

Winter 2007/2008

# AMERICAN★VALOR

A publication of The American Veterans Center - World War II Veterans Committee - National Vietnam Veterans Committee

## QUARTERLY



# American Valor Quarterly

A Quarterly Publication of the American Veterans Center

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WINTER, 2007/2008

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### WELCOME

Welcome to *American Valor Quarterly*, the new home of *World War II Chronicles* and *Valor: The Veterans of Vietnam*. This new, first-class magazine will not only continue to carry the personal experiences from our veterans of World War II and Vietnam, it will also give voice to those who served in Korea, the Gulf War, and those young heroes who are serving us today. We hope that you enjoy this new format, which we consider a tribute to our veterans from the Greatest Generation to the latest generation.



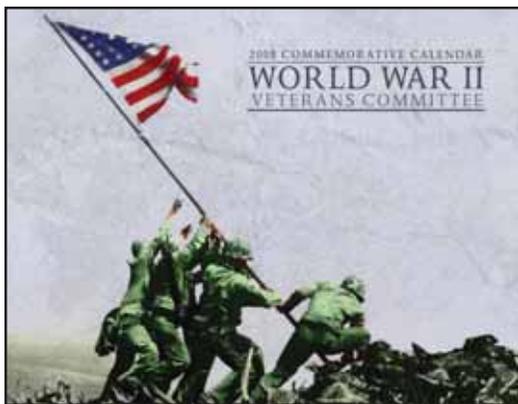
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FROM THE EDITOR

# HEROES FROM EVERY GENERATION

BY TIM HOLBERT

Welcome to *American Valor Quarterly*, the new publication of the American Veterans Center and its two divisions, the World War II Veterans Committee and the National Vietnam Veterans Committee. Inside, you will find the first-hand accounts from America's most distinguished uniformed heroes, from the Greatest Generation to the latest generation.

Long-time readers of our previous publications, *World War II Chronicles* and *Valor: The Veterans of Vietnam*, should know that we will continue to bring you the stories and experiences of our World War II and Vietnam veterans in each issue, as we have for so many issues before. Our dedication to the men and women who served in World War II and Vietnam remains as strong as ever, and we will continue to strive to preserve their legacies for years to come.

We have combined *Chronicles* and *Valor* into this single publication for several reasons. First, as you can already see, printing one publication rather than two allows us to present a first-class magazine with a color cover and slick paper, worthy of the stories contained inside. We have long argued that the most valuable history comes from those who witnessed it, and believe that our veterans and active duty service members deserve the highest quality outlet to share their lessons and experiences. This new design helps us to better serve as that outlet.

Secondly, the new design allows us to focus more widely on the larger mission of the American Veterans Center and its two divisions. As you will see inside, *American Valor Quarterly* also spotlights our oral history program, with excerpts from our radio documentary series, *Veterans Chronicles*, which airs on the Radio America network and can be heard at our website at

[www.americanveteranscenter.org](http://www.americanveteranscenter.org). The involvement of young people is of paramount importance in all of our programs, which is why we also bring you articles researched and written by students studying to be the next generation of historians and journalists, who will be counted on to continue to tell the stories of our veterans long after they have passed. In this issue we are proud to publish an article on the Vietnam War by our summer research intern, Emily Tibbitts, who spent several months studying the topic and speaking to veterans of the war to present a history of the war and the media's role in it. We will also continue to highlight our many other programs, such as the National Memorial Day Parade—the nation's largest Memorial Day parade—and our annual Veterans Day conference, featuring some of America's greatest veterans.

In the end, however, there is one overriding reason for the new format. Our nation is at war. Regardless of our political divides, there remains one fact that is certain: the men and women who are serving us today are among the greatest this country has ever produced, and they deserve to take their rightful place in our pantheon of heroes alongside those who have come before them, the veterans of Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. Each generation has their experiences to share, and each generation has its stories of valor. The American Veterans Center's mission is to bring the men and women of these generations together, to honor the service and sacrifice of all those who have answered the call of duty. *American Valor Quarterly* has been created to help ensure that no generation's stories of heroism, ever again, go ignored. We hope you enjoy the magazine, and once again thank you for your support.

**AVQ**

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*American Valor Quarterly*, Winter, 2007/2008.

A quarterly publication of the American Veterans Center, 1100 N. Glebe Rd. Suite 910, Arlington, VA 22201. Telephone: 703-302-1012. Fax: 571-480-4140.

The American Veterans Center is comprised of two divisions, the World War II Veterans Committee and the National Vietnam Veterans Committee. *American Valor Quarterly* mailed to donors to the World War II Veterans Committee or National Vietnam Veterans Committee who make a contribution of \$50 or more per-year. Contributions help to fund the Center and Committees' various speaker conferences, student programs, the National Memorial Day Parade, documentary and oral history projects, and this publication. To make a contribution or subscribe, call 703-302-1012 or e-mail [avc@americanveteranscenter.org](mailto:avc@americanveteranscenter.org).



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# THE GREAT WAR

## THROUGH THE EYES OF ITS LAST EYEWITNESS

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*Frank W. Buckles is one of America's oldest living veterans. At 106 years old, Mr. Buckles is one of only three living veterans of World War I known to the U.S. government, and the only one to have been serving in Europe when the war ended in November of 1918. On Memorial Day, 2007, Mr. Buckles came to Washington, DC, to serve as Honorary Marshal for World War I in the National Memorial Day Parade, presented by the American Veterans Center. In this inaugural issue of American Valor Quarterly, Frank W. Buckles tells his story, in his own words...*

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*Born in 1901, during the McKinley Administration, Frank Buckles grew up in the heartland of America, which gave him something in common with his hero, who was also commander of American forces during the First World War.*

I grew up on my father's farm in Harrison County, Missouri, and when I met General John Joseph Pershing, he asked me where I was born. When I told him, he said it was just 43 miles, as the crow flies, from Linn County where he was born. So I suppose we were fellows.

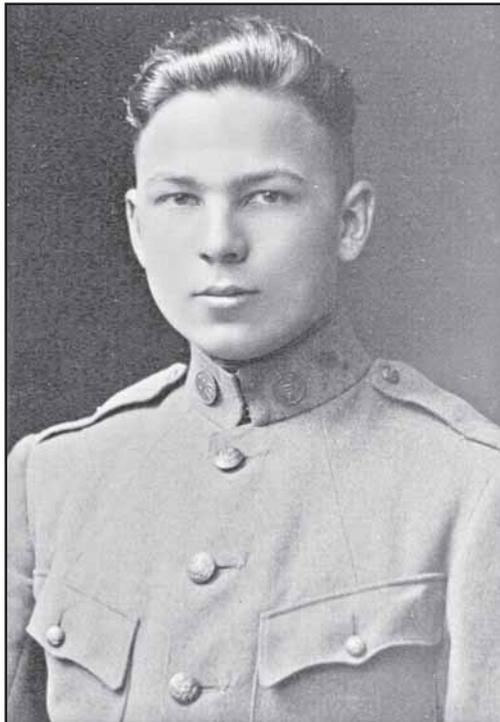
*When Buckles was 13, World War I broke out in Europe. We may be able to watch war play out minute by minute today, but back then, of course, there was no television or radio to help him follow events. Nonetheless, Mr. Buckles was engrossed by the war coverage in his local newspaper.*

The papers were full of coverage of the war. I could read about what was happening in Europe, the problems with Mexico, right up to date.

*As the next couple of years played out, Americans were drawn ever closer to the side of the Allies, after German U-Boats sunk the Lusitania and unrestricted submarine warfare threatened many*

*passenger vessels in the Atlantic. Finally in 1917 after learning of a German attempt to draw Mexico into the war with our country, the United States declared war on Germany. For Frank Buckles, the decision to join the service was an easy one.*

It was something I was interested in doing. Everybody was talking about it.



