded soldier and another woman searching the skies. I'm not sure how well it plays with the entire setting, but I will say that it feels like it belongs and doesn't harm the solemnity of the overall memorial experience.

Despite the initial anger the design inspired, it has become a place of reconciliation and healing. Almost as soon as veterans and their families began visiting, even those who resisted for many years, it became obvious that Lin's design did not portray shame or disgrace, but contemplation. The highly polished finish of the slabs allows for an interesting effect; as you are looking at the names, and especially as you are searching for a specific name, you are reflected back at yourself. You are a part of this story. We carry the responsibility to maintain their memories, if in no other way than a remembrance of the sacrifice these Americans shared. Even as a 13-year old, I got that as soon as I looked at the Wall.

And yes, my father's second cousin, Andrew Garcia, is listed on the Wall - Panel 33W - Line 84. He died five years before I was born, and while Dad knew him a little, they weren't close. I only knew his name, Andrew, I wasn't even sure what side of Dad's family he was on, but a bit of searching found that he was Andrew Perez Garcia, killed by small arms fire, February 8th, 1969. I haven't been back to the wall in a couple of decades, but for certain, the next time I visit, I'll do a rubbing to preserve a part of my extended family's history.



Comics of the Vietnamese Diaspora

by Allison Hartman Adams

Comics are a sort of historical record. Cathy Schlund-Vials, writing for the *Smithsonian*, points out that comics are positioned to “reflect the popular attitudes of the era in which they are produced.” We have only to look at how American comics responded to the Great Depression (Superman fights landlords), World War II (Cap fights Red Skull), and Vietnam (Joe Kubert introduces the “Make War No More” roundel). James Bacon’s articles on Joe Kubert, Marvel, and DC comics during the Vietnam era (pages 38, 58, 67, respectively) show the power of comics as historical record, reminding us that neither readers nor their heroes were immune to the dilemmas of Vietnam.

Of course, things change. Ceasefires are called, peace talks are conducted, abandoned, then reanimated. People come home, people leave home. Time passes. And with time, we begin to discover the far-reaching ripple effects of our actions. Comics’ role as a living record shows us how we move through history, the way we come to terms with what we have done and left undone. And, eventually, comics show us how we’ve grown—even found new wisdom, if we are lucky.

While comics have been deeply integral to our culture for generations, graphic novels have recently been recognized as vehicles for self-contained deep-dives into uncomfortable topics. It’s probably no coincidence that just as quickly as graphic novels have been embraced by readers (and educators, librarians, etc.), so too do they account for a growing percentage of banned books in the U.S. (most recently, *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe, *The Handmaid’s Tale: The Graphic Novel* by Margaret Atwood & Renée Nault, *Saga* by Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples). It’s no wonder, really. Comics have been on the chopping block for as long as they have existed. In 1954, Frederic Wertham published *Seduction of the Innocent*, which investigated the negative effects of comics on the young, and (predictably) triggered a censorship campaign against comics. As a result, the U.S. Congress initiated an inquiry into the comics industry, and quickly thereafter, the Comics Code Authority was established, which asked comics publishers to police their own publications in order to earn the official seal of approval. It took until the early 2000s for comic book publishers to abandon the CCA, and since then, organizations like the Comic Books Legal Defense Fund have been working hard to protect readers and comic book creators from censorship.

Humans, as visual creatures, crave understanding through images. In graphic novels, single panels or whole-page splash illustrations often convey more meaning and heart—more quickly—than a nuanced character arc that takes whole chapters in a novel to develop. This is scary for some, and unacceptable for others, as these images often get at something visceral, something raw, something that cannot be glossed over or misinterpreted. Moreover, graphic novels have the flexibility and freedom to grapple with difficult themes with an immediacy not afforded to the serialized releases of their comic book cousins (which often develop these over time).

Graphic novels of the Vietnamese diaspora are no exception. These works operate as a way to process family and national trauma and pave the way for integrating the past with the future. Moreover, they really and truly are living historical records. These are the stories we’re meant to know but often miss in the sea of scholarship and war movies. Below is a list of truly excellent graphic novels that explore the

experience of the Vietnamese Diaspora. These are stories of family and loss and violence and transcendence, recalling other cultural touchstones such as *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, another unflinching look at an earlier and truly horrific period in our history. While the graphic novels listed below might not have the wide-reaching cultural impact of *Maus* (yet), they, like Spiegelman’s extraordinary work, allow us to be uncomfortable, to be informed, and to be moved.

Vietnamerica: A Family’s Journey written and illustrated by GB Tran (2010)

Tran didn’t grow up in Vietnam—he was largely disinterested in his family’s harrowing tales of escape after the fall of Saigon. Eventually, however, Tran began to recognize the importance of this family history, and in his 20s, he traveled to Vietnam to begin understanding the choices his family made, from his mother’s insistence on staying with his emotionally distant father, to his grandfather’s desire to enlist with the Việt Cộng, to the eventual choice the Trans make to leave Saigon—not because America was the land of hope and dreams, but because their vision of Vietnam was dead.

Tran’s illustrations are striking. He uses color and style carefully: he alternates between washes of blues and blacks, full color “cartoonish” illustrations, scratchy and chaotic tableaux, and splashy full-page graphics that look more like propaganda posters than sequential art. Each color is associated with a particular family member’s history, and the style shifts based on time period and topic. While occasionally confusing and convoluted (Tran’s family is *enormous*, a fact that he struggles with too), Tran’s retelling of his people’s experience of the war captures the bittersweet nature of memory as it tangles with hopes for the future.

Vietnamese Memories: Leaving Saigon (2010) and ***Vietnamese Memories: Little Saigon*** (2018) written and illustrated by Clement Baloup

It begins with a cooking lesson. Prawn curry. Baloup’s father’s tiny kitchen in Marseille. “How did I learn to cook?” his father asks. “Well, I guess I did a good job of watching my father...” So begins a winding, circuitous route through the history of Vietnamese immigrants in France. Baloup interviews one storyteller after the other, most of them ending their tale by telling him to go talk to so-and-so to hear the rest. Baloup began this collection by publishing the 10-page comic of his father’s tale as a *bande dessinée* (Franco-Belgian comic), but it quickly spun into a longer project that spans continents and generations.

Baloup occasionally interrupts the narratives to give much needed historical context, and he alternates his color schemes between black and white (for memories), and color (for present day) that is so saturated as to shock the reader upon turning the page. Included in *Leaving Saigon* is a “Linh Tho,” which is inspired by the true story of 20,000 Vietnamese workers displaced during World War II. Based on Pierre Daum’s 2009 investigation, *Immigrés de Force*, Baloup illustrates Daum’s groundbreaking journalism in pale watercolor that bridges the gap between memory and present day, further underscoring the need for France to recognize the dignity and personhood of the oft-forgotten Vietnamese people living among them.

Baloup's second volume, *Little Saigon*, focuses more on those who have come to America to rebuild their lives after the War—from refugee camps, to Little Saigons, to favorite restaurants. None of these stories are free from violence, and each dwell on the cruel choices and high stakes of carving a new life in a strange land. Like *Leaving Saigon*, Baloup leans on the power of color to guide the reader through the timelines. Much of this volume is memory, and few of those memories are pretty. The pages are dark, scratchy, and hard to look at sometimes, which makes the present-day interludes operate as a sort of emotional and visual breather for the reader. The appendix includes Baloup's bright, full color illustrations and sketches created during the making of this volume, an antidote to the heavy stories that came before.

***Such a Lovely Little War* (2016) and *Saigon Calling* (2017)**, written and illustrated by Marcellino Truong, and translated by David Homel

In *Such a Lovely Little War*, Truong tells the story of growing up the son of a French woman and a Vietnamese diplomat. When the family is recalled to Saigon so that his father can serve as Ngô Đình Diệm's personal interpreter, the cracks begin to show. His mother's bipolar disorder intensifies, the country they love begins to disintegrate, all told through a child's eyes, with a child's belief that it's all going to work out in the end. *Saigon Calling* continues his family's saga in London, after their escape from Vietnam following Ngô Đình Diệm's assassination. Marco, now a teenager, has to contend with his desire to fit in, the increasing anti-war sentiment, constantly being pegged as the "other" (in a variety of cruel and creative ways), and the desire to both shake off and embrace the memory of his beloved, suffering country.

Truong's stories use Vietnam as a backdrop to the disintegration of his mother's health, his father's faith, his siblings' ties to family, and to his own sense of self. Eventually, their paths lead them back to each other, but one gets the sense that releasing the pain of their pasts in Vietnam is a crucial step in this journey.

His style is striking; Truong's illustrations feel more like a comic book, with plenty of speech bubbles, captions, and heavy black contour lines. Like other author/illustrators in this list, Truong makes judicious use of color; washing out memories and the past in pale reds and blues, the present storyline in full color, and occasional historical interludes in splashy, vivid two-page spreads, which highlight notable moments in Vietnam's history as well as the steps toward South Vietnam's eventual dissolution.

The Best We Could Do written and illustrated by Thi Bui (2017)

In 2002, Bui set out to understand her family's history and why they left Vietnam to rebuild in America. Her first attempt was a written history based on transcripts of her family's stories while she was in graduate school, but the result was too academic, and it did not solve "the storytelling problem of how to present history in a way that is human and relatable and not oversimplified."

Much of the narrative is anchored around Bui's interactions with her family as she conducts these interviews. The story begins as Bui delivers her own child, frustrated with her mother's inability to support her through the experience, and she realizes that "family is now something that [she] has created," not something she was born into. The responsibility of it overwhelms her, and in this moment, Bui begins to empathize with her mother for the first time. This sets her on her journey to understand the depth of her family's distance, pride, and love.

The timeline feels malleable in this story. Bui's own revelations punctuate the sprawling family memories. As such, there is little visual distinction between the past and present, or between new understandings and old wisdom. The whole of the graphic novel is illustrated using swooping, black pen-and-ink lines, shaded with watercolor washes of gray and pale bronze. This underscores the intricate, interlocking nature of the family's history and future, the exact thing that Bui doesn't grasp at first and seeks to understand. Brenda Noisux's article on page 44 speaks to Bui's sense of uncertainty and what can be learned from it.

***Green Lantern: Legacy* (2020) and *Green Lantern: Alliance* (2023)** by Minh Lê, illustrated by Adie Tong

While Lê's work is not quite as enmeshed in the War as the previous books on this list, this clever, warm young adult graphic novel series deserves a mention here specifically because the characters are *not* struggling to make a new life—even though sudden and profound change is thrust upon them. Thirteen-year-old Thai Pham inherits his Bà's (grandmother's) Green Lantern ring, but couldn't possibly know what's in store for him as the next Green Lantern. Here, the Vietnam War is woven into the history of the family, and indeed is what makes Thai the right person for the job. His Bà ran from the violence of the War (flashback panels and translated Vietnamese speech bubbles tell the tale). She builds a new life in Coast City as the anchor of her neighborhood's thriving community. Everyone looks to her for help, leadership, and guidance. After her death, a fancy entrepreneur attempts to buy her market, which has been the center of the vibrant community for decades. The family thinks of selling, especially after continued harassment from local hooligans.

As Thai begins training with the Green Lantern Corps as his planet's next guardian, he discovers that Xander Griffin, the wealthy land-developer, is more than he appears to be. The Phams' role in the community, which is deeply informed by their experience during and after the War, is baked into Thai's DNA, giving him a complex moral landscape that is immediately relatable. Along with his trusted companions and several lessons from Bà's spirit along the way, Thai thwarts the bad guys, honors his family history, and somehow never loses that touch of teenage realism.

The illustrations are clean, vibrant, and full of motion. Lê and Tong spend a notable amount of time on Thai's dissatisfaction with his costume, and it is only appropriate that the final version (designed by Thai's friend Serena) ends up being culturally significant and appropriate for the underlying themes of the story. Stick around for the next installment, *Alliance*, in which Thai teams up with Kid Flash and we are treated to flashbacks of Bà's early-days adventuring with Superman.

All of the above graphic novels are available at most major book retailers, but I highly recommend ordering them from your local independent bookstore!

Curse you Red Baron!

Fanzine by Dick Eney in Vietnam, from 1966 until 1973

Volume I, #1

This is CURSE YOU, RED BARON! Number 1 and to start off with let's close up that gap between the Y and O, huh? I'll assign it an Operation Crifanac number later. It's meant to be a letter substitute kind of thing like the old STUPEFYING STORIES, and refers to a running gag over here with Peanuts. Over here, in turn, refers to Viet Nam, where Dick Eney is right now. You guessed it:

It's Eney's Fault

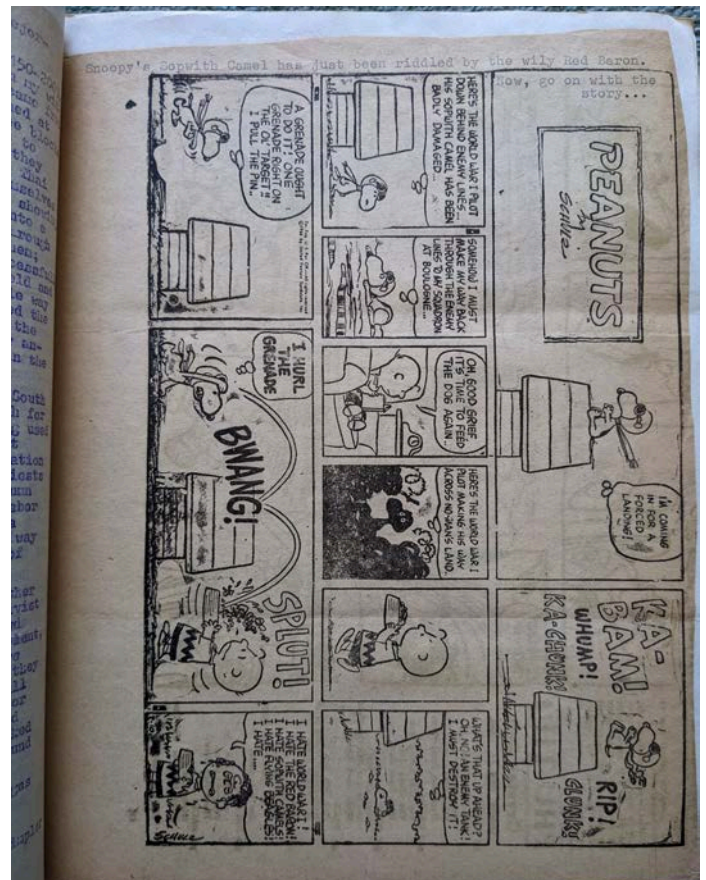
WHOLE LOT OF SMAKING GOING ON, DEPT.: By Roscoe, I'll be a little more careful next time I drink a toast to "Rum, Crime, and Riot" -- which was the last thing I drank to (in hot sake, at that) before the party adjourned to Kindly William Rotsler's pad for the balance of the evening. But how was I to know my wish would be granted so fast, or so literally? Mumblemumblegrnsnort.

Actually, matters were fairly quiet all along in Saigon. The only rumble of real note came when "the mob attempted to storm the radio station" and got run off, with no casualties. The Astor Hotel, where I'm temporarily lodged, is only three blocks away, and the other Agency personnel here -- including some won Public Safety (professional fuzz, to youse West Coasters) -- thought I was kidding when I told them that, the brief outburst of shouting had been the central incident of a big news event. There were all sorts of terrifying stories filtering back from the States alleging wild doings here in Saigon, and I kept my eyes peeled to see what I could, but not much luck.

JB: And so we get a placement in time. Eney reports on his version of the 1966 May Labour Day march, protest and riots, including insight into *Viện Hóa Đạo*. His view is at odds with what was reported by the press in the States.

Volume I, # 2

JB: In this volume, Dick includes a cutout of a Sunday *Peanuts* in which Snoopy has a forced landing behind enemy lines. His kennel becomes an enemy tank, and in an attempt to destroy it, Snoopy throws a grenade into his dog food that Charlie is carrying. The back of the clipping gives us "crystal ball" Phu Tho race predictions for Sunday August 21, 1966, next to a Dennis the Menace strip.