Frank W. Buckles - a soldier at the age of 16.

*At age 16, Buckles tried to enlist, but he was turned away by several recruiters for being underage. Since pretending to be 18 wasn't working, he told the next recruiter he was 21, and his military service officially got started.*

I enlisted in the regular Army on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, 1917. I had been advised by one of the older sergeants that the way to get to France quickly was to go into the Ambulance Corps, because the French were begging for the ambulance service. I went from Ft. Logan, Colorado, to Ft. Riley, Kansas, and received advanced training in trench warfare.

*By this time, France was weary from waging war for more than three years, all of it on its own soil. The massive*

*casualties on their side led the French to label their battered men as the "lost generation." Buckles recalls that they and their British allies were deadlocked against a persistent enemy and both countries were very happy to see the Yanks arrive.*

When I arrived in Europe, I felt it was a very severe situation. We were welcomed in Britain, and welcomed in France, but it was very serious. They were happy to see the Americans, both the British and the French, and their feeling was that it was a relief to have some younger people coming in to help.

*Of course, we know now that the entrance of the U.S. forces made a decisive difference in the war. Buckles gives much of the credit to the strong leadership of General John J. Pershing.*

He was the leader. No question about it. In every way. It was reflected in the men...they realized it. He was a tough character.

*Finally, at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month in 1918, the guns fell silent. The armistice took effect and the killing finally stopped.*

It seemed to be a relief to everybody. I didn't find many to be so jubilant; it was more a relief to them that the war had ended.

*For veterans of World War I, it was exceedingly difficult to see the peace violated just two decades later. For Frank Buckles, World War II would be excruciating, even though he was no longer in uniform. By the late 1930s he was working for a steamship company and the outbreak of war in Europe meant shifting many of the routes away to the Far East, including the Philippines, where the company already did plenty of business. But when Japanese forces went on the rampage in the Philippines, Mr. Buckles could not escape the brutality.*

I was living in Manila, when World War II started, when the Japanese invaded the Philippines. I was in a prison camp, for one year, and two years in Las Baños. Three and a half-years in Japanese prison camps, I was one of the few who survived.

*Three and half-years in the horror of Japanese prison camps. So how did Frank Buckles emerge as one of the few fortunate survivors?*

Physical condition. My determination to live, keeping myself in good shape as much as possible.

*After being rescued from the prison camp, Frank Buckles returned to the United States, got married and raised a family and in the mid 1950s he purchased a 330-acre farm that still keeps him busy today. But of course, he has had plenty of time for reflection given all the amazing advancements in all areas of life since his birth, he really can't put his finger on the most significant area of progress that he's seen in many years, but he says its easy to narrow the list at least a little bit.*

It sure isn't the television.



Frank W. Buckles is presented with the U.S. Army Freedom Team Salute commendation by Maj. General William Monk, III during the National Memorial Day Parade presented by the American Veterans Center. Buckles served as Honorary Marshal for World War I in the parade, and was met with a standing ovation from the 250,000 spectators who lined the parade route.

*There's also been plenty of correspondence. Buckles says the letters from current soldiers show the same patriotism, devotion to duty, and belief in the rightness of their cause that he felt 90 years ago when he went off to war. In the end, Buckles remains very proud of his service and the service of others in his generation to his country in World War I. The lingering regret however, is that the peace following the war failed to last.*

There was a feeling that it was the war to end all wars, hoping that their problems could be settled some other way.

I think that most of the veterans of World War I were quite disturbed when there was another war, when they became involved in another war.

*Frank Buckles is among the last of the World War I generation, but his humble dignity and plain spoken friendliness serve as a reminder of the great Americans who did so much to build this nation and of those throughout our history who answered the call and served our country in uniform during its hour of need.*

**AVQ**

# HOLLAND:

## PARADES, GRENADES, AND HELL'S HIGHWAY

FROM *BROTHERS IN BATTLE, BEST OF FRIENDS*  
BY WILLIAM "WILD BILL" GUARNERE  
AND EDWARD "BABE" HEFFRON

*Bill Guarnere and "Babe" Heffron have, in recent years, become two of America's most recognizable veterans of World War II, with their stories made famous by the book Band of Brothers, and the subsequent miniseries on HBO. The popularity of the miniseries, and of Bill and Babe themselves, has done a tremendous service in encouraging younger generations to learn more about the history of World War II and its veterans. Bill and Babe recently told their own story, in the new book Brothers in Battle, Best of Friends. In this issue, we print an excerpt from that book, recounting their experience in Holland during Operation Market Garden.*

### MID-SEPTEMBER TO END OF NOVEMBER 1944

**Babe:** Going to Holland we flew in C-47s, with P-38 fighters trailing us for safety. The P-38s fired at anything they had to. Once we got close to the drop zone, we heard occasional bursts of anti-aircraft fire, but not much. Things were pretty quiet. Looking out the door of the plane, I saw a windmill, might have been on the Belgium side of the border, and shots were firing out of it at the planes in the sky. We had been told the Germans used windmills to hide their anti-aircraft batteries, and sure as hell they did. Right away a couple P-38s that were escorting us flew straight under the tail of our plane right for that windmill. They blasted it, and all we could see were plumes of black smoke. The windmill was destroyed.

The plane's crew chief, who was an old guy to us kids—he was in his late twenties—went up and down the aisle telling us all what a credit to our country we were. "You guys should be proud of yourselves," he said. "I wish I could do what you do." He made us feel really good about what we were doing. He told us he'd mail letters for us, so some of the guys scribbled off letters and handed them to him. I said, "By the way, who's Doris?" He told me it was the pilot's wife. I told him about the broad back in South Philly and

the Dear John letter. He must have related the story to the pilot, because the pilot, a really nice guy from New Jersey, came out to shake my hand. He looked at us all and said, "Don't worry, boys, I'll be dropping you right where you belong."

The mood in the plane was tense. Guys were praying, sitting in contemplation. We felt some flak on the tail of our plane, and the order came to stand up and hook up. Sometimes

you felt that order in the pit of your stomach. When you stepped out that door, you knew full well you might not be alive when you hit the ground. We were told to check equipment and stand in the door. Joe Toye was pushmaster.



Waves of Allied paratroopers land in Holland during Operation Market Garden - September, 1944.

They make sure you get a good fast stick out of the plane. The green light came on, even though we weren't by the drop zone yet. We jumped from about twelve hundred feet, which is high for a combat jump, but the area was supposed to

be quiet. We were glad to go out that high because that meant there was no major threat in the area.

I heard a story later that in Bill's plane, a few of the guys here cutting up and laughing, I guess to relieve the anxiety. Bill was watching the guys, like he always did. He was standing up, and he turned to the rest of the guys and asked, "You guys doing all right?" Then he said, "I just want to remind you, the krauts are down there waiting for us." All of a sudden, it got quiet. He was saying, *if you don't want to think about what's coming, I'm going to make you think about it.* He wanted the guys to be in fighting mode before they hit the ground.

The jump couldn't have gone better. It was noon on Sunday, September 17. A bright, beautiful, sunny day. We landed in a giant field. I could hear rifle and machine-gun fire in the distance. The Germans must have been shooting blindly

from somewhere far, because shells would go past our ears and just drop to the ground. Projectiles that had no spin on them and just ran out of steam. A crashed glider and C-47 were burning on the field, and chaplains and troopers were trying to drag the dead and wounded off the drop zone. When you landed, you were supposed to move fast—cut your chute off, gather your gear and get off the drop zone to your platoon, and get into formation.

One reason you had to move fast was so you didn't get hit with anything. Gear was raining down on us, guns and ammo, and equipment. Landing troopers were running and grabbing whatever they could stash on them. As I was running to get to my platoon, a trooper lying on the ground cried, "Help me, Heffron, please! My leg is broken. Don't leave me for the krauts!" I recognized him from jump school, so I stopped to help him. He was in Dog Company. I tried using a rifle to splinter his leg, but we figured out he could use it better as a crutch, and then I carried him off the field. Lieutenant Peacock, who I never liked—he's the one who turned Bill in for having a girl in the barracks—wasn't far away and he barked, "Heffron, join your platoon!" I carried the trooper to the road where he could get transportation and took off. I told him to be happy for his broken leg.

He had a million-dollar wound there. He was hurt just bad enough to be forced out of combat, but not critically wounded. Being hurt and in pain meant nothing. A good soldier still fought like that, most Easy Company men did. No one wanted to let their buddies down. You *wanted* to do your part. And you wanted to do it well. On the other hand, you were happy for fate to intervene and take you off the battlefield. That broken leg was a ticket home.

As machine gunner for 2nd Platoon, I had to be ready to set up my machine gun at any moment, wherever they told me to. The gun was heavy, about twenty-six pounds, you threw it over your shoulder; it had a shoulder sack that it fit into. It was an air-cooled 30-caliber automatic machine gun. The regular outfits had water-cooled. We had no way of using them. We had to carry a light 30 shoulder type. Mike McMann was my assistant then. I always had different assistants but everyone knew what they had to do. You set up the bipod in the dirt, the bipod strapped on the gun.

You threw it down and you stayed there. Your assistant fed the belt of ammo into the gun so it didn't jam. Our job was to provide cover for the rest of the platoon's advancement whenever we were under attack or on the offensive. Then you picked up the gun and advanced with them, and set it up again. Mostly, it was used in defensive position.

You set the gun up, wait for the krauts to come over, and you nail them. My job was to repulse any attack or patrols. If everyone was digging in for the night, you became a defensive machine gunner. Once you opened fire, you gave your position away, so you had to move from that spot quickly. We moved around a lot with those heavy guns.

The Dutch were out to greet us. They were so happy. They called us angels from the sky. They hated the Germans. The Germans came around to their farms every three to six months with wagons and trucks and took all the newborn animals and first fruits, took whatever livestock and produce they wanted, and brought it back for the German farmers.

When we entered the village of Son on the way to the Wilhelmina Canal, the Germans hit us with an 88; they hit a big vacant department store window, and the glass blew out, and the pressure blew me into the center of the street and knocked me unconscious. When I came to, I was dizzy and I hoisted my gun over my shoulder, and a kid from Dog Company said, "You all right?" I felt something warm running down my arm, and I looked and I was bleeding. It wasn't nothing. I was okay. A couple days later, my hand got swollen, it had dirt in it, and I went back to the aid station to get it lanced and bandaged, and I was fine after that. But when it first happened, I caught up to my squad, and my squad leader, Joe Toye, said, "Where the hell you been, Heffron?" I told him I got tied up for a while.

**Bill:** It was a beautiful day when we jumped into Holland. Absolutely gorgeous. Nothing like Normandy. This jump was so beautiful you might have thought the war was over. The people from the town of Son saw us before we saw them. They waved orange flags from the windows and doors and came running out of their houses to greet us. They knew they were liberated; it was a celebration in the streets.

They hugged and kissed us, gave us food and drinks—beer, milk, apples, honey. They didn't have much, but they shared what they had. They were so grateful. Some of the men got caught up in the fun. Broads were grabbing them, kissing them, it was a den of iniquity! I was ready for the krauts to surprise us any minute. The drop was quiet, but you knew the krauts were around. The Dutch called them *Bosbe*. Might have been code for "German." As we advanced, they were trying to keep us informed. They kept hollering, "*Bosbe, Bosbe!*" Let me tell you about the Dutch: I thought they were the most beautiful people alive. They were so friendly. Couldn't do enough for us. They spoke English. They were so appreciative that we'd come to help them. Not like the French. I didn't see a Frenchman anywhere. Somebody told

me before we jumped in Normandy, “Don’t turn your back on a Frenchman.” That was good advice. A lot of them liked the Germans a little *too* much.

As we went through the crowds, I piled a bunch of green apples in my pockets, and hoped I didn’t accidentally throw one at a kraut instead of a grenade. You’re not going to stop a Nazi with a piece of fruit.

Things were fairly quiet moving toward the bridge at Wilhelmina. Just as we were about a half-mile in front of the bridge, the krauts woke up from their little nap. A machine gun and German 88 fired at us. One of the shells hit a big department store window, and the impact threw Babe across the street, knocked him out. He was shook the hell up, that’s all. Then just before we got to the bridge—*bam!*—it blew up right in our puss. Big chunks of debris flew everywhere. We hit the dirt and fired back at them. Nobody got badly hurt. Damn krauts were waiting for us. The problem was, the planes dropped us eight miles away. Too much time passed by the time we jumped, got together, got through the crowds, and got to the first bridge. If they dropped us right on it, we would have beat the Germans there. But that’s hindsight, kid.

Babe and the other machine gunners laid down cover fire and pushed back the Germans. Some of the men tried to get a makeshift bridge up so we could cross the canal. We got resourceful, tore down barn doors, whatever we could find heavy enough to get everyone across. Later, the engineers came, they built something stronger to get the tanks over.

**Babe:** We spent the night in Son, sleeping on the ground. You made a hole for yourself and stayed there. In the morning we had orders to move out and take Eindhoven. As we marched, everyone was spread out. You always spread out. If you bunched up, and an 88 came in, it would take everyone out at once. Lt. Bob Brewer walked ahead of us as lead scout, when suddenly sniper fire came from a church and hit him right in the throat. We had to keep advancing. Outside Eindhoven, we had to regroup, because we lost some men and we lost Brewer (he ended up surviving), a lieutenant. So we sat on the steps at St. Katrina’s Church for an hour before moving out again.

Before we jumped our orders upon landing were to find any thing with wheels to help carry our supplies. A Dutch woman

gave me an old baby carriage. So there I am pushing a baby carriage with ammo, weapons, and supplies. As I’m pushing it through the streets, crowded with people partying and singing, my mind went to South Philly. Four blocks from where we lived was the Delaware River. Ships would bring coal and the coal would be transferred to trains that ran along Delaware Avenue. My family was poor, and my mother would send my three brothers and I down to Delaware Avenue with my sister’s baby carriage to pick up any stray pieces of coal we could find. It meant we’d have heat from the coal stove. We’d fill the carriage with the coal and push it home. If there was snow on the ground, we used a sled. This wasn’t easy. There was a mean railroad dick we called Duckfeet. Everyone in South Philly has a nickname and this man walked like a duck. He wouldn’t hesitate to shoot anyone he caught stealing coal. I don’t

know if he’d have shot us four little kids, but we were scared of him. Pushing the stroller down the streets of Eindhoven, I wondered what mean old Duckfeet would have done to the krauts if he was so quick to shoot someone pocketing coal. Believe me, I would have given anything at that moment to be back in Philly with Duckfeet.

Popeye Wynn threw his weapons in my baby carriage. I said, “You do the pushing then.” I picked up my machine gun and hoisted it over my shoulder and gave him the carriage.



“Babe” Heffron during World War II.