Volume I, # 3

Let us pretend that those spirit-duplicated issues of CURSE YOU, RED BARON! never insulted your faaanish eyeballs, OK? And this, which is issue 3 and Operation Crifanac CCXCIX, is really the first. Except in that case this would be issue number 1, which it obviously isn't, though equally obviously

It's Eney's Fault

THOUGHT FOR FOOD, DEPT.: Not until coming to Viet Nam...South Viet Nam, note well...did I manage to satisfy my curiosity about one of those culinary matters that every reader of Huckleberry Finn must have wondered about.

To fill in a little background: the Saigon River is too much travelled by heavy shipping to be good for fish, and the countryside runs to the production of pond fish carp, tilapia, and like that -- rather than river fish. Just the other day, though, a shipment from the Bassac River came into town, and Ba A-Lai, who's the best cook at I Mac Dinh Chi, got to the market just as they were displaying the prime specimens of the catch, and that, fellow fans, is how I finally tasted my first mess of fried catfish.

No hush puppies, though. I sets me face like flint against those hateful things.

I've had a little difficulty getting "real" Vietnamese food so far -- I mean, made dishes which are prepared in a distinctively Vietnamese style. Yes, I agree that's a flippin' silly thing to worry about; but aren't those frivolous problems sometimes the most fun to solve? Besides, I get tired writing about those Buddhists all the time.

Mind, I don't mean I haven't eaten Vietnamese food; my acute xenophilia would have taken care of that even if it hadn't come up in line of duty. But field rations -- rice spiked with broiled fish or nuoc man -- are "Vietnamese food" only in the sense that bacon and toast are "a British breakfast" or lentil soup is "French cookery." And when it comes to city-side meals, all the places above snack-bar level feature Chinese or French dishes -- no Vietnamese specialties, though there are several Vietnamese recipes that deserve the attention of Food Fandom.

From my tour in Japan I remembered that Chinese food has a status, in Mongol Asia, much like that of French food in Europe: that is, it's what people ask for, or claim skill in preparing, when they want to come on like cultured gentry with discriminating palates. Similarly, Chinese words and references are used to give all sorts of consumer products, theatres, night clubs, and such an aura of Instant Sophistication. And all of us who've been there, plus a number who haven't, know that Japan's all-time favorite song is "China Nights" -- Shina no Yoru.

This fact surprised me when I first ran across it. [...] Some of my Vietnamese friends agree with this, roughly -- not as to the presence of envy, to be sure, but with the idea that Viet Nam swallowed these definitions of what constituted cultural superiority because the beneficiaries of 'em simply shoved them down her throat. We were having a language-practice session not long ago when, during my half of it, I instanced this as an opposite to ethnocentricity. I can't discuss sociology in Vietnamese, of course -- I'm barely equal to things like "the post office is at the end of Liberty Street on the right-hand side"-- but the Vietnamese are pretty good at English, and well up on their history. Anyway, Nguyen Nhut Thang, who is a linguist -- he's finishing his last year of grad

school in Saigon before being assigned as a high school principal down in Rach Gia -- thought that my instance of the lack of Vietnamese restaurants was not an illustration of what I meant. His explanation was that Vietnamese food was what people got at home and they went out to a fancy expensive restaurant to get something exotic. Le Chuong Thi, easily the prettiest accountant in town, thought differently and produced a nice interdisciplinary metaphor to describe the situation: Viet Nam had been located in the zone of contact between two snobberies, which precipitated out all over the country.

I noted -- though without saying so -- that neither explanation granted the Chinese or the French any of the advantages necessary for cultural penetration, other than the surface advantage of irresistibility combined with well-developed national egomania. Merely being present and being arrogant doesn't account for being imitated. What I said for company, though, was that it would be interesting to see the result of prolonged contact between Viet Nam and a culture whose mere existence had radically affected both France and China.

Even this came close to being the wrong thing to say among friends. Miss Thi immediately remembered a snack on the stove. Mr. Thang grumped somewhat and I vastered he was mentally reviewing some of those results. But curiously, as he thought it over his expression became less forbidding. (Or is it so curious? Linguistics is reckoned to the humanities, but has many of the characteristics of a science... Well, anyway:) "Is hard to say what changes are because of Americans and what are part of becoming modern country. We notice right away -- like -- cyclo drivers and who --"

Niss Thi came back with a dish and he switched to a milder term -- "bar girls make more money than honest workers. But same thing would happen any time more money got into...um...national economy. And we want more of money... want more money circulating in the economy; is the way to break away from subsistence, and we must have...to modernize country..."

Miss Thi's accountancy vocabulary supplied the English phrase he was hunting. "We must to have an increasing per capita gross national product for the modernization that the country needs; and we must to have a fully monetized economy to allow free inter-provincial capital movement."

"Yes," he agreed with an embarrassed laugh, "just what I wanted to say. But inflow of money means..." He paused to think and it dawned on me suddenly that he was doing a spur-of-the-moment intuitive analysis rather than quoting someone else's explanation. "I think," he continued after a moment, "is logical money-dealers make more, but the others..."

I saw what he was driving at. "In an expanding or inflationary economy, consumer sales and service industries take an extra-big bite of..." He gave me a blank look and I tried to rephrase the idea, but Miss Thi (she must have been using telepathy to spot the moment of puzzlement so closely) came to the rescue with a translation:

"Service industries' nhia la..." I couldn't follow her, but Mr. Thang cleared up right away, nodding vigorously.

"So," he concluded, "you see how it is that lots evils nobody want mus' follow after benefit we do want and mus' have..."

My subconscious had been nudging me ever since he started speaking -- he was here to practice English, sure, but his normal accent was a lot better than this...then it got through to me why he was a trifle embarrassed. Heh, I wasn't the only one who was gentling things down to spare feelings, I told myself.

"But nevertheless," I pointed out for him as he paused, "we Americans are the ones here; even if anybody else would have done the same, we are the ones who actually are causing you the pains of modernization."

Mr. Thang gave me a grin of pure relief in the moment before Miss Thi decided that the conversation was going the wrong way.

"Modernization is not able to overcome...beat some old practices," she remarked with a smile.. "Cha gio, for instance." And raising the cover from the dish she showed us a dozen cryptic golden-brown lozenges. Mr. Thang gave a theatrical cry of glee and took one, dipped it in sauce and ate it in two bites. I followed his lead -- it turned out to be Chinese plum sauce -- and gave an entirely untheatrical show of jubilation.

It was one of the best kosher knishes I'd ever tasted. And I can't even guess how it came to be a traditional Vietnamese appetizer.

View on the War and the 1966 Vietnamese Election (CYRB vol I #3, continued)

SPECIAL OF THE MONTH, DEPT.: Just for you we have, accompanying this issue of CYRB, a color transparency of a genuine Buddhist u*p*r*i*s*i*n*g! It's the first stage of the one I told you about in the last issue, which was eventually broken up by the rainstorm. Another Operation Crifanac exclusive!

A DH 4 knocked down an Albatros Friday.

PASSE WITH FIENDS, DEPT.: Ethel shook a finger at me the other day and I thot I should point out that I've been avoiding, as much as it honestly can be done, comment on the war against the Communist Empire. As nearly as I can make out, about half my friends will be miserable whichever way things go; and there is really not much point, since they are bound to be unhappy, exerting myself to make them more so. That's why I've been concentrating on the Buddhists' capers: aside from their being on stage center, religious fanaticism is the general enemy of almost all of us.

Avoiding comment entirely, though, is too much to ask of mortals, even if it is Ethel that asks. Aside from the impossibility of not commenting on the most important issue in the world when I'm right in the midst of it, the Viet Cong are Topic A in every part of the country except -- the frankly hedonistic spots, where they are Taboo A; much the same thing, after all. If the effects of the war can creep into a discussion of food, what would they not creep into? (Classical opera? Sorry, it's being upheld by devoted artists so it won't be lost due to Viet Cong liquidation -- there's a similar suppression campaign on in Communist China, I hear.)

After that I really should have some juicy story, but as a matter of fact that won't happen until next month, when the election and the VC effort to wreck it come off. That was a blunder on the Communists' part, to decide to use terror to abort the election; but they were in a bind either way. The local elections last year caught them flat-footed; 74% of the registered voters took part and HO & company have been trying to explain that away ever since. This one was a puzzle. The Viet Cong line would look pretty sick if a good turnout voted in this election; but when they decided to threaten people away from the polls, it convinced some of those who had been taking the attitude the election was phoney that the election wasn't phoney. Like: Charlie is threatening to kill

anybody who goes to the polls, and at the same time trying to tell us going to the polls is meaningless?

At the same time, the planned offensives into the highlands and just northwest of Saigon seem to have been successfully aborted; but the invasion force in ~~Cambodia~~ outside Viet Nam still has about one good punch left in it. Just possibly, that punch may be swung next month, as part of the effort to keep the elections from happening. Right now, I'd bet that it'll go both ways: the Viet Cong will make a heavy effort in September, but the election will go through just the same. And I'd even bet that the voting turnout will surpass last year's 3.5 million. Let's wager a drink on it: if the vote is less than 3.75 million, I'll buy, next time we meet at a World-con.

AHA: *Eney comments here on South Vietnam's Constituent Assembly election in September of 1966. Despite efforts by the Việt Cộng to intimidate voters, 80.8% of registered voters were able to cast their ballots to elect an Assembly to draw up a new constitution.*

Volume I, #5

You were thinking you'd never see another issue of CURSE YOU, RED BARON!, perhaps?...Hand up the kat who muttered, "no, hoping..." ...This is Number 5, Operation Crifanac 312, and is brought to you to celebrate the Lunar New Year. Happy 2510 to each and all! Aside from dull lectures and like that, of course, of which we say

It's Eney's Fault

THE DISMAL SCIENCE: All of us know about how politics bores faaans to distraction, because they tell us about the fact every time they launch out on a political discussion, but the subject of economics is so transcendently weedy that people don't even have to tell us how they loathe it. What could be a more promising subject for a New Year's exposition? Well, practically anything up to and inclusive of a dissertation on Saigones architecture, but I note that the subject is Topical, what with the Associated Press making accusations of forty percent wastage and diversion in the civilian aid program here in Viet Nam.

Actually, I didn't realize anybody was taking this seriously, until the other day when Russell Chauvenet wrote me to ask how to contribute to the benefit of the Vietnamese people without getting a large slice of his contribution into the wrong pockets. I was going to write back a short note, but you know how it is: you hate to give a short answer and so you explain a little, and -- if you're in any kind of government office -- you look it over and find the explanation so studded with gobbledegook that nobody could comprehend it unless they had a fairly detailed knowledge of the program already. And so you have to explain the explanation, which brings it up to such a length that you might as well remember Laney's Maxim and go ahead & stencil the thing, especially since if Chauvenet is wondering what the score is undoubtedly others are too.

Volume I, #6

EYEBALL CONFRONTATION "But why in the heck did you set to studying English out of The Lord of the Rings?" I asked

in puzzlement. The Special Forces captain held out his glass and I refilled it.

"It's no odder than you trying to teach yourself written Vietnamese by trying to translate that sword-and-sorcery novel", he pointed out. "Actually all I wanted was a handy source of sample sentences. I never thought the Rhade would treat the whole thing as a coherent story."

"I realize this isn't regular dress," I remarked, looking at the slide again, "but do they ever dress up like this at home?"

"Sometimes, for festivities of different kinds. These getups are specially made for the National Day Parade but they'll use 'em after they get home whenever they want to dress fancy."

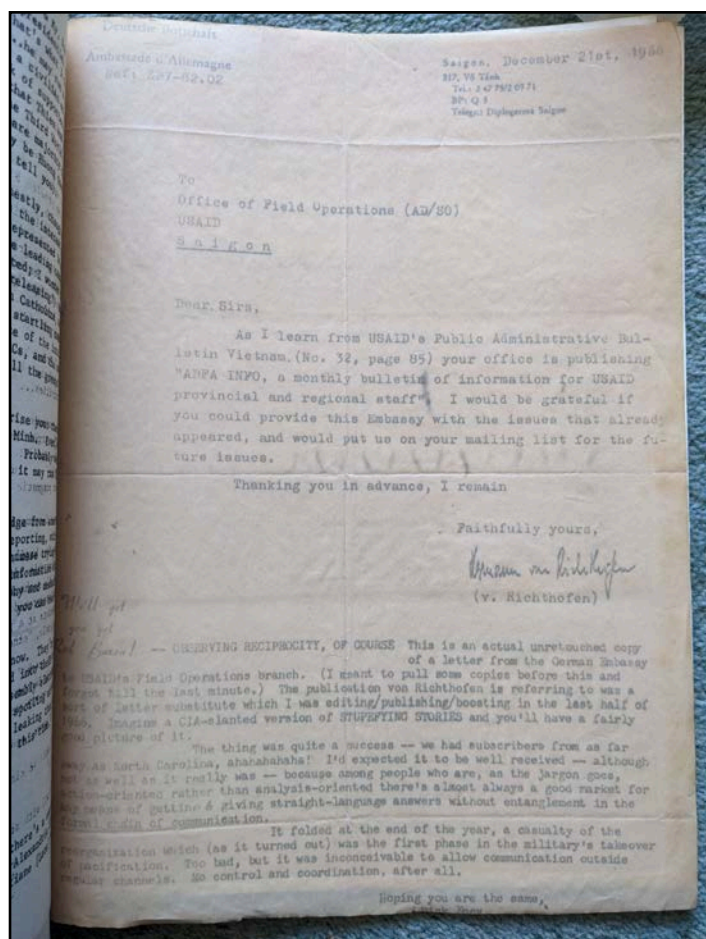
"Just like the Costume Ball at a Worldcon..."

"Huh?"

I passed that foxy pass off with a wisecrack I forget. Somehow I'm going to have to correct that habit of assuming everybody who reads Tolkein knows about faaandom.

"Your guess is as good as mine." -- Nostradamus

Volumel I, #10



Volume II, # 3

With all that sesquipedalian verbojuice on the front, perhaps I'd better confirm that the line that gives the title is the little one that says CURSE YOU, RED BARON! Series II, Number 3, from Dick Eney down in the tropical zone to you people up there in the temperate climates. Operation Crifanac 362, and

It's Eney's Fault

WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE? (I) Now, as I was about to say before that guy in Hanoi distracted me, here I am in the Mekong Delta with the Office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, henceforth called CORDS. I like polysyllables, but not that much.

CORDS is the inter-agency group which is responsible for the pacification campaign in Viet Nam; it includes representatives of MACV, AID (ahem) USIA, and CSA -- otherwise, the Military Advisory Command/Viet Nam, a Department of Defense group; the Agency for International Development and US Information Agency, which are agencies within the State Department; and the Office of the Special Assistant (to the Ambassador), the local euphemism for the Central Intelligence Agency. In effect, the CORDS organization includes all the American civilian programs, plus that part of the military advisory effort that isn't linked to regular forces. The bureaucratic troubles which result from having three different offices in Washington ("parent agencies") to report to are something I leave to your imaginations. After all, everybody's expected to compose Black Humor nowadays.

Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh

The Delta is a rather peculiar locale from the Agency's point of view. It's a working location, unlike Saigon; but it differs from the other three Regions of the country in that there are only token US/Free World military forces present. In the three northern Regions, the military situation -- and therefore more peaceful development -- is powerfully affected by the presence of strong units of the North Vietnamese Expeditionary Force and even stronger units of the US, Korean, Thai, and ANZac armed forces. Plus, I needn't add, Allied officers of much seniority.

In the Mekong Delta, on the other hand, there are (aside from air units) only some specialist troops plus the Navy's Riverine Force; there never was more than a fraction of one division of US ground troops down here (two brigades of the Ninth Infantry), and they went home in July. The main allied strength is the Vietnamese IV Corps, and the main enemy units are "real" Viet Cong; that is, units with a fair proportion of genuine ethnic Southern Vietnamese and formally subordinate to COSVN, the Party's branch Office for South Viet Nam. Despite the large number of NVA fillers in these "Viet Cong" units, the situation is still more or less the classic case, in which subversive aggression is being carried out and resisted by actual inhabitants, rather than the odd situation further north where the "liberation army" consists of troops of a foreign power who happen to be of the same race and language-group and is resisted by an international force. It also makes the civilian US component down here relatively more important than is the case in oth-

er Regions, where us pacification types are rather overpowered by the sheer numbers of Round Eye combat personnel.