**Bill:** The next morning, we marched through pastures and fields into Eindhoven.

Now we thought Son was a celebration, but Eindhoven was a sight to behold. The streets were so crowded we could barely push our way through. It was one giant party. Civilians grabbing and kissing us, giving us food and beer. One woman was shoving an autograph book in our faces, saying “Sign, sign!” We had a war to fight and she’s looking for autographs! We scribbled in her book “John Wayne,” “Cary Grant,” “Kilroy,” “The Andrews Sisters.” We just wanted to get the hell away from her.

You know why the Dutch were so aggressively friendly toward us? I mean *aggressive*. It’s because they never knew what it was to be occupied. They weren’t in World War I. They were a peaceful people, always neutral. After five years of oppression, we came and liberated them. They were so grateful. One Dutchman said to us, “Can you define freedom? You can’t,” he said. “Because you don’t know what freedom is until you lose it.” I’ll never forget that. Babe was there, too, when he said it.

There were women who collaborated with the Germans, they were kissing us, too. But the Dutch didn't waste time taking care of the traitors. Right away, they rounded them up, grabbed the men right off the streets and killed them. The women got what was due them, too. The Dutch threw them into the middle of the street, ripped off their clothes, shaved their heads, beat them, publicly shamed them. They deserved it. What should you do, kiss them? They were sent off like homeless lepers. We saw them wandering in the countryside and we didn't say a word to them. We knew what they were, what they done. Someone probably killed them eventually.

**Babe:** We were the first platoon in the city, and we secured the bridges over the Dommel River and set up outposts. I had orders from Bill to set up my machine gun by a footbridge going over a small canal next to a set of row homes. I'll never forget that spot, and actually when I went back to the spot ten years later, and asked someone about the footbridge, the man said, "You have a good memory. The people have moved now, but yes, there was a footbridge there."

We set the gun up and had it facing a secondary road on our right coming into the town. We had the larger roads coming out of the woods already secured. All our guys were in place and we were waiting for a counterattack, and one of the heads of the underground—they wore an orange band on their arms so we knew who they were—came over and said to Compton, Toye, and Bill, "We have a horse and wagon coming up the road with about eight German soldiers, and a large artillery piece on the back of the wagon. Would you give us the pleasure of taking them out, instead of you?"

We looked at each other and Compton said, "If anyone deserves to take them out, it's the Dutch." They suffered through five, six years of occupation. So we said, "Go ahead." They hid on the side of the road in a doorway, and when the horse and wagon made a move with the artillery piece, the Dutch opened up and killed all of them. All except one, a tall blond-haired, blue-eyed kid who was badly wounded in the left shoulder. He was holding his shoulder, moaning in pain, and they marched him over toward us so headquarters could get some information out of him. We were all hollering, "Suffer, you son of a bitch!" when an old Dutch woman in her eighties came out, and asked him in

Dutch, "Where does it hurt?" It looked like she was going to help him. He pointed to his shoulder, and she started hitting him over and over with her pocketbook right on that shoulder, screaming something like "*Moffe! Moffe! Moffe!*" She's screaming at him, and he's screaming in pain. Turned out the woman had put a brick in her pocketbook. She made my day, she made everyone's day. We asked around what the woman was yelling and found out there was no translation for it in English, but it was something like "evil."

**Bill:** The Dutch underground found us right after we landed. Told us where the Germans were, what their plans were. They hated the Germans, wanted to get in on the killing, too. Gave us accurate info, became part of our combat team. One of them was John van Kooijk. A good Dutchman. A good source for us. He pointed out who the collaborators and the rat finks were. Told us everything. He stayed with us, and fought the entire war with 2nd Battalion. I think they put an Airborne uniform on him, too. The Dutch women sabotaged the German telephone lines and communications, we found out later.



"Wild Bill" Guarnere during World War II.

The days after we secured the bridges, word came from the Dutch underground to get the hell out of town. The Germans were planning to bomb Eindhoven that night. We didn't have the fire or air support to do anything about it. As we were marching out, we felt like hell. The people in Eindhoven must have felt like we abandoned them. But what could we do? There was no way we could have spread the news fast enough. Put it this way: *Eind* means land, *hoven* means farms—land of farms. There were green pastures as far as the eye could see. Everything was too spread out. If we stayed and tried to inform the people, we would all be dead. We sat in our foxholes and felt terrible.

The next day, the nineteenth of September, I went out looking for Able Company to find my buddy James Diel. I found a couple kids from Able, and asked where he was. They said "You just missed him. He was on the road and a shell hit him, cut him right in half." It was a shock. He was my sergeant back in training, and he was a good buddy, but I couldn't stop to think about it or I'd be buried there, too. When someone got killed, you just got more fired up for the next battle. I ended up getting his dog tags, I have no idea how, but after the war, I gave them to his family.

**Babe:** One of the men in 2nd Platoon, Stephen Grodski, who we called the Brow because he looked like the character from the *Dick Tracy* comics—he had one big eyebrow across his forehead that looked like it was drawn on with some grease paint—he would make us the last hot meal I remember having for seventy-some days. We were in the middle of an apple orchard, and he made a stew out of everything we could find. He put it all in a helmet and cooked it with a Bunsen burner.

In the morning, we had a forced march to Neunen. Some of the guys piled onto the British Cromwell tanks moving with us into the village. We heard there was nothing there, and it was pretty quiet as we came up to it, except for some Dutch civilians cheering us on from their windows or the streets. There were beautiful buildings, old country inns, and farmhouses. We took a secondary road in, but all the land was flat, it was all farmland, so we were in plain view.

The roads were raised a few feet off the ground, too, which made you more conspicuous, and along both sides of the roads were drainage ditches. Those ditches ended up being an advantage and a disadvantage, depending on whether it was us or them hiding in them.

We led a frontal assault, and luckily we were on the flank, in a wooded area, because suddenly, we heard the rumbling and clanking of metal, and it wasn't our tanks. German tanks came rolling out from behind the trees about four hundred yards away and let loose with a barrage of 88s. There were dozens more tanks behind them. We only had about four or five. We dove into the ditches just as our rear tank got blasted.

Johnny Martin saw a German tank hiding in a hedgerow with its gun pointed right at one of the British tanks just waiting for it to advance a few feet. I covered him, and we ran over to warn the tank driver. Martin jumped up on the tank and pointed to where the German tank was hidden and said to the driver, "Shoot him! Shoot him!" But the Brit wouldn't listen, he couldn't see the tank. Boy, they were laid back, those Brits, even with 88's exploding all around them. He was more concerned about his orders not to destroy property. We hightailed it away from him, not a minute before the German tank let loose and blasted him, and then blasted another one of our tanks behind him. The crew from the first tank escaped, but the gunner, he got both his legs blown off, all that was left of him was a torso.

Our regimental chaplain, Father Maloney, ran over and pulled him from the tank, laid him down in the ditch, and

gave him his last rites before he died. Let me tell you about Father Maloney. *He* was a hero. As spiritual guide for the 506th, he had twelve rifle companies to worry about, not counting regimental headquarters. He went from company to company holding Mass, giving last rites and spiritual aid, wherever he was needed. He risked his life going onto the battlefield to save someone's soul. His job was saving souls, not lives. He didn't carry a gun, only his chalice, crucifix, and sacramental stuff. I imagine he enjoyed meeting his maker, because that's the way he treated people and the way he served. He went out of his way to make someone feel better. He got the DSC in Normandy for courage.

One day when I came to a confession, he said, "I don't see many of you guys when there's no fighting." He said, "The Catholic faith is the hardest to live by but the easiest to die by. When you meet your maker it's all forgiven." That thought helped me through every day. Neunen was overrun with German soldiers and tanks, firing at us with everything they had. Mortars, pistol fire, MG-42 fire, and 88s. You couldn't see through the clouds of dust and smoke, and there was debris flying everywhere. A machine gunner from Dog Company got hit. He yelled, "Son of a bitch, I'm dead!" and he dropped dead. It was the strangest thing to see.

We were pinned down in a ditch, trying to advance and staying low, when clouds of heavy smoke came wafting down the ditch toward us. The Brow yelled, "Gas! Gas!" We went to grab our ankles for our gas masks, but most of us left them in the plane. Usually they were right above our knives, which we had on our right ankles, unless you were left handed, then it was on your left ankle. We'd taken them off, along with our reserve parachutes, to lighten the load before jumping. Those things were big and bulky, not like gas masks today. We never figured the Germans would actually use gas, even though the generals and higher-ups expected them to; we even had gas-impregnated jump jackets. At that moment, we were scared as hell, cursing ourselves for being so stupid. We were sure we were going to die. Then Joe Toye yelled, "They're smoke pots!" When the air finally cleared, we could see it was smoke from a burning English tank that the wind carried down the ditch. What a relief! We'd have all been dead if it had been gas. Bill was pissed. He shouted, "Who the hell hollered gas?!" but nobody would rat. Under our breath we were calling the Brow a dumb son of a bitch; he scared the hell out of us. Bill would have given him holy hell.

Tanks were burning all around us, and the kids inside were dead, so the tanks kept rolling on their own, and would stop only when they rolled into ditches. While I was in the

ditch manning the machine gun, one of the tanks rolled into the ditch on fire. I couldn't go running out, or even raise my head, the place was like a hornet's nest. I would have got my head blown off. I was pinned down. Getting a shot off was out of the question. I don't know how I escaped that burning tank, but somehow I did.

We never succeeded in pushing the Germans back, and we were ordered to withdraw. It's hard to take when you get that order to pull back. You feel defeated. But you do what you're told, and we had full confidence in any order Dick Winters gave.

I was providing cover fire for the rest of the platoon, when I felt something hit my leg hard. I thought I was hit. But it was Buck Compton's head. He fell across a wheelbarrow right at my feet. A sniper got him right in the backside. He looked up at me and said, "She always said my big ass would get in the way." He had four holes in his rear end. He was a strapping guy, too heavy for anyone to drag, and we were being bombarded with heavy machine-gun fire. I tried to help Buck, but he told me to leave him there for the Germans.

(Bill adds: "When Compton got shot, he wanted us to leave him there to die. He didn't want anyone else to get hit trying to save him. He was no midget.

Six-foot-two, two hundred forty pounds. I told him he was going to get shot in the ass because he was too big to run fast. Our company medic, Gene Roe, tried to patch him up, and we had to get him out of there. Malarkey, Babe, Joe Toye, and I and some others tried to lift him, but it was like picking up a damn elephant. We had to rip a door off a barn, make a stretcher out of it, and get him up onto a British tank. He was mad as hell that we were trying to help him. Mad as hell. Cursing us all. He wanted to kill us. But Compton was lucky. He got four holes in his rear end from one bullet, and I'm saying he was lucky. It was a fleshy spot, they could fix it bing-bang-boom, so he was lucky.")

That was a pretty amazing feat that Bill, Malarkey, and Toye pulled off. They did it in that open field with machine fire coming from every direction. Especially considering we were the only platoon there, the others were off to the flanks. To get beyond the German fire, I had to climb over a six-foot hedgerow. These damn things were four feet wide. You

ran at them, trying to get over, and bounced off. And I was bogged down by my machine gun. John Sheehy yelled from the other side, "Come on, Heffron! Give it a running start!" I threw my machine gun over the hedgerow to Sheehy, but to get a running start, I had to move back into German fire. My heart was pounding. It was like you see in a movie. Bullets were kicking the dirt up next to my ankles and whizzing by my head.

As I ran, my rosary beads flew off my neck, but I jumped the hedgerow and Sheehy grabbed my jump jacket and yanked me over. I didn't want to leave without my rosaries. I thought I wouldn't come out of this war alive without

them. "To hell with the rosary beads," Sheehy yelled. "Let's go!" I stooped down to pick up my helmet, which had fallen on the ground, and the rosaries were right inside the helmet. Lying right in there. By some stroke of luck, the rosaries had come over the hedgerow with it. If Sheehy hadn't waited for me and helped me that day, I never would have made it. I never forgot what he did.

On the other side of the hedgerow, one of our guys was wounded and lying in a ditch, and we were withdrawing, so I ran over to throw him over my shoulder and put him on a tank. Then I heard Sergeant Ranney's voice come from the tank: "Leave him, Heffron, he's dead."



Bill Guarnere and Babe Heffron with Tom Hanks and Frank John Hughes, who portrayed Guarnere in the miniseries "Band of Brothers."

When I laid him back down, I saw he had a hole through his left temple. Then I saw his face. It was Miller, the guy I told a few days before that he would get through the war without a scratch. I didn't want to leave him, and we always brought our dead back, but Ranney had given the order. Maybe there was no room on the tank, or maybe someone got him later. I know they had to take his dog tags and personal things, they had to report him dead. But boy, seeing Miller hit me like a ton of bricks. I had to sit there for a minute. I didn't even know his first name. When a replacement got killed and no one knew his name, you described him: "The little skinny guy that came into the outfit as we were leaving." I always tried not to get close to anyone because it hurt like hell when they died. I think about Miller a lot. He was just a kid.

*Brothers in Battle, Best of Friends* by Bill Guarnere and Babe Heffron, with Robyn Post, is available at bookstores nationwide and from Berkeley Hardcover publishing.

WWII

# NEVER FORGET

## AN AMERICAN SOLDIER'S VIEW OF UNSPEAKABLE EVIL BY HARRY ZASLOW

*Harry Zaslow was born in Philadelphia in 1925, the son of Jewish Russian immigrants who had come to America to escape the edicts of the Czar's government. At the age of 19, he joined the United States Army, serving with the 283<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, fighting in four combat campaigns and 15 battles in Germany and Europe. On April 29, 1945, he participated in the liberation of Dachau Concentration Camp—one of history's most gruesome symbols of inhumanity. What he witnessed there, and throughout the war-torn towns and villages of Europe, would remain with him for over sixty years...*

### Charlari, Belgium

It was September 27, 1944. Other Jewish soldiers in my battalion and I traveled to Charlari for the High Holy Day services of Yom Kippur. Charlari was a beautiful town, and I was reminded that while Jews in America were praying in beautiful synagogues with their loved ones, these battered people were in the remnants of a synagogue that had been burned to the ground by the Nazis.

Of the 500 Jews that had lived in the area, only a small group remained. Most of the men, women, and children had been taken away to Germany or Poland. With my knowledge of Yiddish, I was able to hear their stories as told by those who were left behind. The Gestapo came in the middle of the night and took children away, some as young as two or three-years-old. Each Belgian Jew had someone missing: a sister, a husband, a child, a father, grandparents, uncles, aunts. In spite of these cruel tragedies, they were ecstatic when the U.S. Army liberated the town and what was left of its people.

The Belgian Jews told me that for four years they lived in fear. They dared not walk the streets and hid in cellars. With every knock at the door, they trembled in fear. If the Belgian Nazis found out they were Jewish, they were reported to

the Gestapo. Being discovered meant being beaten unconscious, and then being beaten some more. A seven year old boy told of his father being burned alive at the stake, an imitation of the Spanish Inquisition.

Another girl was thrown into a temporary camp behind the enemy's lines for the pleasure of the German soldiers. The Gestapo agent asked her name and age.

"My name is Ellen, and I am 18-years-old," she told him.

"You will not see your 19<sup>th</sup> birthday," the agent told her, coldly.