Those of you who got the first series of CYRB! may remember the one, about June '67, where I was crying into my glass about the fact that we civilians had had to holler copper to the military when the enemy escalated his attack against Viet Nam, and thinking how much better it would have been, both for the Republic and the Third World generally, if advisory effort alone could have given enough support to the Vietnamese resistance. Well, in the Delta that's effectively what's happening; that is, the Vietnamese are carrying the ball against the Viet Cong to a great extent, and pacification is taking place under the protection of armed inhabitants of the country we're supporting rather than mixed nationalist and allied protection.

That makes it pretty important to succeed in the Delta. What makes it even more important is the fact that the civilians are doing so much of the American part of the job. This, in other words, is a chance for us to show that peaceful development, even in a combat environment, doesn't necessarily require all sorts of military personnel running things.

Vol II, #5.1

I certainly didn't expect to follow CYRB: II/5 so quickly with CURSEYOU, RED BARON II/5.1, but then that isn't the only unexpected thing that's happened today. This is Operation Crifanac 372, and

It's Eney's Fault

FATE TAKES ME UP ON IT: Let's change the ending of CYRB! II/5 to say that I'm quite sure I'll be able to find out more about the Cambodian situation by next issue. I just got the word I'm being assigned to Kien Phong province, up on the Cambodian border, as Deputy Senior Advisor. Well, first-hand research is the best, at Dr. Kinsey once remarked.

Interesting bits of unclassified information keep coming along, even here. You probably remember the report, about 18 March, of South Vietnamese artillery firing a support mission for a Cambodian task force which was sweeping a VC battalion out of Rase Area 704, where the Mekong crosses the international border (These were "real" VC, rather than North Vietnamese Army elements.) Instead of pulling out afterward the Cambodians stayed there, were attacked, and beat off the VC after a heavy fire fight. The real surprise, though, came a few days later when the rear areas of the 1st NVA Division were hit by a couple of Cambodian battalions. Results are unclear, but the fact that they're picking fights with the North Vietnamese Army at all is more than we really expected after all Sihanouk's propaganda. It starts to make the revolution more like a popular uprising than a palace coup d'etat.

I can't help thinking, though, of another popular uprising many years ago, when the Yugoslavs realised they'd been sold out to the Nazis. That also was a spectacular explosion of feeling; but that didn't keep the Yugoslavs from being knocked to pieces as soon as Hitler could rush his Panzers in. Nobody has ever thought the Cambodians could eject the Communists by main force, on the basis of either the size or prowess of the Cambodian armed forces, and I haven't heard anyone offer a new estimate in the last few weeks, either.

Volume III, #1

NEW JOB AT THE SKONK WORKS Since I have to put my return address on these things, there's no point my trying to conceal what's happened. When I got back at the beginning of March I found I'd been transferred from my old job as Deputy Senior Advisor in Kien Phong province to be...business of dropping the voice to a mumble...Director of Land Reform for the Mekong Delta area. Reform! Good grief! Why didn't they come right out and ask me to defend Truth, Virtue, and Integrity? Who ever heard of an Imperialist Hyaena being a reformer? Aside from the blow to my Image, I daren't guess what this will do to my future with the Agency...

Still, it's a good-sized job (he said, trying to see the bright side). The new Vietnamese land reform program, "Land to the Tiller", aims at just about eradicating the tenant-farmer system and is meant to give four or five acres of land apiece to over a million Vietnamese farmers. About four-fifths of these, we expect, will be in the Delta. There will be a simultaneous confirmation of titles for landholders who work their own land; guesses on the number of these run from 200,000 to 400,000.

What with Vietnamization being the Secret Word, this may be the last program in which American advisors play a large active part. This isn't because we are evading the Vietnamization idea, but because the program aims at run-ning to substantial completion in about three years and right now is making so much progress that this goal may be bettered. This calls for heavy support from computer programmers, photogrammetrists, and other exotic boffins for those three years, during which 300,000-odd land titles will be processed annually; but it won't do to Vietnamize by simply training Vietnamese to handle these jobs. Such specialties take years of training, and in this case, after the major effort has caught up with the needs of the present body of tenants, the program will drop to something like 10,000 20,000 titles a year, leaving a lot of expensively trained engineer-quality people with very little to do in Viet Nam. But we already have plenty of such specialists in the US and other Free World nations, plus lots of jobs to occupy them when this one is over; hence we're doing a good deal of substantive work for the Vietnamese land reform program rather than just providing advice.

AHA: The "Land to the Tiller" program that Eney discusses here turned out to be successful for a time. Designed and subsidised almost entirely by the U.S., the program failed after the fall of Saigon in 1975. It is curious that Eney does not mention the Land Reforms of the 1950s, run by the Việt Minh. While these earlier reforms built a loyal base among farmers in the north, they quickly turned brutal and violent, resulting in the death of more than 13,000 Vietnamese people (a low estimate). Additionally, Eney, perhaps unconsciously, articulates a major problem with U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In Ken Burns' documentary, author Duong Van Mai Elliot points out that the U.S. established a sense of dependency for the South Vietnamese government. The U.S., she says, went wrong in "creating an army in their own image, and army that was used to fighting a rich man's war." Eney couldn't have known at the time, but his commentary here foreshadows the reality of the end of the war: South Vietnam was unable to sustain the U.S. model, but U.S. military and advisors couldn't (or wouldn't) see that.

Volume III, #4

Well, (you see, I do come to the point at last) that's how a string of trucks happened to be rattling through the countryside in Binh Tuy one morning, trying to make Ham Tan by siesta time so they'd be sure of getting back to Phan Thiet before dinner. (Ham Tan to Phan Thiet is roughly comparable to a Philadelphia-New York trip without turnpikes.) Then at the far side of a blind curve what should they see but a picket of Viet Cong...

It is just possible that this gang had been laying for the Co-op's returning vehicles specifically, since the VC are very grabby for cash money. (Think about the implications of that a bit...) Going up to Saigon the trucks would have been no target, since guerrillas can't store fresh fish. The stock method used by VC in levying their protection money is to take a cut of the visible and assessable wealth; while nobody ever found out whether this group deliberately tried to hit the truckers at a time when their wealth consisted of bundles of cash, the timing was suspiciously convenient.

Anyway, the truck column eased to a stop, the drivers no doubt expressing their opinion in good sailor terms. The VC closed up to the lead vehicle and that's when the third element of the affair made its appearance: a couple of helicopters happened to pass well to the north.

It came out later that this really was an accident, perhaps the only one of the day. The choppers were travelling on military business with no idea there were VC anywhere around, and probably never heard of the Phan Thiet Fishing Co-operative. Fortunately, they did know that the spectacle of a string of vehicles stopped, for no evident reason, in the open country, was something to be checked out. They turned toward the trucks to see what was up.

They had no difficulty seeing what was going on, but the question what to do about it was knottier. The Viet Cong strung themselves out along the column of trucks and there everybody was. The choppers couldn't shoot the VC without hitting the civilians too, and couldn't get close enough to pick off individuals with aimed bursts without receiving effective return fire from the enemy. The VC could fight back if the choppers tried to close in, but their AK-47s had neither punch nor range enough to chase the aircraft away or even keep them beyond effective machine-gun range. So the party hung fire for ten minutes or more: the Viet Cong lurking like mad, the choppers circling and gnashing their teeth in frustration, and the truck drivers sweating and wondering when the balloon would go up.

Present forces might be balanced, but the situation wasn't. Either the friendly reaction force (which everybody knew the choppers had called) would get there first and shooting would start when they tried to chase the VC away, or the VC covering force (which everybody knew would have been alerted by the sight of the choppers circling) would arrive first and the trouble would begin when they tried to get at least one aircraft with surprise ground fire. Take a moment, if you will, to reflect how all parties are perfectly familiar with the gambits in this game... Right. It was at this point a new gambit began.

The truckers made the move. The lead man simply let in his clutch, very easily, and crept forward...not gunning his motor or any obvious thing like that, but crawling along at the speed (whatever it may be) an empty freight truck can make with its motor idling. It was so slow that for a minute the Viet Cong didn't notice anything, and when they did they didn't realize an escape was going on. For a moment more they simply yelled and waved at the trucks; and by that time the whole convoy was in motion.

One of the VC finally caught on and sprinted out ahead of the lead truck -- he had to put on a special burst of speed by this time--held up his hand to command a stop, and waved his gun at the driver. But he'd gotten far enough away

for the choppers' door-gunners to hit him without endangering the trucks...Maybe he had been the leader; or possibly (the VC were now running like mad to keep near the trucks) the leader couldn't communicate or think of the obvious trick to stall the column again. The situation, however, was rapidly coming apart. The VC could not simply shoot the drivers: without live civilians near them, the choppers would open fire immediately. For the same reason, they couldn't stop running; but since nobody can deliver aimed fire from a rifle while he is running, they couldn't keep the choppers, now, from closing in near enough to pick off individuals.

This started dawning on the guerrillas quite soon and the VC unit began to unravel as one or two men would make a break for each bit of cover they passed, with the choppers throwing a hatful of bullets at each by way of farewell. There wasn't any dramatic finish; after about five minutes the trucks were free of their followers and from there they had a clear run into Ham Tan. I never heard what contact the reaction force made.

I'm not too sure what the point of this really is, except to illustrate what I meant when I commented to Dick Ellington that the Vietnamese possess great Cool. Perhaps the moral is that nonviolent resistance can be effective when somebody reinforces your nonviolence with a battery of airborne machine-guns. And maybe all it shows is that people will do more for their families and friends than they will either for an abstraction or such highly concrete motivations as their Commissar's pistol. But shucks, I thought everybody knew that.

AHA: Here, Eney retells the experience of The Fishermen's Co-Op's convoy which was shipping surplus supplies up to Saigon to sell. Eney's sense of humor and respect for the South Vietnamese fishermen is evident. This is a stranger-than-fiction story that could have devolved quickly into a tragedy, resulting in many more deaths than the single Việt Cộng soldier.

Volume III, #5

JB: Eney takes issue with New York Times.

CURSE YOU, RED BARON! Vol. III, Number 5, has finally filtered through to you and again I won't annoy you with reasons why it wasn't out sooner. Well, actually, I'm enclosing one reason why it wasn't out sooner, but let's hope that doesn't count as annoyance. Operation Crifanac 428, and

It's Eney's Fault

MY ADVENTURES ON THE TRUTH SQUAD AND HOW THEY GREW (AND GREW AND...)

You know the drill: here's this news story about something you saw happen, or some project you've been working with, and there in the middle of it is this whacking great Terminological Inexactitude which makes you screw the paper up in a wad and fling it across the room with a mighty oath, after which you decided that what this country needs is an agency which would go around after these #%\$&!* reporters and straighten out their misstatements.

Well, I didn't do it quite like that, because somebody else saw the story first and jokingly asked, what was all this jazz about the Land Reform program being a success only where the Việt Cộng had done our work for us? So I had time to cool down and clip out the story for further study when I did get hold of a copy.

Tom Fox of the New York TIMES had impressed me as a reasonably conscientious and well-qualified individual when he came down here; if I were more British I'd probably refer to him as a "decent chap". He wasn't satisfied with Saigon handouts, but came down and talked to us field people and even went to An Giang province for a short visit. In fact, when I looked at the whole article (and not just the few lines I'd gotten needed about) it wasn't too bad. Of course, being in the TIMES and being about an effective US program in Viet Nam, it was negative; but with this one exception the shortcomings had some relation to reality. Tom didn't mention any of the things that were being done about evasions of the law, but the evasions he cited were genuine. (I told him about most of them myself, for that matter.) And the remark about officials in Saigon minimizing the Crime Problem is superabundantly true; but that's another story. Tom apologized later to G—, one of my junior staff members (hem hem) and said that the editor had cut up his story badly, but it is a Law of Nature that reporters always feel editors have cut up their stories badly, so I'm not sure what he meant.

But that chuck about us picking up after the Viet Cong got to me. One imagines how the NAACP would feel on seeing it solemnly argued that, since Robert E. Lee freed his slaves, the Confederate Army deserved to be considered the true source of the Civil Rights movement. By Saint Dymphna, those reactionary Reds weren't going to filch the credit for our revolution, if I could help it.

Logically, I figured, I should be able to. The assertion was about things we had good records on. The Hamlet Evaluation System was collecting data on the extent of Viet Cong influence back when Land Reform was only a gleam in Keith Sharper's eye; and naturally we've been keeping the most meticulous records on how many titles we issue and what provinces they go to. (This will form an updated set of tax records in the future.) By stating their fiction in such specific terms, the TIMES was Just Askin' For It.

AHA: Eney's writing continues, outlining how he researched the issue for several days to refute The New York Times article. While he does eventually succeed, he also concedes that he was "getting into a writeup several times longer than Fox's whole article just to quash a few sentences of falsehood," which he didn't know were the fault of the author or his editor. By the end, however, he can "confidently say...that, as far as facts can be established, the TIMES was wrong in suggesting that the Viet Cong influence had some kind of connection with the successes of the Land Reform program." However, some Vietnam War scholars have argued that the U.S. was out of touch with what the people needed or wanted, which ultimately led to the strength of the insurgency against U.S. and the ARVN.

Volume III, # 9

Having just about finished his last assignment in Viet Nam, Dick Eney sits down to do another issue of CURSE YOU, RED BARON! Volume III, No. 9. this is, complete with a Vietnamese stamp on the envelope again. (This time it illustrates the victory at An Loc, despite Dick Geis belief that the Communists are still besieging the place. Binh Long is the province in which An Loc is located; Anh-Dung means, roughly, "enduring valor".) Operation Crifanac 452 and again

It's Eney's Fault

ONE BIG BALL OF WAX And sure enough, the Land Reform program in Viet Nam did go over the top by deadline day. President Thieu promised the people, when he signed the Land to the Tiller law into effect in 1970, that a million hectares would be distributed by 26 March 1973 and the figure reported was 1,003,325 hectares. It must be great to have precognition like that.

Not to play word games, what had happened by 26 March was that transfer of title to the actual tiller had taken place, and was legally registered in Saigon, for 1,007,217 hectares of land. (The other figure was as of the preceding Wednesday: of course they couldn't wait till the last minute to get handouts in print.) About 83% of this was represented by what I have been referring to in earlier letters as "distributed land": that is, land which is not only transferred on the books but for which the farmer has his title papers in his hot li'l fist.

(The exact figure used was reached after an unedifying hassle. Some eager types wanted to give as the achievement all applications which had been approved at all, on the ground that since the rejection rate was low everybody whose request had been approved could be considered to have gotten his land, couldn't he? And wicked hardliners wanted to use the figure we'd been using--farmers who actually had papers in their possession because it smelled very cheesy to change the standard of measurement to fit the planned result and, actually, scoring an 83% success in the teeth of two major enemy offensives and a couple of domestic political disturbances was very much something to be proud of. So we split the difference: the achievement reported was the land which had been legally transferred to the tiller, though some recipients haven't yet gotten their paperwork. Figures, as the saying goes, don't lie.)

The million hectares was just a mark to aim at, and completion of this part of the program doesn't mean the end of Land to the Tiller; but it does bring it close to a cleanup of the greatest amount of land worked by tenant farmers. Or I should say ex-tenant, since we've transformed the majority of them into landowners: the ratio on the Mekong Delta's "primary occupation" lists stood at 56% tenants, 10% hired labor, and 34% owner-operators in December 1970, and now--as of April 1973--it's 10% tenants, 7% hired labor, and 83% owner-operators.