Ellen's father stood by in horror, his wife already having been taken away. Shortly after, however, the American army began shelling the Germans day and night, forcing them to retreat and release Ellen and other Jewish women. There was no time for German soldiers to be entertained by female hostages.

Ellen made her way back to her town of Charlari, but where was her family? I met Ellen the night she fled from the retreating Germans. She told me she had just turned 19. I too was 19. I was an American soldier from Philadelphia. I had freedom and security, with no fear. Ellen's life was threatened simply because she was Jewish. Each of us, as 19-year-olds from different parts of the world, gazed upon one another—the liberator and the victim of hatred. I was relieved that Ellen was saved, brought back to her home and her father, and could live her young life with happiness and, someday, in a world of peace.

### A German Army Slave Camp

On April 20, 1945, our battalion was once again moving forward to a place unknown to us. The remnants of the



A German girl is overcome as she walks among the bodies of slave workers killed by the Nazis. Allied forces exhumed the bodies from mass graves and laid them out so the townspeople could see, first-hand, the work of their leaders.

German army were retreating further into Eastern Germany. We drove through various abandoned towns without challenge, saw how the Nazis and Wehrmacht lived, and how they treated the slaves they held in their camps.

I walked with a small group from our gun crew into one of these slave camps. The slaves there were Russian girls—for a better word, they were “sex slaves.” These girls had no place to go. No sight of pity ever hit me so hard as when I entered through that door. The place was neat, and the room was kept pretty clean. It was not the crude furniture and beds, because one saw that all over Europe.

No, what made us boiling mad was the condition of the women, girls, and babies. Babies, babies all over the place. Their mothers’ faces were weary and lifeless. They fed their babies with what little they had left of themselves.

A Polish girl, about 16, told me the same story I had been hearing since we battled our way across the Rhine. The girls worked hard during the day with not much food, and at night, they provided sexual favors for the German soldiers. The Polish girl said, “Look what a German soldier gave me!” Was the baby just born? No; it was born five days before, and no bigger than a kitten. Ten babies had died in the past week.

I was glad to get out of that sad and gloomy maternity ward. The Germans had conquered parts of Russia and brought back the booty—Russian girls. There was nothing we could have done to help these poor abused girls, victimized by their Nazi conquerors. Genghis Khan, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, overran Northern Africa, Persia, and Eastern Europe, and the Mongol men would rape women and be rewarded with swift riding horses. The Nazis, with their goal of a superior civilization, had reverted to centuries of the past, with the prize of women slaves.

### [A Russian Girl Wandering on the Road](#)

On April 17, 1945, we had covered most of Western Germany, and expected to soon meet with the Russian

Army. Instead, we saw a strange sight—people in striped clothing walking toward us, who must have been coming out of German jails or camps. I came across a Russian girl on the road, and she spoke to me in Russian. I replied, “Nepadimsiesh,” but it became clear that though the released slave laborers were now free, they had nowhere to go. I asked if she spoke German. She told me she came from Kiev—where my father had come from. She said she could barely wait to get back to Russia, but she didn’t know if her parents were alive or dead. She worked hard during the day and “entertained” German soldiers at night. She had been in Germany for two years.



[Exuberant prisoners of the Dachau concentration camp celebrate upon their liberation by American forces in April of 1945.](#)

I was emotionally upset with the story of the Russian girl who found herself in such a deplorable situation. “To the victors go the spoils.” I was angered with the German soldiers and officers. They had no respect for morals or other human beings. But, my second thought was that not all Germans were like this—not all were evil. I was proud that as the American army pounded its way through Europe, they were disciplined and had respect for the local populations, be they friend or enemy.

### [Dachau Concentration Camp - Morning Hours April 29, 1945](#)

By daylight, our artillery battalion moved on, joining the 42<sup>nd</sup> “Rainbow” Division in the battle for Munich. As soon as our Battery “B” of the 283<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery—100 men and howitzers—arrived in a park in the city of Munich, German artillery bombarded us with shrapnel raining down from the sky. Our men dove under our trucks to avoid being hit.

I tried to dig a trench at the edge of a wooded area, until a German artillery shell exploded 20 feet from where I was located, and the concussion knocked me to the ground. A dense black cloud enveloped me. My sergeant called out, “Zaslow, are you alright?” I got up from my trench, dusted off my combat uniform, and said, “Yeah Sarge, I’m ok.”

After reorganizing our howitzers, the sergeant approached me and said, “Zaslow, you’re going on a mission. You are one of four men.” I was curious as to what the mission would be, but could not ask questions. Just follow orders.

All four of us mounted a small open-end truck and began the drive. We had spent a severe winter in combat, but we now saw that flowers were growing alongside the dirt road. Our destination, 12 miles away, was the town of Dachau in Bavaria. When we arrived, we came upon a long line of cattle cars, with the doors wide open. Each of the box cars were filled with a tangled mass of dead bodies, jammed from the bottom to the top of each car.

I stood frozen, not understanding who these dead people were and what they had done to deserve this death. We were startled. It seemed that the entire world was a world of the dead and not the living.

Although I was battle-hardened, I was bewildered and sickened at the sight. At that moment, I was not a seasoned combat soldier at the ripe age of 20, but a human being who loved and cherished life.

The scene was overwhelming. With our carbine rifles and helmets the four of us walked toward the gateway of a compound. Lying on the ground at the entrance, a Nazi officer in a tailored blue and gold uniform was lying on the ground, dead. I wondered what had caused his death.

At the entrance to the camp, which had been unknown to us, was a wrought iron archway with the words spelled out, “Arbeit Macht Frei”—“Work Will Set You Free.” Once again, it was difficult to understand why these words appeared. Later we learned that the camp held imprisoned inmates. Using applied psychology, it was intimated that those who would apply themselves to the cruel rules of the camp would survive. The statement at the gate was not true. Already we had seen hundreds of dead people in the box cars. As we entered a brick courtyard, we saw the administrative headquarters which were vacant.

In the courtyard, a half-dozen inmates of the camp in striped clothing were disciplining 18 camp guards who were standing at attention. The same guards had forced Jewish inmates to

stand at attention for many hours. One guard flicked his eyes and was pulled out of rank by an inmate who whipped him severely on his backside with a bull whip which had formerly been used on the inmates.

A tall Polish inmate ran towards me with great joy. “Americanski! Americanski!” he shouted. He hugged me so fiercely that my helmet fell to the ground. He told me that the inmates were returning the cruel treatment they had received from the guards.

We then entered a three-room, one story building. I was aghast and overwhelmed at the sight. Two rooms had bodies stacked to the ceiling. The middle room held three ovens heated to high temperatures, still burning.

With my gloved hand, I opened the door on the center oven, and was shocked and sickened to see a burning body lying on a metal slab. The stench, the fumes, the sight of death all around me was too much to bear. This hell on earth had become my world.

We would not leave the camp until the chaos would be brought under some control. We were told to try to keep the inmates from attacking the Nazi guards. Four Jewish inmates told me that if we would have come 24 hours later, they and

1,000 others would have died. Words cannot express the senselessness of the pure slaughter of these people. After several hours, we were ordered to return to our outfit in Munich.

When our group returned to our artillery position, a sandwich was handed to me by our battery chef. I was sick to my stomach and wracked with mental pain. But I knew that if I were to survive the remaining weeks of the war, I would have to fortify myself to eat the sandwich. Our next mission would be to advance toward Hitler’s hideaway, Berdechsgaden.

*Harry Zaslow has told his story, and the story of the Holocaust, to nearly 5,000 elementary, middle, and high school students, and has compiled his experiences in the book A Teenager’s Journey in War & Peace available from [www.AuthorHouse.com](http://www.AuthorHouse.com) or at 888-280-7715.*



Harry Zaslow - a teenager at war.