Volume III, #10

CURSE YOU, RED BARONI Vol. III, Number 10 and final, is sent to you from Dick Eney, who is cleaning up the files in preparation for closing down the Regional Land Reform office. Well, isn't that what all bureaucrats do after completing a program? This is operation Crifanac 454 and

It's Eney's Fault

PERIOD PIECE No openings available elsewhere in the Viet Nam program, says Personnel. Well, after three tours plus two extensions, and considering that the program I was helping run is effectively completed, I can't expect much help from them. I've a position to return to at the Agency, at least, which isn't the case with a lot of USAID/vietnam personnel.

One more set of tables for a final info bulletin and that'll be it. Het roi. Fini. Wrap up the Land Reform program and mark "closed, complete, generally successful. And the

project actually did what it set out to do in about the time it was supposed to take. I suppose we can't all say that.

Let's see: that completes a series, now I think back. Staff reports officer in Saigon, Planning officer in Washington, Program officer in Can Tho, Deputy Province Senior Advisor in Kien Phong, and finally a Division Director with CORDS. (Youngest Division Director in the country for eight months; what price Generation Gap?) Just enough variety to know something about the civilian development program over here...

I hope I'll be able to avoid any really obscene responses the first time I hear some clabberwit claim that Nothing Has Been Changed. It is indeed a change that even when people are griping the complaints take off from the idea that the Vietnamese government has established its legitimacy. (The month I got here Thich Tri Quang was considered to have an excellent chance of disproving its claims. Only the third time I'd been tear-gassed, that was.) It is a change that people looking for Communist troop units have to go and beat up the boonies. (The month I got here I stood in front of my hotel downtown and watched air strikes going in on a Viet Cong battalion that was trying to force its way into one of the outlying wards of Saigon city in broad daylight.) It is a change that we now try to deal with corruption by telling the offender's superiors so that he may be punished (we used to keep it quiet in order not to tip off other grafters to any new possibilities). It is a change that there can no longer be a pretense that the North Vietnamese invasion is a civil war. (That fantasy still had currency in 66.) And it is a change that the farmers here in Viet Nam are no longer in a cleft stick between exploitation by the Viet Cong and exploitation by their landlords. Yes; re-reading that last sentence, I think that change can stand being compared to the others.

Quick inventory of effects before packing:

About ten linear feet of documents, all of them, naturally, unclassified. About two feet of personal notes, and I write a small hand. Something more than three thousand color slides of everything from rice sprouting to C5A's off-loading. A limited command of spoken Vietnamosa (I tried, but it turns out I'm a little tone deaf), and somewhat more facility with the written language. Three Vietnamese medals and a couple of American ones. Two promotions, which the office in Washington says they don't have to consider because they were given at an overseas mission. A few commendations from John Vann, which are worth more than any of the preceding items even if they're not so easy to show off. A good deal more facility with statistical analysis. (I'd been meaning to bone up on that for a long time and finally had to.) An eye still good enough to let me put half a magazine full of M-16 through a hole the size of a quarter at 100 yards, provided I remember to wear my glasses and the sun isn't too bright. And (heaven knows what it can signify) the ability to take fairly good pictures of people—I used to do well only with inanimate objects. But if that represents some kind of victory over a psychological block it hasn't improved my ability to improvise small talk, even in English.

Other stuff:

Flew 154,000 miles that I can account for, in several types of helicopters, various light transports, and some airliners. Drove I-don't-know how far in sedans, jeeps, and Scouts, killing nobody and getting wrecked only once. (By a truck that turned out to be loaded with USAID-funded imports. Don't tell me there's any justice.) Shot at I forget how often, but only three times close enough to hear the iron flying. Pocket picked once (but only of a change purse), mobbed by "cowboys" once (unsuccessfully), hit by motorcycle once (but she was braking hard and barely knocked me off my feet). Racked up in helicopter once because the clutch burned out, or whatever the equivalent helicopter malfunction is. Other-

wise put down by a leg infection and something the doctor sonorously described as bilateral pleuritis. "Through the goodness of Him that is best I am, as you see, alive; glad shall I be if I meet with no more such brunts."

So: I managed to arrange the distribution of seven thousand square kilometers of the world's best farmland, more or less fairly. And helped bring into the open a small collection of law violators, more or less justly. One way or another, I can say I'm responsible for the fact that about half a million people who used to be sharecroppers are now independent farmers. Half-a-bloody-million; I don't think I've ever seen half a million people at one time in my life.

Independent farmers, I mean, if Viet Nam makes it. If there is after all a Communist conquest, I'll be able to say I'm responsible for the judicial murder of half a million class-enemy landlords. I suppose we can't all say that, either, can we?

Commentary by James Bacon

It is a fascinating thing to read Dick Eney's "Curse You Red Baron." Even the title, which links to *Peanuts* and Snoopy in his Sopwith Camel, was contemporary, an early use, and it is interesting that he riffs on how American servicemen used that phrase with reference to Vietnam.

CYRB ran from 1966, when Dick went to Vietnam. Skyrack 90 (June 15th, 1966) gives his COA address % Saigon, and Ethel Lindsay's Haeversings wrote in Haverings 24 (December 1966) about the first two issues, "These are written about the Viet Nam War - mainly about the propaganda angle. Dick reads what has happened in the papers, and compares this with what he has observed himself. Interesting..but mind..I wouldn't say that Dick is strictly objective. Well - is anyone?"

And I think that is fair and Ethel nails it.

Dick spent 3 tours plus two extensions in Vietnam. In Vol iii #9, he mentions August 1972, and then he talks about April 1973, but we see he is posted away 6 years.

He comes across as a fannish person in particular. He created a bibliography of acronyms, and if that is not fannish, I am not sure what is. I wonder whether he realised as the war progressed, that he was tasked with a challenging job, within a horrible theatre of operation, which soon everyone hated. Did he realise this, or did he focus on his land reform, as a detail-oriented government official. I sense the geek in him making all the corrections, and while he isn't continually pro-America, he often offers acerbic and laconic satire about the US, which is funny.

I have spent a lot of time looking into Dick. We fired off FOIA requests, made discreet enquiries, tried to figure things out as best we could, but information is sparse.

I think we need to remember how much Vietnam was a war that should never have happened, was based on lies, and as I watch *Apocalypse Now*, remind myself it was written in 1969. The American people were duped, as people have and always will be. WMD was the lie this century.

"Curse you Red Baron" is an unexpected fanzine emanating from Vietnam. In his writing one can see the strong pro-US bias but then he is there, a government employee. Taral Wayne wrote to *Blatant* 18 (April 1989), alleging Eney could call in air strikes. I'd believe that. USAID was an integral part of the US machine, and Eney writes himself how they are intrinsically linked to the military. But I failed to find a reference.

Our FOIA requests showed that Dick was a Sergeant in the United States Army, 1955-1957. His roles were defined and we list those in the notes, and he received the Meritorious Honor award Agency for International Development in 1972, and Social Welfare medal Republic of Vietnam, 1970, although mentions more.

A fascinating insight, we republished with his wife's permission, these extracts to share what we felt were representative of his fanzine work.

Notes

Career

Reports officer, Agency for International Development, Saigon, Vietnam, 1965-1967

Program analyst Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support Region IV, Agency for International Development, Can Tho, Vietnam, 1969

Deputy senior advisor Kien Phong, Agency for International Development, Cao Lanh, Vietnam, 1969-1970

Director land reform division, Agency for International Development, Can Tho, 1970-1973 Program analyst, Agency for International Development, Washington, 1967-1969, 73-77 Country desk officer for Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania, Agency for International Development, Washington, 1977-1991

Program analyst, Agency for International Development, Washington, 1991

He wrote:

The United States Economic Assistance to South Vietnam 1954-75 Volume III

A Bibliography of official Documents. December 31, 1975 US. Agency for International Development Washington, O.C.

Lists: Landlord Compensation Irregularities. Richard E. Eney. Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) . May 1973 I v. ARC Catalog No. VS 333.13, ~5

VIETNAM A SELECTED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

JUNE 1970 A.I.D Reference Center Room 1656 NS Prepared by Research, Evaluation and Information Retrieval Staff Bureau for Vietnam Agency for international Development

A GLOSSARY OF INITIALS AND ACRONYMS ENCOUNTERED IN VIETNAM by R. H. Eney, Vietnam Bureau, U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C., January 1969, 12 pp. Acronyms and pertinent explanations of initials used by military and civilian personnel in Vietnam.

LAND-TO-THE-TILLER IN THE MEKONG DELTA: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EFFECTS OF LAND REFORM IN FOUR VILLAGES OF SOUTH VIETNAM A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Charles Stuart Callison September 1976. 418 Anticipated Use of Landlord Compensation · Payments, MR 4," Memorandum from Richard H. Eney, Chief, Land Reform Division, CG4/rm.o, dated May 1973

Contemporary photo of Eney at the 1965 London Worldcon taken by Peter Mabey:

<http://www.fiawol.org.uk/fanstuff/THEN%20Archive/1965%20Worldcon/65Wcon04.htm>

Now, Earl Kemp visited Vietnam and met Eney, an astonishing visit to Vietnam as a correspondent <https://efanzines.com/EK/el16/index.htm#kill>

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/civil-operations.html>

https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnaax020.pdf

https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADY979.pdf

https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAD296.pdf

Vietnam Comic Recommendations

By James Bacon

We do not have enough space to cover every good comic that connects to the Vietnam war, so here is a list of recommendations. At some stage, we may return to look at the impact of the American War in Vietnam, and after the War, in comic books. **Blazing Combat** was a four issue anthology that faced fierce opposition as it portrayed the Vietnam War in a very realistic and considered way, as it tackled many stories from a variety of eras. The four issues have been reprinted in one volume and is an excellent read. **Last Day in Vietnam** by Will Eisner is a very thoughtful and beautifully-drawn comic that draws on thirty years of connection to the military. He presents stories from his time, first serving during World War II, and then working for the army on the PS magazine. Eisner noted 'I arrived in Vietnam during the Autumn of 1967. I was based in Saigon, and my tour was only to last a month. In the North, the US Army was struggling to hold onto Khe Sanh, a base just below the DMZ...my job was to visit the field units and pick up maintenance stories... it wasn't until the Tet Offensive in January of the following year that Saigon was partially overrun by the Viet Cong and America became truly aware that it was losing the war.'

Larry Hama was such a delight to meet in person. A veteran of Vietnam, he was crucial to the U.S. portrayal of Vietnam in comics. He reached out to Doug Murray, also a veteran, and with artists Micheral Golden created 'The 5th to the 1st,' for Savage Tales Vol 2. #1 and #3 in 1985. Jim Shooter, then EiC of Marvel, went to Hama and sought out an ongoing war comic, and so **The 'Nam** reunited this team. The story was cleverly told, in that each month was a month of the War for the character Ed Marks. I enjoyed these stories, so much so that I asked Larry for an Ed Marks sketch. Later stories were not so good (the Avengers showed up, as did the Punisher) but the first 12 were very good.

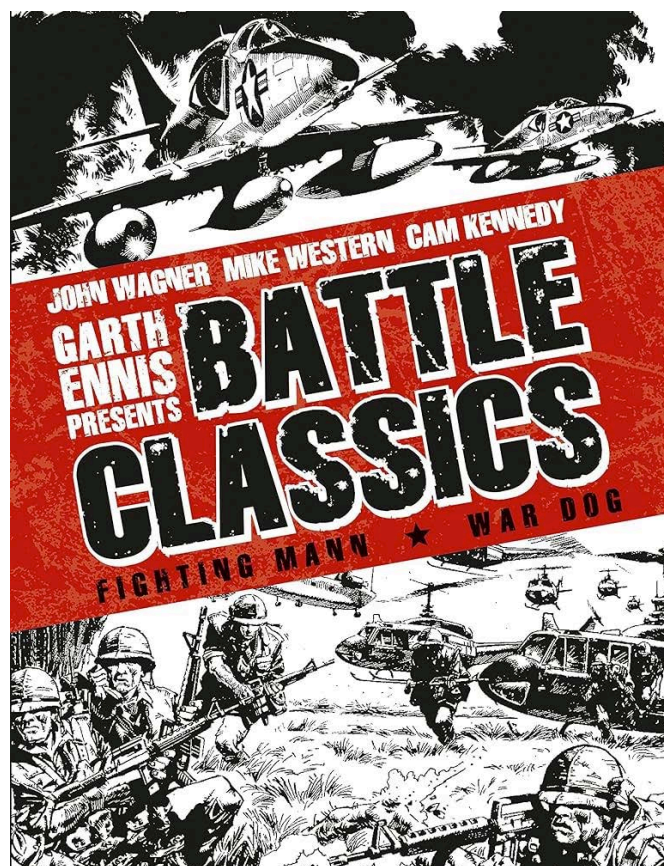
Garth Ennis has developed the Vietnam story in the Max Comics imprint for Marvel aimed at an adult audience. He took a look at Frank Castle with more care and attention to detail, presenting the character as always meant to be. When working in the war setting, with Frank Castle or Nick Fury, Ennis does a very good job, always historically accurate and honest, even when cruel, in his portrayals. He is adept at the anti-war message within these stories, and be it **Punisher Born** or **Punisher Platoon** or **Preacher** they read very well.

Big Man Plans by Eric Powell and Tim Wiesch is an incredibly dark and harsh story about a dwarf who fights in Vietnam, but is heavily put upon in the real world. It's quite thoughtful in a grim and gruesome way. Harvey Pekar and David Colliers' **American Splendor**, the Robert McNeil biography, is really quite honest and insightful. The idea of being on Riot Patrol with a bayonet in the Watts projects, or in the jungle, is an interesting experience and a great read. **Tet** by Paul Allor and Paul Tucker feels like it would not be to my taste. The art is a bit basic, but it works very well in its storytelling that follows Lt Eugene Smith, both at home and also in Vietnam in 1968. **Apache Delivery Service** by Matt Kindt, Tyler Jenkins, and Hilary Jenkins is not the war story I anticipated when I began reading. The story follows a Diné Navajo that everyone refers to as an Apache, who goes into the jungle and calls in airstrikes—hence the 'delivery service.'

Real War Stories, mentioned in the Kubert article on page 38, has a superb line-up of writers, each sharing

some very horrible stories, including Alan Moore on 'Tapestries,' which is about Vietnam.

Of interest is that the UK comic **The Hornet** from IPC produced a number of stories in 1967 which featured true stories of Australian soldiers fighting in Vietnam, such as Warrant Officer Swanton. Not the greatest but a more unusual find. **Lost Soldiers** and **Cat Shit One** are also great.



Finally **Fighting Mann** by Alan Hebden and Cam Kennedy is probably one of the most accurately drawn and more interesting stories about Vietnam, albeit created for the British War Weekly anthology comic, *Battle*. It has been collected by Titan Books and is well worth seeking out, as it is very snappy, and the story flows quickly, given its weekly nature. We follow a Colonel as he returns to Vietnam in search of his missing pilot son, who is not so much MIA (after evading a SAM) as considered a traitor. So we have quite the adventure, as the Colonel works with an old friend Chong and calls in favours and gets help, uncovers the truth, and then gets in even deeper. The art is phenomenal—without doubt the best portrayal of vehicles, planes, and helicopters one will find in comics. A cracking read.

Introduction to *Vietnam* by Julian Bond by James Bacon

Vietnam is a 20-page comic written by Julian Bond and drawn by T.G. Lewis in 1967.

Bond was a civil rights activist, and at this time had been expelled from the Georgia House of Representatives in 1966 for his antiwar position. It presents one of the most thoughtful and honest perspectives on the Vietnam War, and makes an argument to fellow African American readers to consider for themselves what they think of the War. It is superb how it compares the Black community to the Vietnamese people, a people who were also seeking self determination and democracy.

Bond spent his life fighting for civil rights, eventually becoming the first president of the Southern Poverty Law Center in 1971. He was a journalist for *The Atlanta Inquirer*, a Black protest paper he had helped establish, and went on to be a professor at the University of Virginia (1990-2012). He is also the namesake for the non-profit organization JULIAN, founded by Jill Collen Jefferson, dedicated to defending civil rights. Bond served as a Georgia House of Representative member and Georgia State Senate member. A professor, a brilliant writer, a civil rights leader, and comic writer.

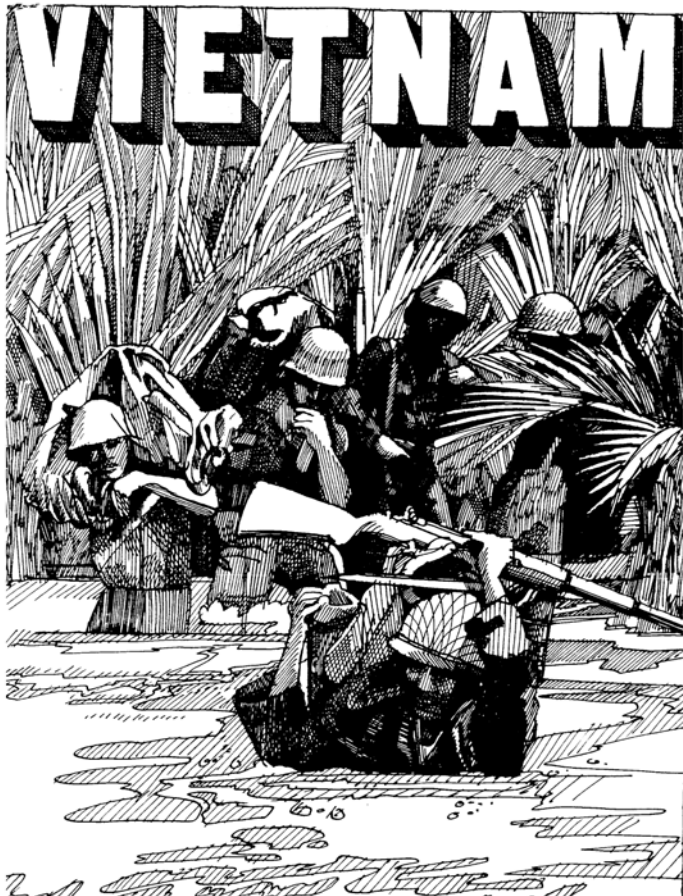
We are able to share this comic that is ©Julian Bond. One can find it online from the The Sixties

Project (http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Exhibits/Bond/Bond.html) and Civil Rights teaching has it available as a PDF (<https://www.civilrightsteaching.org/transnational-solidarity/vietnam-comic-book>)



This graphic, made available by the Sixties Project, is copyright (c) 1991 by the Author or by Viet Nam Generation, Inc., all rights reserved. This text may be used, printed, and archived in accordance with the Fair Use provisions of U.S. Copyright law. This text may not be archived, printed, or redistributed in any form for a fee, without the consent of the copyright holder. This notice must accompany any redistribution of the text. The Sixties Project, sponsored by Viet Nam Generation Inc. and the Institute of Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, is a collective of humanities scholars working together on the Internet to use electronic resources to provide routes of collaboration and make available primary and secondary sources for researchers, students, teachers, writers and librarians interested in the 1960s.

© Julian Bond. Made available online by The Sixties Project.



WHO IS AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM?



MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



AND THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ARE AGAINST IT.



THE SOUTHERN CONFERENCE EDUCATIONAL FUND AN INTERRACIAL CIVIL RIGHTS GROUP IS AGAINST IT.

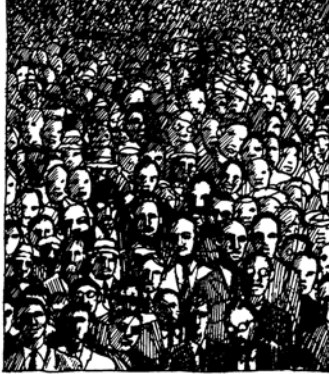


Vietnam

JOHN LEWIS, STOKLEY CARMICHAEL AND THE STUDENT NONVIOLENT COORDINATING COMMITTEE ARE AGAINST IT.



ONE SNCC MEMBER, JULIAN BOND WAS THROWN OUT OF THE GEORGIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BECAUSE HE IS AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM.



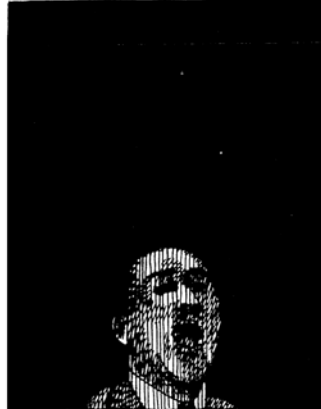
CASSIUS CLAY- MUHAMMAD ALI- AND ELIJAH MUHAMMAD AND THE BLACK MUSLIMS ARE AGAINST IT.



MALCOMB X WAS AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM.



SO IS ADAM CLAYTON POWELL.



JAMES FARMER, FLOYD MCKISSICK AND THE CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY ARE AGAINST IT.



MOST OF THE AFRICANS AT THE UNITED NATIONS ARE AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM.



SO ARE THOUSANDS OF OTHERS, WHITE AND BLACK, RICH AND POOR.



THE NEGRO MAN SAID: "WHY SHOULD WE FIGHT FOR A COUNTRY THAT HAS NEVER FOUGHT FOR US?"



ONE SAID "WHY ARE WE ALWAYS FIRST CITIZENS ON THE BATTLEFIELD, AND SECOND CLASS CITIZENS AT HOME?"



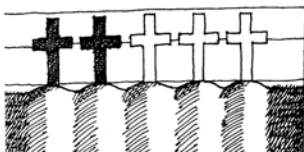
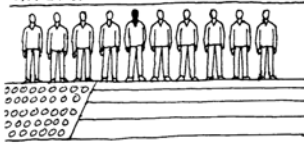
ONE MAN SAID "WE SHOULD FIGHT FOR FREE ELECTIONS IN MISSISSIPPI AND ALABAMA, NOT IN VIET NAM."



SOME NEGROES ARE WORRIED BECAUSE SO MANY OF US SUFFER FROM THE WAR.



ONE OUT OF EVERY TEN YOUNG MEN IN AMERICA IS A NEGRO.



BUT TWO OUT OF EVERY FIVE MEN KILLED IN THE WAR IN VIETNAM IS A NEGRO.

THE UNITED STATES SAYS THIS IS BECAUSE NEGROES ARE VERY BRAVE, BUT MOST PEOPLE KNOW IT IS BECAUSE WE DO MORE OF THE DIRTY FRONT-LINE FIGHTING THAN WE SHOULD.



WHEN YOU READ THIS BOOK, HOW WILL YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR SON OR HUSBAND OR BROTHER OR UNCLE - OR YOURSELF - FIGHTING, MILES AWAY FROM HOME AGAINST A PEOPLE WHO ONLY WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE BY EVERYONE?



by Julian Bond & T.G. Lewis

IN 1860, WHEN THE UNITED STATES WAS FIGHTING A WAR TO FREE THE SLAVES,



THE FRENCH WERE FIGHTING A WAR TO MAKE SLAVES OF THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN VIETNAM. THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE WANTED TO RUN THEIR OWN COUNTRY, BUT COULD NOT DEFEAT THE STRONG FRENCH ARMIES.



DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, ONE GROUP OF FRENCHMEN WAS FRIENDLY TO JAPAN AND GERMANY. THESE MEN SURRENDERED VIETNAM TO JAPAN WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT.



THE JAPANESE TOLD THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE THEY COULD BE FREE UNDER JAPANESE RULE, BUT A GROUP OF VIETNAMESE UNDER A MAN NAMED HO CHI MINH WANTED FREEDOM UNDER THEIR OWN RULE. THESE MEN FOUGHT THE JAPANESE.



WHEN THE SECOND WORLD WAR WAS OVER AND JAPAN WAS BEATEN.....



THE VIETNAMESE RULED THE COUNTRY. THEY HAD AN ELECTION AND HO CHI MINH WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT.



THE FRENCH WANTED TO TAKE OVER THE COUNTRY AGAIN, HOWEVER, AND CAPTURED THE CITY OF HANOI.



BY 1946, FRANCE AND VIETNAM WERE AT WAR.



EVEN THOUGH THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE WERE FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY AGAINST AN OUTSIDE FORCE,



THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOT HELP THEM. INSTEAD, WE HELPED FRANCE.



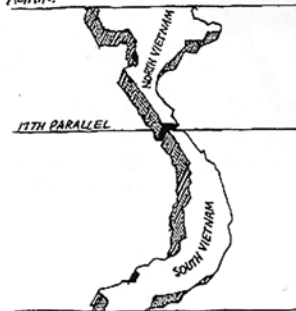
BUT EVEN WITH OUR HELP, WITH MODERN WEAPONS AND MANY MEN, THE FRENCH COULD NOT WIN. SOME MEN WANTED US TO TAKE OVER THE WAR WHEN THE FRENCH



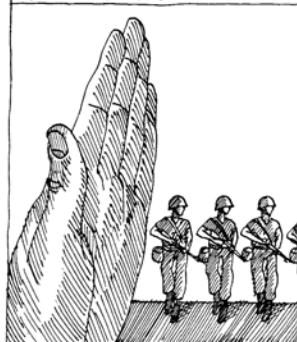
SURRENDERED BUT PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON, WHO WAS THEN STILL JUST A UNITED STATES SENATOR SAID HE WAS AGAINST "SENDING AMERICAN G.I.'S... ON A BLOOD-LETTING SPREE TO PERPETUATE COLONIALISM AND WHITE MAN'S EXPLOITATION OF ASIA."



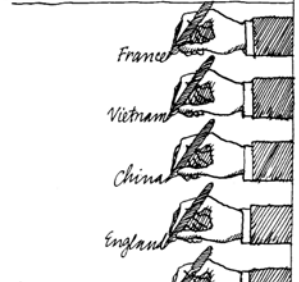
IN 1954, FRANCE AND THE VIETNAMESE AGREED TO STOP FIGHTING AND TO DIVIDE THE COUNTRY IN HALF UNTIL AN ELECTION COULD BE HELD AND THE COUNTRY UNITED AGAIN.



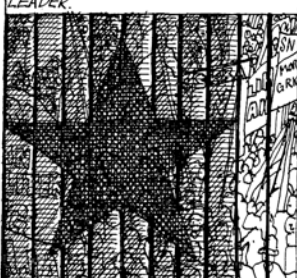
THEY ALSO AGREED THAT NO SOLDIERS OR WEAPONS FROM ANY COUNTRY WOULD COME INTO VIETNAM.



FRANCE, VIETNAM, CHINA, ENGLAND, RUSSIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES SIGNED THIS AGREEMENT. THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOT SIGN, BUT WE AGREED WE WOULD NOT TRY TO OVERTHROW THE AGREEMENT BY FORCE.



THE UNITED STATES DIDN'T WANT AN ELECTION IN VIETNAM. PRESIDENT EISENHOWER SAID IF AN ELECTION WAS HELD "POSSIBLY 80 PER CENT OF THE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE VOTED FOR THE COMMUNIST HO CHI MINH AS THEIR LEADER."



Vietnam

BECAUSE WE DIDN'T WANT THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM TO SELECT A MAN WE DIDN'T LIKE, WE SET UP A MAN NAMED NGO DINH DIEM AS PRESIDENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM AND HELPED HIM HOLD TWO ELECTIONS IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY.



THE ELECTIONS VIOLATED THE AGREEMENT WHICH HAD ENDED THE FIGHTING.

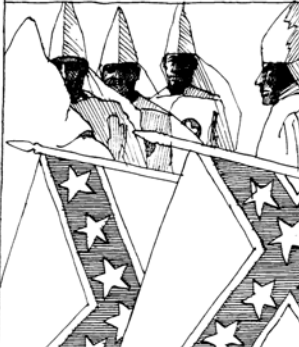
THE DIEM GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM ARRESTED, TORTURED AND KILLED MANY PEOPLE WHO DID NOT AGREE WITH IT.



IN DECEMBER, 1960, THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT WAS FORMED.



SOME PEOPLE HERE CALLED IT THE "VIET CONG" LIKE PEOPLE WHO DON'T LIKE NEGROES CALL US "NIGGERS."



THE MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT WERE DOCTORS, LAWYERS, CATHOLICS, BUDDHISTS, DEMOCRATS, COMMUNISTS, STUDENTS AND MEMBERS OF THREE OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES IN VIETNAM.



THEY BEGAN TO FIGHT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM.



THE DIEM GOVERNMENT ASKED THE UNITED STATES FOR MILITARY ADVISERS TO HELP TRAIN THE VIETNAMESE ARMY.



THERE ARE NOW MORE THAN 400,000 AMERICAN MEN FIGHTING IN VIETNAM.



SOME AMERICANS SAY THAT SINCE HO CHI MINH IS A COMMUNIST, AND SINCE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT ARE COMMUNISTS, THEN THEY DON'T SPEAK FOR THE ORDINARY PEOPLE OF VIETNAM.



BUT HENRY CABOT LODGE, THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR TO SOUTH VIETNAM SAYS "THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN DOING ANYTHING FOR THE LITTLE MAN, THE MAN AT THE GRASS ROOTS, TO LIFT HIM UP, ARE THE COMMUNISTS."



AND PREMIER KY, THE MAN WHO RULES SOUTH VIETNAM TODAY, SAYS "THE COMMUNISTS ARE CLOSER TO THE PEOPLES YEARNING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND AN INDEPENDENT LIFE THAN HIS OWN GOVERNMENT."



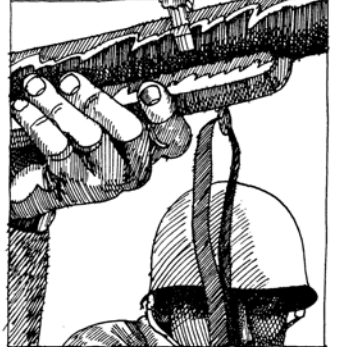
MANY AMERICAN GENERALS SAY WE CAN WIN IN VIETNAM.



BUT GENERAL DOUGLAS MACARTHUR, PRESIDENT (AND FORMER GENERAL) DWIGHT EISENHOWER, GENERAL MATTHEW RIDGEWAY, GENERAL MAXWELL TAYLOR, GENERAL JAMES CAVIN AND GENERAL OMAR BRADLEY HAVE ALL SAID AMERICA SHOULD NOT HAVE LARGE NUMBERS OF TROOPS FIGHTING A LAND WAR IN ASIA.



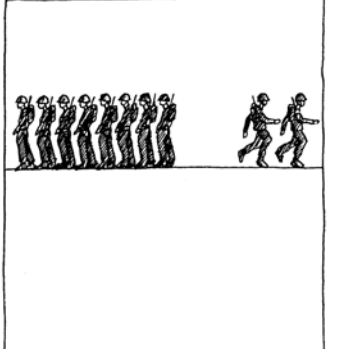
THE UNITED STATES SAYS WE ARE FIGHTING IN VIETNAM BECAUSE OUR GOVERNMENT DOESN'T LIKE THE PROGRAMS OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT.



BUT THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT SAYS IT WANTS FREE ELECTIONS REPRESENTING ALL INTERESTS, LAND REFORMS AND ALL DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS.



WE SAY THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM SUPPORT THE WAR, BUT 20 PER CENT OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY DESERTED IN 1965.



by Julian Bond & T.G. Lewis

WE SAY THE PEOPLE WE ARE FIGHTING THERE ARE OUTSIDERS FROM NORTH VIETNAM. BUT ONLY 6 PER CENT OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT'S ARMY IS FROM NORTH VIETNAM.



THE OTHERS ARE FROM THE SOUTH AND ARE FIGHTING OUTSIDERS - THE UNITED STATES - FOR THE FREEDOM OF THEIR OWN COUNTRY.



IT WE ALSO SAY WE WANT THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT, AND THEN WE WON'T EVEN LET COMMUNISTS RUN FOR OFFICE.