# The Hero of Taejon-ni

## Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura in the Korean War

### AN EXCERPT FROM VETERANS CHRONICLES

*The World War II Veterans Committee, and now, the American Veterans Center, began with the production of the award-winning radio documentary series, World War II Chronicles, commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II. This program, hosted by the late, great “Voice of World War II,” Edward J. Herlihy, aired on over 500 stations nationwide between 1991 and 1995 on the Radio America network. In the years since, the American Veterans Center, with the World War II Veterans Committee and National Vietnam Veterans Committee, has produced dozens of radio documentaries and series, in an effort to bring the history of the Second World War to the American public.*

*The Center’s tradition of quality radio programming continues with the weekly series, Veterans Chronicles, hosted by Gene Pell, former NBC Pentagon Correspondent and head of Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. With Veterans Chronicles, listeners are taken to the battlefields with the men and women who have served our country so gallantly. The series is broadcast on the Radio America network and past shows can be heard at [www.americanveteranscenter.org](http://www.americanveteranscenter.org), [www.wviiivets.com](http://www.wviiivets.com) or [www.vietnamvetscommittee.org](http://www.vietnamvetscommittee.org). In this issue, we print an excerpt from a recent episode.*

*Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura received the Medal of Honor for his valor in the Korean War during a battle on April 24 and 25, 1951. Corporal Miyamura is credited with killing more than 50 of the enemy while covering his squad’s withdrawal before being severely wounded and captured by Chinese Communist forces. He spent the next 28 months as a prisoner of war. Hershey’s story begins in the American southwest, in New Mexico.*



**Hiroshi Miyamura:** I was born in Gallup, New Mexico. My parents came from Japan and settled in Gallup in 1906. I have five sisters and a brother. I just lost my oldest sister last year. Growing up, I used to be a great fan of the movies and I always had cowboys as my heroes. One of my favorites was “Hopalong” Cassidy, because he was such a gentleman, and yet when he needed to be forceful, he was. I admired him for that.

**Gene Pell:** You wanted to get into World War II earlier than you did as part of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, correct?

**Miyamura:** Yes. I don’t know if you know, but our government had passed a law at the outbreak of the war and it classified all Japanese citizens as enemy aliens. We were not allowed to volunteer for the service, or be eligible for the draft, until after a

group of Japanese American university students in Hawaii who wanted to prove their loyalty to this country were able to form a battalion, known as the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Well, the 100<sup>th</sup>, after training in the United States, was sent to the European Theater, where it distinguished itself in battle. The commanding general asked for more of these troops, so the government set up a draft and asked for volunteers for this new unit they were forming.

I did not know a lot of these young men were from internment camps. They had been sent to these camps at the outbreak of the war because our government did not really trust us because they didn’t know enough about us. But anyway, some of these young men volunteered for service out of the internment camps. Then they opened up the draft, and that’s when all the young men of draftable age in Gallup were sent to this new unit.

*Hiroshi was called to active duty in January, 1944. He trained in Florida and was sent to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, where he learned of the formation of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team.*

**Miyamura:** I was assigned to Company D of the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which was a heavy weapons company. We went through basic training, at Ft. Meade, Maryland, and before we were to board the ship, we were given a physical and a full field inspection. During the physical, I was told by a lieutenant colonel that I had a hernia. I didn't even know what a hernia was at that time, but he asked me if it bothered me and I said no. Still, they sent me back to Camp Shelby to get fixed up.

By the time I finished my convalescence, another group had just finished its basic training, so I joined them. I sailed out of Norfolk, Virginia, and five days before we landed in Italy, where the regiment was fighting at that time, we heard over the ship's loudspeakers that the war in Europe was over. Rumors began to fly that the ship was going to turn around and head to the Pacific Theater, but we landed in Naples, Italy, and caught up with the regiment, where we were told we would undergo training before heading to the Pacific. Before we really got into heavy training, the war in the Pacific had ended, so all we did was pull occupation duty. I was very fortunate to come home with the colors, and to parade down Constitution Avenue in front of President Truman.

*Corporal Miyamura was discharged in June, 1946, signed up for three years in the Army Reserves, and attended engineering school in Milwaukee. In 1949, he signed on for three more years in the reserves, not knowing what they might bring. He soon found out when the Korean War began.*

**Miyamura:** In August, 1950, I was told to report to Ft. Hood, Texas, for a nine-week refresher course, but all we did every day was march with a full field pack. I later learned why we did so much marching—that was training to help

us climb those hills in North Korea. You have never seen hills like the hills in North Korea.

**Pell:** I have been. I served there a little after you did, and know what it is like.

Let's go to the action that brought you the Medal of Honor, and your recollections of that night.



Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura, who before his heroics in the Korean War, was a veteran of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team in World War II.

**Miyamura:** I had just come back a few weeks earlier from R&R in Japan. We were above the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel at the time, and were told to withdraw to the south of the Inchon River. I was told to dig in at the top of a mountain, which was really about the only orders I received from my platoon sergeant. Once we dug in and supplied with ammo, I never saw him again.

On the night of April 24, 1951, the Chinese hit our position. They had started a spring offensive earlier that month. At the time they hit my position, it was about midnight, and pitch dark. We were told that we might get hit anytime. They more or less announced their advance because they were blowing on bugles and making as much noise as possible. I know that was a psychological thing, but it

does set you on edge, especially when you don't really know what direction they are coming from. Eventually, they started coming up on my position, and got behind my position—that's when I realized my men were in danger. I gave them the orders to withdraw, and said to them that I would cover their withdrawal as long as I could as they made their way back to our command post. I just kept firing, and don't really know what happened much after that, except that white phosphorous bombs were dropping around me, so I decided to make my way down the mountain.

*Facing an overwhelming Communist Chinese enemy, Hiroshi Miyamura fought them off as best as he could while his men withdrew. He killed more than 50 of the enemy before being severely wounded and captured, spending 28 months as a prisoner of war. He describes how the capture took place and then what followed:*

**Miyamura:** On my way down the mountain, I ran into one of the enemy, we came face to face, and I bayoneted him. As I withdrew, I fell backwards and at that instant, he had a concussion grenade in his hand from which he had pulled the pin. I felt it hit my foot and it went off. I didn't know it at the time, but I ended up with a piece of shrapnel in my leg. I tried to keep making my way down the mountain. When I arrived at the bottom, I ran into a barbed wire entanglement that was strung across the road. I didn't know it was there, since my focus was on one of our own tanks. I heard his motor start up, so I waved at him, but it was still dark enough that he couldn't see me. I got cut up pretty bad from the barbed wire, but dropped to my knees and crawled underneath. I don't know how far I made it—my guess is about 50 yards before I just dropped to the ground. I'm not sure exactly how long I laid there; I do know that I heard a lot of troops pass my position, but no one stopped to see if I was dead or not. I didn't know if it was our troops or the enemy, so I just laid there. I soon heard a voice, in English, say "Get up. You are my prisoner. We have a lenient policy. We won't harm you. Follow me." And that's when I decided, since he had a .45 pointed at me, that I had better follow him. I got up, and finally realized that I was hurt and lost a lot of blood, but decided that I would hobble after him. I didn't know if he would shoot me or not. He led me to where others who had been taken prisoner were being held.