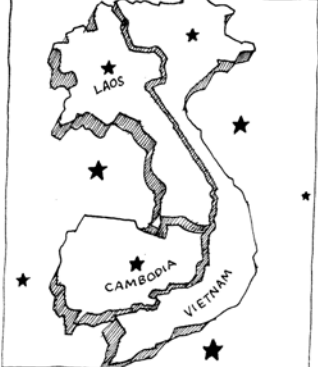
WE SAY THE NORTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT NEGOTIATE WITH US, BUT THEY HAVE TRIED TO TALK WITH US SEVEN TIMES SINCE SEPTEMBER, 1964.



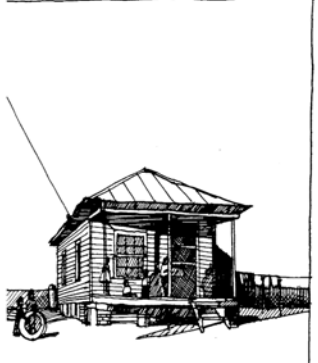
WE SAY WE FIGHT IN VIETNAM TO FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNIST CHINESE AGGRESSION IN SOUTH VIETNAM. BUT THERE ARE NO CHINESE TROOPS FIGHTING IN VIETNAM, NORTH OR SOUTH.



WE SAY IF SOUTH VIETNAM GOES COMMUNIST, THEN SO WILL EVERY OTHER COUNTRY NEAR IT.



WE ARE WORRIED ABOUT FIGHTING A WAR AGAINST POVERTY IN AMERICA.



BUT WE SPEND \$499,999.96 FOR EVERY ENEMY SOLDIER WE KILL OR CAPTURE WHILE PEOPLE STARVE AND GO WITHOUT GOOD JOBS AT HOME.



WE SAY WE HAVE TO KEEP FIGHTING BECAUSE IF WE STOP, OTHER COUNTRIES WILL NOT RESPECT US.



BUT FRANCE LEFT AFTER HER TROOPS WERE DEFEATED IN VIETNAM, AND EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD RESPECTS FRANCE FOR HER DECISION.



WE SAY THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT DOES NOT FIGHT FAIRLY BECAUSE THEY HIDE BEHIND TREES AND BUSHES,



BECAUSE THEY TAKE LAND FROM THE RICH AND GIVE IT TO THE POOR.



BECAUSE THEY KILL THEIR ENEMIES.



BUT WE HIDE BEHIND TREES AND BUSHES WHEN WE FOUGHT THE BRITISH FOR OUR INDEPENDENCE.



WE ASKED FOR HELP FROM ANY COUNTRY THAT WOULD GIVE IT TO US (FRANCE, SPAIN AND HOLLAND DID GIVE US TROOPS AND AID).



WE TARRED AND FEATHERED AND KILLED OUR ENEMIES, AND TOOK THEIR LAND.



Vietnam

THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM ARE FIGHTING THEIR OWN WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE.



THEY WANT TO RUN THEIR OWN COUNTRY, AND DON'T WANT ANYONE-AMERICANS, FRENCH, CHINESE OR RUSSIAN- TO TELL THEM HOW TO DO IT.



WHAT DO YOU THINK? SHOULD WE BE FIGHTING IN VIETNAM, OR SHOULD WE LET THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE- CATHOLICS, BUDDHISTS, COMMUNISTS AND DEMOCRATS- SETTLE THEIR OWN PROBLEMS THEIR OWN WAY?



YOU ARE A PART OF AMERICA.



YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE A PART OF THE GOVERNMENT.



MEN YOU VOTE FOR HELP MAKE THIS WAR POSSIBLE. WILL YOU VOTE FOR THEM AGAIN?



OR WILL THE WAR IN VIETNAM - THE WAR THAT IS FOUGHT IN YOUR NAME- KEEP ON KILLING?



WHAT DO YOU THINK?



War Fiction, A True Story

By David Thayer

Hot wind in the summer of 1970 stirred the dust on the hilltop overlooking the South China Sea. Dirt and sweat stained my fatigues from weeks in the field. The company commander assigned my platoon to sit and wait while others patrolled up and down the slopes strewn with jagged volcanic rock. I looked for something to fight the boredom.

Some soldiers passed around a months-old copy of *Playboy*. Looking at the photographs on the stained and wrinkled pages only increased my dissatisfaction. Despite what some claim, few red-blooded American boys actually read the magazine. The airbrushed fantasy of what we were struggling to return to left me uncomfortable.

I gravitated toward my sergeant, a devout Mormon from Utah, tall, slender, tanned from months in country. I asked if he had anything to read and he handed me a paperback Western. In it two hell-raising cowboys clash with the authorities in a small Texas town. In the end they ride off happily, their six-shooters blazing.

I finished the book in little more than a day under the blazing sun. I wondered who'd sent it to Vietnam thinking it would make a GJ's tour of duty easier. Crawling out of my pup tent, I returned it to my sergeant to see if he had any more suitable escape literature. He had only another Western, and he was still reading that himself.

"Where'd you get them?" I asked. "They have anything else?"

"The BX," Sgt. Pierson said. "They had plenty of other stuff."

A week later we returned to Camp Randolph near An Khe in the Central Highlands for a brief rest. I hurriedly showered, put on clean fatigues, and headed for the base exchange (BX).

While my more materialistic buddies ogled the electronic equipment, I looked for reading material. In the back of the BX, I discovered rotating metal bookracks. The REMF's (Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers, support troops who outnumbered us grunts 10 to 1) had nearly stripped them bare, as if by defoliant.

Overcoming dyslexia as a child, I become a voracious reader by my teens. Keying off a list of the supposed hundred best works in world literature given me by a not completely objective English teacher, I read such classics as *Don Quixote*, *Vanity Fair*, *Crime and Punishment*. Much in them was beyond my years to understand, in itself a valuable vicarious experience.

But here were no classics. Among the few remaining books, one with a blood-red cover caught my eye. It was a dictionary, *The New Merriam-Webster Pocket Dictionary*, employing attention-grabbing color in what I now seeing as common practice among reference books to compete with entertainments. I was momentarily disappointed. I wanted lively fiction to counterbalance the drab prospects of my drab surroundings. But in the absence of fiction, I thought a dictionary would at least keep my situation from reducing my word skills to mere functional literacy.

Clutching it, I continued to search the racks. I spotted one with the painting of a strange aircraft on a pink cover. Having read some science fiction in high school, I quickly realized what it was. Why the others had passed it over, I don't know. In the absence of great literature, I took it, *The World's Best Science Fiction 1970*, edited by Donald A. Wollheim and Terry Carr.

Back at the barracks across base, I opened the pages of the science fiction anthology. Inside I found stories by authors whose names sounded vaguely familiar but whose works I'd never before read. I started in the evening light, continuing until the mountain shadows became too deep. There was a blackout within the camp to avoid giving the enemy easy targets, and the lights in the barracks stayed off.

Floodlights surrounded the camp, facing outward, illuminating the grassy no-man's land beyond the barbed wire with an eerie brightness, like that in a deserted shopping center parking lot. Light enough to read wasted on the enemy. I sulked in darkness until sunrise the next day. Word of our next mission came down, ending our brief, uneasy peace.

I wondered where to put the books. The thigh pockets in my jungle fatigues were easily large enough, but a few days of sweat and rain turned paper into worthless pulp. Stories of the Bible in a soldier's pocket stopping a bullet and saving his life were to me religious wishful thinking.

"How you keep things dry in the field?" I asked Sgt. Pierson.

"Ammo can," he said.

The ammo cans resembled the pails in which elementary school kids carried their lunches, only slightly larger and heavier. In each came a 200-round belt of machine-gun ammunition. Although designed to keep the ammo dry, the can quickly became excess weight to a grunt humping through the jungle.

I claimed one from the scrap pile. In it I placed my wallet (already showing signs of jungle rot), stationery, pen, pencil, money, and books. Only later, when our machine gun repeatedly jammed on the new guy carrying it because of rusted links and corroded brass did I doubt the wisdom of exposing the ammo to the elements.

Over the next week, when time and sunlight allowed, I read "When Legends Die" by Robert Silverberg, a story about idlers in the far distance future resurrecting heroes of the past for their own amusement; "Death by Ecstasy" by Larry Niven, about a man pleased to death; "The Haploid Heart" by James Tiptree, Jr., about an extreme generation gap in an alien society; "A Boy and his Dog" by Harlan Ellison, about divergent societies in a post-holocaust world; and "Nine Lives" by Ursula K. LeGuin, about nine clones who all die after an accident kills one.

Beside the title of each in the table of contents, I placed a pencil checkmark after I finished it. Disconcertingly, they all seemed to speak to my condition but offer no answers. Stark interior illustrations by Jack Gaughan only added to the effect. I stopped after those six. The other stories somehow seemed either superfluous or irrelevant.

I offered to lend the anthology out to get something else to read. Someone handed me *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis. I was ready for some light reading, even a juvenile book. I enjoyed the story of children escaping the horrors of war into the realm of talking animals, ignoring the nonsensical message of a royal elite coming to save the world. No flesh and blood Aslan was coming to save me or my buddies. In the tropical heat of Vietnam, the eternal winter of Narnia sounded inviting.

I carried the book safe in my ammo can as the entire infantry company in a torrential rainstorm crossed a broad valley toward a new position. We shivered in the 80-degree heat, soaked to the skin. The point man in the lead squad cautiously entered a large clearing and approached a

huge tree near its center. A few wasps buzzed him and he swung at them. The entire nest, hidden in the branches above, responded. The man and those immediately behind him ran wildly to escape.

The rains stopped as the company regrouped. With the point man too much in pain to concentrate on continuing to break trail, the company commander looked for someone else to lead. A baby-faced 17-year-old full-blood Cherokee brave quickly and eagerly volunteered. His mother had signed the papers to allow him to join up.

The Captain, seeing no other volunteers, reluctantly agreed. A hundred yards farther along the steep slopes of the valley wall began. The young Indian hacked a path through thick cane with a machete. The rest of us, carrying weapons and 70-pound packs, struggled just to keep our feet. The sun came out, heating the air and making the humidity in it oppressive.

Suddenly someone yelled, "Medic!"

"He's stepped on a booby trap," Tom Dietz, the only other blond, blue-eyed grunt in the company, speculated behind me as the medic crawled forward.

The thought of punji stacks, bamboo stacks sharpened to a point and covered with human excrement, came to my mind. I had seen them along a well-worn trail between villages on an earlier mission, placed to impale unwary soldiers diving for cover in an ambush. But here we were making our own trail.

"What happened?" we asked the smiling medic 5 minutes later as he slipped past us back down the mountain-side.

"He tripped and whacked himself in the shin with the machete."

We mused that the only danger to the point man was himself. We started moving again but only advanced a few more feet before again stopping.

"Medic!" The overeager man had whacked himself in the other shin. Dejectedly he limped past us, white gauze showing through cuts in the fabric of both pants legs.

Back at Camp Randolph, the Indian, passing my cot still limping, saw the book on my cot with its fanciful illustration of a lion and children on the cover and surprised me by asking about it. Somehow I'd thought him more intent on proving brave than literate. Even after I pointed out to him that the book was a children's story, he said he wanted it. I never found a chance later to ask what he thought of it.

In the fall we slowly passed the days digging foxholes around a village near Camp Randolph. Between patrol, I saw on the air mattress in the foxhole of a G.I. in another squad *The War Against the Rull* by A. E. Van Vogt. The picture of a man in a clean space-age uniform with a high-tech rifle astride a giant, savage beast of burden appealed to me. I envied him, mud caking my own boots and rifle from playing soldier.

I asked if I could have the book after he finished. He told me he'd promised it to his squad leader, Sgt. Kerry. Kerry and I had barely been civil toward each other ever since I'd refused to share with him the catsup my mother had sent me from home. A single bottle of catsup doesn't go very far in covering up the taste of C-Rations and I had myself and the buddies in my own squad to think of first.

The next day someone found an unexploded mortar round outside our perimeter. To alleviate the danger of it accidentally going off and wounding anyone, the mortar crew packed C4 plastic explosive around it and detonated it. The brass tip of the round flew into the air and came down on the air mattress on which the day before I'd seen the science fiction novel. The projectile pierced the mattress with a perfectly cut hole, leaving it a useless slab of rubber. I grimly chuckled to the soldier. Had he not sought cover elsewhere, the projectile would have made a much uglier hole in him. If I couldn't have the book, at least I could have some entertainment at the expense of those to blame.

In December my division received orders to go home and with it anyone who had at least 9 months in country. I had only 6. Most of my buddies stayed behind, too. We received orders to report to the 101st Airborne Division, stationed in the northernmost part of South Vietnam. Books became the last thing on my mind. After 2 weeks in transit and reorientation, 60 of us were waiting in Phu Bai (Vietnamese for City of the Dead), an Army base built on a cemetery, for the trucks to take us to the heliport to airlift us to the field. A staff sergeant in crisp, clean fatigues walked up.

"Anyone here can type?" he asked. "I need two clerk-typists."

Only Tom Dietz and I saw the question as a chance to escape more hazardous duty. Those around us were all Black, Hispanic, or whites with little formal education. Dietz and I, after all, had been to college. We overcame the fear of volunteering and raised our hands. The sergeant took us to a long building constructed of corrugated tin panels. In a small room inside he had us sit down at wooden tables behind manual typewriters.

"I'm giving you a 5-minute typing test," he said. "Take as long as you want."

Fifteen minutes later, when I had my typing speed on paper up to 45 words per minute, I turned my test in. I passed. Saved from returning to the field, I joined the REMF's I'd learned to despise. Tom Dietz joined, too. The sergeant assigned me a bunk in dry hooch with electric lights. I asked my new hooch mates what they did to pass the time and they showed me the company library. I discovered why the soldiers in the field had such little selection in reading material. The REMF's hoarded the best for themselves. I saw shelves and shelves of paperbacks. Remembering the anthology, I took every science fiction book I could find, novels by Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, Clifford Simak. Having served my time as a grunt, I felt no guilt. I felt only distaste for the REMF's who'd been nothing else.

Twenty years later, I've never reread the stories in the science fiction anthology. I rarely reference the pocket dictionary anymore. They occupy space in my bookshelf, wedged between other more presentable paperbacks. Their covers, on which I had first judged them, are faded and stained, tattered and torn. The spine of the anthology is bent, broken by other readers, but all the pages remain attached. The books kept my imagination alive and passed the time, when time was the enemy.

Their sentimental value to me far exceeds their cover price.

Originally published in Mimosa 12, December 1992.

Garth Ennis talks about Vietnam with James Bacon

Garth Ennis has written hundreds of comics, across a variety of genres and the Vietnam War has appeared as part of his stories at different times. I have found his war comics to be very thoughtful and considered, and his sincerity to history and dedication to detail, which artists frequently talk about, has created some brilliant stories. He was good enough to entertain some questions from us, and we were very pleased with his responses.

James: In *Preacher*, we see Jesse meet Spaceman on two occasions, and we learn about his father and Vietnam. Why was the Vietnam War your choice of back story here and what did you want fans to take away from it?

Garth: Vietnam fit the timeframe quite nicely—if Jesse's born around 1970, like me, you could easily see a young John Custer having returned from SE Asia a couple of years before. It also allowed me to talk about some elements almost unique to that conflict, most obviously the reception veterans got when they returned to the US. What it brought to the characters was, I think, a kind of inherent sadness—John goes to fight for his country the way his own father might have in WW2, but finds himself in a very different situation, and Jesse grows up remembering his dad as a guy who died before he could come to terms with his experiences.

One thing that's worth noting is the response the Fuck Communism Zippo has gotten over the years. A lot of people have told me it's clearly a metaphor for how the series treats religion, with Communism standing in for Christianity as more mental whitewash that removes people's ability to think for themselves. In fact it was just a piece of whimsy; I found the idea of John Wayne handing out the lighters highly amusing, this somewhat out-of-touch American icon thinking the complexities of war in Vietnam could be reduced to a two word slogan. I read an interview with a bloke who was given one, and he said while it was cool to meet John Wayne he found himself scratching his head a bit afterwards—like, what on earth does this actually mean?

James: War stories are about adventure, but also about reflecting on how horrid war is from a position of civilised safety. Do you find getting an anti-war message through to readers hard, and how do you manage that?

Garth: It's largely instinctive. Sometimes you just tell the story and hope there are enough pointers in there that people will pick up on—you don't want to hit the reader over the head every time. The recent Johnny Red story in *Battle Action*, for instance, portrays our hero as a guy who sees war as something between a job of work and a series of tricky problems to solve, and who is ultimately inured to the results. Many participants who survive combat for any length of time get a taste for it—not necessarily for blood and gore, but for violent and frenetic action. For a fighter pilot in particular, you have to like what you're doing to be good at it (and therefore survive). The cost to that person's humanity, and his inability to settle down in peacetime, are therefore brought to the fore.

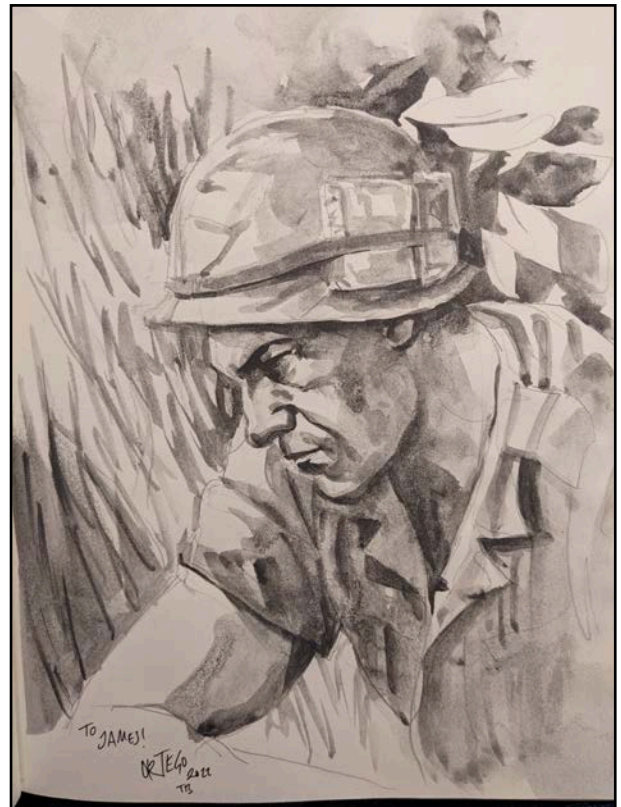
James: You return to Vietnam in a variety of stories: *Born, Fury*, *Punisher: The Platoon*. Why is this war one that seems to capture the imagination?

Garth: To me it's where the American story in the 20th Century goes violently wrong. There had certainly been

some dubious things before that, but if you take America's participation in the Second World War as being largely positive—helping to defeat Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, returning the nations of Western Europe to democracy, and preventing Soviet Communism from spreading too far in any direction—you can see the involvement in Vietnam as being its inverse. A nasty little bushfire turned major quagmire with no side getting anywhere near the moral high ground, except for the poor rural peasants who suffer appallingly through no fault of their own. America stains itself terribly, both internationally and domestically, and the schisms in the nation's psyche never really heal.

Overall you look at it and find the whole thing hard to credit: how did they let themselves get sucked in like this? Why did they keep on reinforcing failure? Why did they keep the war going through so many cover-ups and scandals? And why did they do it again in 2003, when Vietnam should have taught them the ultimate lesson about needless (and illegal) intervention? There are obvious answers to all of these questions, of course, but if you take a step back and look at the thing as a whole, you can't help but find it unbelievable—to a point far beyond the grotesque.

As such, the war provides the perfect backdrop for stories about Nick Fury and Frank Castle—the war's #1 adherent and its terrible offspring.



James: You show respect for regular soldiers, drafted with no choice, while shining a light on appalling behaviour and atrocities against humans. Is this a difficult balance to achieve?

Garth: Another question of proceeding on instinct. If we go back to last year's *Battle Action* special, and look at the Sarge story, we see a pretty good example of what you're talking about—ordinary guys lauded for the job they did in the war against Naziism, a war they didn't ask for but took part in all the same. Yet there are hints that all is not completely well, at least with one of the characters, and when you consider what it is they're actually doing—to their fellow man—you begin to understand that what that generation risked and often gave up for us was not just their physical well-being. This, to me, seems to be fair enough in terms of the intent of the original strip.

On the other hand, if you look at the Marines in *Born*, you see a group of conscripts whose experiences in battle and alienation from society back home has left them in almost inhuman condition—they don't automatically commit atrocities in any given situation, but if one individual does the rest won't intervene. You get a sense of them sliding towards an abyss, with even the one decent guy in the unit unable to act. That the man who stops the wrongdoing is Frank Castle should be a major red flag, especially when you consider the means he employs to do so. Anyway, there you have two different sides of the same situation, each playing out as appropriate to their stories, each saying different things in different ways.

James: In *Watchmen*, The Comedian says "If we'd lost this war...I dunno. I think it might have driven us a little crazy, y'-know? As a country." Do you find that some readers misinterpret meanings? For instance, what does the Punisher symbol mean to you and how do you see that used incorrectly by others?

Garth: That's Alan doing a very dark variation on a familiar trick, where you give the audience a knowing wink—you and they know what the characters couldn't. I recently saw Ian Shaw's highly impressive play about the making of *Jaws*, in which the characters (in 1974) say things like, "Nixon is the worst president this country will ever have", and, "Sharks? What next, fucking dinosaurs?" You can see that in the world of *Watchmen*, America has avoided the disastrous societal consequences of Vietnam, but the Comedian clearly gets a little shiver down his spine when he thinks about how it might have gone.

To me, the Punisher symbol is just a bit of psychological warfare, as well as a rather more practical device to draw an attacker's eye (and gunsight) away from Frank's unarmored head to his armored chest. If you told me I could keep writing the character but had to ditch the skull I wouldn't mind a bit. I've found myself answering this question a few times recently, but essentially:

Police officers who wear the symbol are kidding themselves, in that no one actually wants to be the Punisher (three tours of duty in a combat zone with the last one a disaster, family slaughtered in front of your eyes, life reduced to endless slaughter). What they want is to wear a scary badge while pushing black people around (and worse), and then go home to the wife and kids.

The people trying to get rid of the symbol are also kidding themselves. Will doing so remove the societal inequalities that put black people in police gunsights in the first place? Will it improve police training? Will it do anything other than convince all concerned that they've made a difference (very powerful juju nowadays), when in fact they've done bugger all? What this really is, is a very old game that I've seen being played constantly in my 3+ decades in the business: scapegoating comics, because it's easy and no one

ever sticks up for them, and it means you can avoid having to make genuine but much more expensive changes that would substantially improve the situation.

James: You are renowned for your accuracy and attention to detail historically. Why is this important to you?

Garth: Sometimes it's just because if I don't do it, it'll bug the hell out of me that the thing isn't as accurate as I could have made it. However, my attention to detail is very far from complete: *Born* features a US Marine firebase still in place in late 1971, when in fact I believe the Marines finished ground operations much earlier that year. You live and learn.

Ultimately, we're talking about the involvement of real people—things they did, weapons they used, vehicles they fought in (and against). I suppose I try to get things right out of respect for them and their memories.

James:

Which Vietnam War comic, books and films would you recommend, and why do you like them?

Garth: Comics—the first year of so of *The Nam* was pretty good. Very tasty Michael Golden art. *Fighting Mann*, Alan Hebdon's old *Battle Action* strip, is more of an adventure set against the war but presents an interestingly varied picture of what was going on at the time, with the incomparable Cam Kennedy on art. Pretty sure that was where I first discovered the Vietnam War.

History—*A Bright Shining Lie* (Neil Sheehan) gives an interesting insight into how the disaster came about. *Rolling Thunder in a Gentle Land* is a great collection reflecting the different points of view of as many of the participants as possible. *Nam* by Mark Baker is an occasionally devastating oral history and gave me some of my earliest insights into the conflict.

Memoir—the classic is of course Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, but *Chickenhawk* by Robert Mason gives a slightly unusual perspective. Other good ones would be *Once A Warrior King* (David Donovan), *A Rumor of War* (Philip Caputo), and *If I Die In A Combat Zone* (Tim O'Brien).

Novels—*The Short Timers* (filmed as *Full Metal Jacket*) and its even better sequel *The Phantom Bloop*, by Jason Aaron's uncle Gustave Hasford, *Matterhorn* by Karl Marlantes, and both *Going After Cacciato* and *If I Die In A Combat Zone* by Tim O'Brien. These guys were all veterans, making their insights particularly valuable.

Films—hard to avoid *Apocalypse Now*, which certainly catches the scope of the war and the sense of loss of control, but to my mind gets a bit daft when Marlon shows up quoting TS Eliot and throwing heads at people. Also, how did he manage 400lb on a Cambodian diet? *Full Metal Jacket* is my favourite, probably because it catches the sense of things having gone terribly wrong before enough people realized better than any of the others. And there's a neat little low-budget job called *84 Charlie MoPic*, a found footage film before that was a thing, about a special forces unit on their last job behind enemy lines.

Gordon, Haldeman, Band and the *Robot Jox*

By Peppard Saltine

Robot Jox is a 1990 American science fiction film from Charles Band's Empire Pictures. At first glance this is your typical direct to video B-Movie, however the story behind the film is almost as interesting as the film itself. Stuart Gordon was an American theatre and film director and writer. In 1968, he was arrested for public indecency whilst staging a political re-imagining of *Peter Pan* protesting the Vietnam War. A co-founder of Organic Theater Company (with Carolyn Purdy-Gordon), he directed a number of original and adapted science fiction plays (including Vonnegut's *Sirens of Titan* and Bradbury's *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*), as well the first commercially produced David Mamet play *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. In 1979, PBS televised a taping of his play *Bleacher Burns*. This would lead to Gordon being hired by PBS to direct a four part television adaptation of Joe Haldeman's *Forever War*. Haldeman was on board the production as an adviser, but unfortunately, during pre-production, PBS funding was slashed and the project died in development. But out of it grew some seedlings; the first of these was a stage play of *The Forever War* produced by Organic. The play arises from Gordon and Haldeman's discussions during the ill-fated television adaptation. During these discussions it was noted that the fourth of four proposed episodes would be the easiest and cheapest to film. Leading from that came the idea to adapt just the last part of the book for the stage. It was adapted by Gordon, and for six weeks in October-November 1983, the play ran in Chicago. By all accounts it has significant differences to the novel. (I would love to read the script but have not as yet had the opportunity).

A few years later Gordon and Haldeman began kicking around the idea of a science fiction adaptation of *The Iliad*. So the stage is set, so to speak, for Charles Band, the son of director/producer Albert Band. In 1983, Charles Band founded Empire Pictures to produce and distribute low budget genre pictures, and in 1984 he penned a deal with home video pioneer Vestron Video for worldwide video rights to Empire's films. In 1985, Empire would have the first taste of success with *Ghoulies*, seen by most as a cheap imitation of *Gremlins*. It was actually in production at the same time, but budget problems half way through principal photography caused a delay which allowed *Gremlins* to be released first. Not that it isn't cheap; it is. And it's no *Gremlins*, but it does have a comic charm. Regardless, it performed well, taking in an estimated \$35m world box office. It opened doors for Band and Empire and forged a path into theatres that would be followed by many later Empire productions such as *Trancers* and *Eliminators* and relevant to our current interest, *Re-Animator*. In 1985, Stuart Gordon would direct his theatrical film debut for Empire Pictures *Re-Animator*, starring Jeffrey Combs, (who would be a long time artistic collaborator).

It was a H.P. Lovecraft adaptation that began life as a proposed Stuart Gordon theatre adaptation of the Lovecraft story "Herbert West-Reanimator." That project in turn morphed into a proposed television pilot for a twelve part television series, (co-written by Dennis Paoli). Special Effects technician Bob Greenberg came onboard to advise on effects during pre-production and he introduced Gordon to Brian Yuzna. On reading the script Yuzna came on board the production as producer on the provision that they make it a feature film, he moved the production to Hollywood and made a distribution deal with Empire Pictures to distribute. At some point towards the start of principal photography, Empire became more involved with the production, bringing on Mac Ahlberg as cinematographer and Charles' brother

Richard Band as Score Composer. This production introduced Albert Band to Stuart Gordon and they would become close lifelong friends and artistic collaborators. The film did moderately well in the box office, and was surprisingly well received by critics, (mostly for Jeffrey Combs performance). Its true success came in the home video market, however, and it has gone on to be a cult favourite.

The following year the band got back together so to speak, for *From Beyond*, adapted from the H.P. Lovecraft of the same name by Yuzna, Gordon and Paoli. Gordon would direct, Yuzna produced, Albert Band was production manager, Richard Band did the score, Charles Band executive produced, Mac Ahlberg shot and Jeffrey Combs starred. Empire had just bought the Dinocitto Film studio in Rome, (formerly Dino deLaurentis' studio), and as the production cost in Italy was about a fifth of the cost in America, so *From Beyond* was shot in Italy. Gordon's next film *Dolls* would be shot almost directly afterwards in the same studio using much of the same crew. Gordon had come across Ed Naha's script for *Dolls* in Empire's production office and expressed an interest in directing. Naha was a staff writer and editor for *Starlog* magazine and his writing credits in genre fiction are noteworthy, under a number of pseudonyms including the D.B. Drumm pen name he shared with John Shirley.

Yuzna, Gordon and Naha would go on to develop a story by Gordon which would become the hit Disney film *Honey I Blew Up The Kids*, which Naha would pen. Gordon's next film, however, would be inspired by the hit Japanese toy line and animated series *Transformers*, and that of course is *Robot Jox*. When Gordon first saw the Transformers toys, he wondered why no live action productions were attempting anything like the things that were common in Japanese animation. Charles Band gave him the answer: budget. Allegedly he turned down the concept of a film centred around giant mechs out of hand, on this basis, but later relented and tasked Gordon and David W. Allen with shooting a test reel of stop-motion robot fighting. Allen had done the stop-motion work on *Dolls* and had a long running relationship with Band, (his credits are impressive and include films like *The Howling*, *Willow*, *Batteries Not Included*, *The Stuff* and *Ghost Busters II*) The test reel was then shopped around by Band, impressing potential investors and, (in true Charles Band style), it would be reused in the opening sequence of the film.

Re-enter Joe Haldeman and the science fiction adaptation of *The Iliad*. Gordon sees the chance to revive the project with this new inspiration and giant robots, and Haldeman joins the production. Gordon and Haldeman develop the shooting script together, and are allegedly at odds from the outset. They are unable to align with each other's views in regards to the tone of the film, and though they are working on the same script, they are not working on the same film. Gordon is more interested in making a family-friendly effects-driven film, Haldeman is more interested in a serious dramatic science fiction film. And so each is reworking each others' work. About the only part of *The Iliad* that survives the process is the names of a few of the characters. By this time the budget of the project had ballooned from \$2m to \$7m, making it the most expensive endeavour undertaken by Empire Pictures. Ron Cobb is employed to design the robots, and David W. Allen is tasked with the special effects sequences, and stop-motion photography. (A lot of the effects scenes were shot in a dry lake bed in California because of wide unobstructed panoramic views.) Meanwhile

Gary Graham is cast as Achilles and Anne-Marie Johnson as Athena, and the Principal Photography unit heads to Italy, with Albert Band producing and Mac Ahlberg shooting. Haldeman is brought to Italy as writer and technical advisor to the actors. The shoot lasted from January to April 1987. The effects shots end up not going into production until later in 1987, and are delayed repeatedly by bad weather. Empire Pictures is going through a rapid expansion, opening several new divisions, producing and acquiring distribution rights to its record number of films.

And then in early 1988, there were too many balls in the air, and something slipped. Empire just as suddenly goes bankrupt. Crédit Lyonnais seizes Empire and ousts Band, then extends a \$200m credit line to Epic Productions, (Empire's closest rival whose biggest hit to that time had been *The Curse* a H.P. Lovecraft adaptation starring Wil Weaton), and all films on Empire's slate are delayed. Including the now almost complete *Robot Jox*. Incidentally, this whole merger would later turn into the Hollywood banking scandal in the early 1990s, and Epic itself would end up folded in MGM. (It's a very interesting story, but unfortunately not relevant to our current interest but recommend you check it out if you are interested in that aspect of film making and film history.) Originally scheduled for early 1989, *Robot Jox* was held for release in April 1990, however it was held a second time until finally Triumph Releasing (mis)handled the release on behalf of Epic and *Robot Jox* got an American theatre run on November 21, 1990. It earned a domestic total gross of just approx. \$1.3m, having cost an estimated \$7m to produce.

It's a very faulted film. I love it. I saw it many years before I read *The Forever War*, I owned it on Ex-Rental VHS for many years before I realised it was written by Joe Haldeman, and by that time I respected both works for totally different reasons. But once you know, there are things about it that are obvious, the anti-war sentiment combined with the military experience is evident. Sometimes you can hear Haldeman's voice in the dialogue, and you can see easily the parts of the script that are not him. (I would love to know who came up with the "Crash and Burn" line & fist bump salute.) Haldeman would later write of the film was "to me it was as if I'd had a child who started out well then sustained brain damage."

If you have not ever seen *Robot Jox*, definitely check it out. The acting is mostly awful, the direction is off, and the script is wrestling itself sometimes to the point of nonsense. The soundtrack by Frederic Talgorn is not too shabby, but the real star of the film is of course the mechs, and the models and effects photography are really great fun.



Jimmy My Cousin Who Died in Vietnam

By Guy H. Lillian III

I remember this nice little boy with a beaming smile and a sweet voice. It was on one of our frequent trips out west—we lived in Buffalo then but my mother's folks were in the Antelope Valley northeast of Los Angeles. Jimmy was the son of one of my mother's cousins, and I remember he wore blue dungarees. On this bright desert day he convinced me to climb a tree to the tarpaper roof of their house. I was reticent—scared, I guess—but he scooted up the thick branches like a South Sea Islander after coconuts, so happily that I forgot my trepidation and followed.

And then I remember a later trip, after we'd moved to Riverside, within 100 miles or so of the little town where Jimmy—and my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—lived. I was about 12 or so, and I saw Jimmy that time at Sunday school. My devout Uncle Glen was having us read Bible verses and he called on Jimmy, assuring him that he'd help him. I remember Jimmy's shy smile, looking so small in his Sunday best, his arms hanging down from the short sleeves of his white shirt. And I remember feeling aghast and embarrassed when Jimmy tried to read his verse. His deeply accented voice was all but inaudible as he struggled over the words.

I remember him next from when he was about 18 and I was still in high school. My family had moved to the Bay Area, the length of the San Joaquin from the Antelope Valley, so I hadn't seen him in awhile. I think what had happened is that he'd discovered his limitations, because now he told filthy jokes and seemed bitter and pissed off. I remember walking into my grandmother's house and heading towards my room to take a nap, saying hi to him as he sat on the couch. He didn't reply, and when I roused myself he was gone.

I never saw him again, but I did see a Kodak photo of him in his G.I. fatigues, smiling in that old way. Our cousin

Roger said that he was proud to be in the Army, to be doing something with his life, and it showed. One day when I was at Berkeley—I remember that it was a wet day when Fanny Lou Hamer gave a speech—I talked to my grandmother and she told me what had happened. It took a minute to register.—Jimmy? Jimmy?

In that moment I became anti-war.—*Never again, Granaw*, I said to my dear grandmother.—*Never again!* Guys like Jimmy didn't need to get murdered on guard duty—as he had been—to have their lives mean something. They didn't need to be fed to Vietnam for purposes lost to sanity. But in time I saw another point of view.

Many years later I went to Washington D.C. and visited the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall. If you have never been there, it is a magnificent monument, and if you're a boomer, like Jimmy or me, you owe it to yourself and your times and your countrymen to go. Guided by a bearded vet in a G.I. jacket, I found the appropriate panel—E3, early on. I was horrified at how many panels and how many names followed his.

But Jimmy would have felt in good company. Brothers who would never desert him. I used materials provided by the vet and did a couple of rubbings of Jimmy's name, one of which I sent to my grandmother. I kept the other rubbing and have it someplace, in my diary, perhaps.

Jimmy is buried in Hawaii.

Originally appeared in *Challenger* 33.

In the End by Allison Hartman Adams

When James suggested that I co-edit this issue, he asked what I know about the Vietnam War. With some embarrassment, I confessed that my knowledge was limited to what I'd learned in high school history class. "Perfect," he said.

This baffled me. Now, months later, I understand. I was born after American involvement in the war had ended, and this distance allowed me the coolness of heart to make necessary editorial choices that, I hope, helped create an interesting and engaging issue of *Journey Planet*. But the contents of this issue barely scratch the surface of the emotional and psychological reactions we still have to the word *Vietnam*.

I learned an astonishing amount since beginning research for this issue. I consumed mountains of books, podcasts, comics, and movies, and am now at least somewhat aware of the myriad intricacies that drove a beautiful country, with a strong sense of national identity, to fracture, break apart, and go to war with their colonizers, with each other, with us.

But what shocked me most is the moment that brought it all out of the history books and into my living room. This summer, I spoke to my parents about their memories of the War, and I learned quickly that *Vietnam* is a word left unsaid between them. My preacher father, whose friends went to Canada and jail rather than Fort Polk—friends he might have followed had he not been in seminary—won't speak of the War in front of my mother. She, married to a Naval officer at the time, was repeatedly harassed by anti-war protesters. They blew up her mailbox and threw animal blood at her house. Friends accosted her at parties, blaming her for supporting the machine that enabled the murder of children. Blaming *her*, personally, for the War.

Witnessing this discomfort at close range, even with the War far in the past, helped me see that there is no one definitive experience of Vietnam, just as there's no single definitive written history of the conflict. Many scholars have tried, but no documentary, book, or film can pin it all down.

This is a good thing.

History has a tendency to boil messes like these down into clearly defined lines: America versus Vietnam, North versus South, communism versus democracy. They're all false dichotomies, and the temptation is to reduce it all to the easy, dangerous clarity of "good versus evil," which is the

sort of thinking that leads to the death of millions. So we write about it. We talk about it. We make movies, comics, and music, and we try to get at some sense of complexity—we try to uncover the hard parts, the sad parts, the parts that force us to face ourselves and each other.

Naturally, I'm left grappling with the idea of ownership. Whose story is this? Whose voice am I silencing because I happen to be co-editor of this issue? Does the story of the War belong to the Việt Cong because theirs was the flag left flying at the end? Does it belong to the Vietnamese people, who are still living with the fallout? Does it belong to the American GIs who were promised the same glory awarded to the Greatest Generation, but who were fed a lie instead? Does it belong to the anti-war protesters who shaped the world as they sang out for peace? Or does it belong to my mother, who alone and afraid late at night, waited for those same protesters to move on to another house with their bucket of blood?

Ownership, memory—these are tricky things. Slippery, even. So the only certainty I can land on here at the end is that we all bear some responsibility, even if it is only the mandate to not let it happen again. My weapon in this fight must be storytelling: the novels, the movies, the comics—all of it. I want us to keep telling stories of the War, even if they're not our own, for those stories uncover the truth. Author Tim O'Brien shows us that storytelling is there to help us understand—to *really* understand. "That's what fiction is for," he says. "It's for getting at the truth when the truth isn't sufficient for the truth."

"And in the end," O'Brien writes in *The Things They Carried*, "of course, a true war story is never about war. It's about sunlight. It's about the special way that dawn spreads out on a river when you know you must cross the river and march into the mountains and do things you are afraid to do. It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow."

I see that sunlight—that love and memory and sorrow—in every artifact we have examined here in this issue of *Journey Planet*. I see it in my mother and father, in the stories of those who were there and those who came after. As the Vietnam War takes its place on the library shelf of people's minds, one more in a long string of ugly wars, it is this love and memory and sorrow that I hope is not forgotten.

A Brief Note from Chris

While layout of this issue moved at the pace of a stoned glacier, I was sick. This has happened before (in fact, I've laid out three issues from hospitals over the years) but this one was tough. No, it weren't COVID, 'twere a stomach bug I got from my youngest who got it from at least a half-dozen kids at their school.

I am far more interested in Vietnam's food than our war there. That should be obvious from the article I wrote earlier. War is hard for me; someone with the level of fear of death I have tends to find themselves war-adverse, and added with the pain coming from Israel and Gaza at the moment, it's even a bit harder. Yes, my family in Israel is fine (and, in fact, headed to London and then back to Canada) but still, a nerve may be raw. Add Ukraine, and the continuing matters around the world, and it's tougher still.

The thing I've taken from this issue is this - it was the definition of America's most contentious decade. Nothing happened in America that wasn't either a reflection of, or reaction to, the war happening in Vietnam. From the anti-war movement, to the growth of the Military-Industrial Complex, to the rise of the Hippies, to the New Cinema, it flowed through an aperture that was at least partly defined by Vietnam.

And I hope this issue is a worthy examination of that aperture.

Editorial by James Bacon

Eight years, from 1965 to 1973, 30 years from 1945 to 1975.

In Vietnam, for the Vietnamese, the desire for self determination, for freedom from colonialism was a long and hard fought struggle. Betrayal by powers that spoke so strongly about the importance of freedom was unimaginable. The French were atrocious.

In Vietnam the impact of America's involvement in the War was even more appalling: 3 million Vietnamese killed. Of that number, 1 million North Vietnamese and Việt Cong soldiers; 250,000 South Vietnamese soldiers; and 2 million civilians, according to Vietnam's Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs. More than 600,000 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops wounded, while 500,000 South Vietnamese troops were wounded and 2 million civilians on both sides were crippled by mines, artillery fire, chemical defoliants, bombings, and the general mayhem of war.

The US lost 58,183 personnel, with 304,000 wounded, physically and mentally. Some 105 journalists died covering the war—more than in any other conflict. Of course you were more likely to be drafted if you were Black and less likely to be an officer, proportionally. Some 300,000 African Americans saw service in Vietnam.

So there are more sides to this story.

To what avail? What was achieved? What was the point? Was it a fight against communism, or was it a war against democracy, against self determination and against humans, who had believed in the USA and the idea that colonialism would and should end? In March 1945, shortly before his death, FDR told Gen. Albert Coady Wedemeyer that he 'was going to do everything possible to give the people of that area (Indochina, including Vietnam) their independence.' (Russell H. Fifield, *Americans in Southeast Asia*, 1973, 42). Fifield writes that 'at lunch (FDR) brought up the subject of French Indochina ... He was opposed to colonialism anywhere in the world and specifically wanted to prevent the restoration of Indochina to the French.' (read James W. Pfister's discussion of FDR's attitude here: <https://eu.monroe-news.com/story/opinion/columns/2022/04/25/james-pfister-fdr-sought-independence-indochina-vietnam/7414438001/>)

France were eventually defeated in 1954 at Điện Biên Phủ, and withdrew. The American War escalated from advisors, to 400 Green berets, peaking in 1968 with over 549,500. The North Vietnamese took Saigon on the 30th April, 1975. War for the Vietnamese did not end there, on the 1st of May, the Khmer Rouge landed on some islands and killed 500 civilians. After the War, some 300,000 South Vietnamese were sent to reeducation camps, tortured, starved, brutalised, and sentenced to hard labour. In 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia to fight the Khmer Rouge. They won, placing a pro-Vietnamese socialist government in power, creating the People's Republic of Kampuchea and upsetting China. In 1979, the Chinese invaded Vietnam during the Sino-Chinese War for a number of weeks.

The struggle was unbelievable. The Vietnamese of course had their own struggles and that led to considerable loss.

And then on September 11th this year, President Biden spoke to President of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, His Excellency Võ Văn Thưởng and gathered guests at a state luncheon. He said: 'The great Vietnamese poet Nguyễn Du once wrote, "In glory they made up for their past hardships, and their love got fresher and warmer each day." Mr. President, friends, it's an honour to be here today on this historic occasion, a day when we feel all the glory and warmth of the boundless possibilities that lie ahead — a day that may have seemed impossible not that long ago.'

In his response, President Võ Văn Thưởng said, 'President Hồ Chí Minh penned a letter addressing President Truman, expressing the desire to establish a bond of full co-operation with the United States. As history would have it, this desire had to confront countless turmoil and challenges — all of such we have overcome. And today, we can speak with joy that never before has the relationship between our two countries reached such flourishing height as today.'

Why do we fight? Lets not.

We wanted more words from Vietnamese people, but we hope we have done a good job of sharing their work. I would have liked us to get more written about the written word. J.G. Ballard's "The Killing Ground, which I walked to the Kennedy Memorial at Runnymede to read for instance. I visited the War Memorial in Washington DC two years ago, and when this zine is completed, I shall travel to Vietnam.

Thank you to all the contributors, and readers, and if you see something we got wrong, let us know, share your view, voice your perspective, correct us, or add something, email us at journeyplanet@gmail.com. We can fix it, add it or share a letter of comment in a future issue.

Acknowledgements and Thank Yous:

We owe a lot of thanks for this issue, first to Teddy Harvia (David Thayer) and Diana Thayer, Gay and Joe Haldeman, Mrs. Eney and the memory of Dick Eney.

Garth Ennis, Keith Burns, Col Art, Sara Felix, Larry Hama, Aufa Richardson, Luca Vannini, Simon Adams, Guillermo Ortego, James O'Brien, Chuck Serface, David Ferguson, Senja Trinh, Eirene Tran Donohue, Ryan Britt, Phuc Tran, Brenda Noiseux, Errick Nunnally, John Vaughan, Mark Slater, Pat M. Yulo, Monkey, Erin Underwood, Micheal Walsh, Richard Lynch, Stuart Vandal, Rob Hansen, Will Howard, Iain Hine, David Hine, Rick Swan, James Mason, Kenneth Marsden, Pepsaltine, and Craig Miller.

This issue is dedicated to Gilbert Richard Felix, who sadly recently passed away, and about whom Sara Felix, our *Journey Planet* co-editor and artist extraordinaire, wrote about in this issue, and also to my Co-Editors Christopher J. Garcia and Allison Hartman Adams.

Letters of Comment on Issue 72 Operation Motorman

11th May 2023

Dear Mr Bacon,

I hope this finds you well. I am writing on behalf of the Linen Hall Library to thank you for the generous donation of Operation Motorman to the political collection. It is support of this kind that helps make the Linen Hall Library the unrivalled resource that it is, and I am grateful.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha McCombe

Librarian, Linen Hall Library, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

23rd May 2023

Good Morning James,

Thank you very much for your excellent pamphlet. We really appreciate the thought and time that went into it. We look forward to seeing you again at the Museum.

Mark

Museum Of Free Derry. Derry, Northern Ireland.

May 25, 2023

Dear James,

The Bodleian Libraries has received your copy of Operation Motorman, for which I would like to express my thanks,

Best wishes,

Daniel

Daniel Abbey

Bodleian Library, Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3BG

June 1, 2023

Dear James,

I do remember our exchanges about Flann O'Brien and your research on the Dublin-Cork Centenary Express.

It is very good of you to remember me and to take the time to send me a print copy of your latest fanzine (I've just been exploring your website) on Operation Motorman. It definitely deserves a place on our shelves in Burns Library, as we have been continuing to focus on acquiring materials pertaining to the conflict and peace and reconciliation efforts in Northern Ireland. A difficult, very difficult, subject, to echo your own words, and for that reason vitally important to document and reflect upon, as you have done.

I am, and will remain, very grateful to you.

With appreciation,

Christian

- - - -

Christian Dupont

Associate University Librarian for Scholarly Resources and Burns Librarian

14th November 2023

Good afternoon James,

Our Collections Committee met recently to consider all the recent donations offered to the Museum and I am pleased to say that we would like to accept "Operation Motorman" into our collection.

Thank you again for thinking of the Royal Engineers Museum. We rely on the individual and personal donations to tell the story of the Corps. If you have any questions at all, please feel free to contact me and I will endeavour to answer them.

Best wishes,

Hilary

Hilary Wight (she/her)

Collections Officer

Royal Engineers Museum, Chatham, Kent.