**Pell:** How long were you in captivity then?

**Miyamura:** From April 26, 1951 until August 1953.

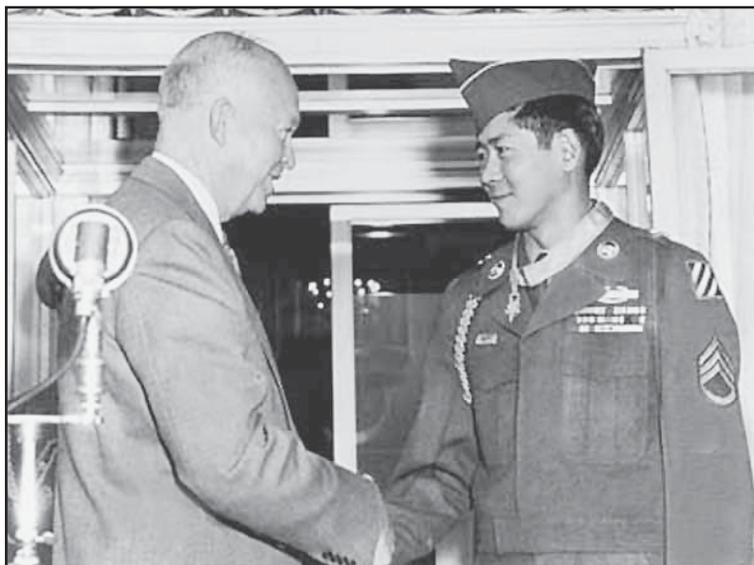
**Pell:** What was your treatment like at the hands of the Chinese?

**Miyamura:** It was very bad. When we got captured, none of us received any medical attention. We did not receive any food for two weeks, and what we eventually got was very little and difficult to eat. As we marched, I could see

many of the men start to turn into human skeletons. We lost a lot of them along the way. Out of our group, we arrived at the prisoner camp with about half of what we started with.

Once we arrived there we thought the treatment would be much better. That first year was no better than the first night we got captured. We still received no medical attention. The food was not any better, and we had little to drink.

*After being held for 28 months in a prisoner of war camp, Hershey Miyamura was finally released in August 1953, and on his way home to his wife in New Mexico. He had no idea he was returning as a hero who would soon be on his way to Washington and to the White House. No announcement of his receiving the Medal of Honor was made while he was imprisoned, presumably out of fear that his captors would retaliate in some way if they learned the true extent of his actions on that night in April 1951.*



*"Hershey" Miyamura meets with President Eisenhower after returning home to receive the Medal of Honor.*

**Miyamura:** When I crossed over to Freedom Village, where American POWs were returned to U.S. hands, General Osborne of the 3rd Division asked me to come before the media with him.

He told me that I had received the Medal of Honor for the actions on April 24, 1951, and all I could say was, "What?!?!" I felt like I was doing my duty and had no idea that I was doing anything out of the ordinary.

**Pell:** How did you learn that you were going to be released?

**Miyamura:** Well, for years, the minute the peace talks started, we had almost daily announcements about how it was progressing. When it progressed on their side, they were happy. But when our side would not give in, they were very, very upset with us. The treatment varied as the outcome varied. But eventually, about six months before being released, we were told that prisoners would start being released; they would call out names every few days or so, and if a person's name was called, he was transported back.

**Pell:** Did the treatment improve while the talks were going on in Pammunjon?

**Miyamura:** As the talks improved, so did our treatment. In fact, they gave us a little bit of food—not big portions, but a lot more than we were getting. And they gave us athletic equipment to try to build our bodies back up. We had lost so much weight because of the lack of medical attention and proper food.

**Pell:** And when you crossed into Pammunjon, Freedom Village, you were greeted by General Osborne?

**Miyamura:** Well after being deloused, I took a shower and was in my pajamas, lying down on a cot. A corporal or sergeant came up to me and told me that there was a gentleman from my home state who wanted to talk with me. So I followed him and he led me into a room, and there stood the general at a table, with all kinds of lights focused on him. So I was led up to the table and that's when the general shook my hand and told me why I was there.

**Pell:** What was your reaction?

**Miyamura:** Oh, I said, "What??" I couldn't really say anything. Then he wanted me to relate how I felt. That's when I told him that I didn't feel like I deserved the Medal of Honor for doing what I was trained to do.

**Pell:** So what then happened? How did you get back home?

**Miyamura:** Well, I was offered the opportunity to fly home, or get on a troop ship with my comrades and friends. I decided to ride the ship, which was supposed to take 19 days; I thought it would be a good chance to try to recuperate and to put on a little weight. I weighed myself, and was 98 lbs. I felt this would be a good time to slowly get accustomed to food again. I had never gotten sick before

on a ship—not going to Europe, and not going to Japan. So I was surprised that, on my first day, I got so sick I could not get out of my bunk bed. I was on that bed for a good eleven days. I finally decided I had to go up top, but they wouldn't let us out of a certain area. They didn't want us talking with the other troops; I don't know why. But we were also interrogated along the way.

**Pell:** When you got home, word of the Medal had preceded you, I assume?

**Miyamura:** Yes, it did. My wife didn't know if I was alive for the first year, because the Chinese did not release any names of the POWs they held in captivity. Only when the peace talks began to improved, they started releasing names, which is when my wife finally found out, a year into my captivity. I had been listed as missing in action.

**Pell:** But she knew you had received the Medal before you got back?

**Miyamura:** She was told that I had received the Medal, but had no idea what the Medal was. Some of my friends in my hometown had to tell her exactly what the Medal represented. It took many years for it to really sink in.

**Pell:** But you were obviously asked to come to the White House; that should have helped it sink in a little bit.

**Miyamura:** Yes, in fact, she was the only one who enjoyed it. I was sick the whole time. I was so nervous, being the first of seven to appear President Eisenhower to receive the Medal of Honor, and I was very nervous. And to receive the Medal, from the outstanding general of the European Theater at that time was quite an honor.



Hiroshi Miyamura (above center-left) leads a wreath laying ceremony at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in honor of all who served in the war.

**Pell:** It was also quite a recognition that you received it not only when you did but under the circumstances that you did, while so many of the 442<sup>nd</sup> were denied that for many, many years.

**Miyamura:** Yes. I heard from some of the fellows I had trained with about the bravery of a lot of the boys, and that they deserved a medal of some kind. Many years later I read the citations of their Distinguished Service Crosses. When I read the DSC citations, I thought to myself, “This is equivalent to a Medal of Honor citation, and they deserve the Medal of Honor for this action.” A panel of officers came to the same conclusion. So out of 20-some men that were selected to be reviewed, 22 were later upgraded to the Medal of Honor (before these upgrades in 2000, only one had been awarded previously, to PFC Sadao S. Munemori in 1946).

**Pell:** When you look back on this experience, what are your thoughts today?

**Miyamura:** Well, I am just very thankful that I am still around. As I mention in all of my interviews, I would like people to know I believe it is my faith in God that carried me through, and I encourage the young people of today to find God in their lives. I know he will carry them through, because in their darkest days, they will never be alone.

*One hundred and thirty-one men received the Medal of Honor for their service in Korea: 78 Army, 42 Marines, seven Navy, and four Air Force. Hiroshi Miyamura’s citation reads as following:*

*Near Taejon-ni, 24 and 25 April, 1951:*

Cpl. Miyamura, a member of Company H, distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy. On the night of 24 April, Company H was occupying a defensive position when the enemy fanatically attacked threatening

to overrun the position. Cpl. Miyamura, a machinegun squad leader, aware of the imminent danger to his men unhesitatingly jumped from his shelter wielding his bayonet in close hand-to-hand combat killing approximately 10 of the enemy. Returning to his position, he administered first aid to the wounded and directed their evacuation. As another savage assault hit the line, he manned his machinegun and delivered withering fire until his ammunition was expended. He ordered the squad to withdraw while he stayed behind to render the gun inoperative. He then bayoneted his way through infiltrated enemy soldiers to a second gun emplacement and assisted in its operation. When the intensity of the attack



High school students line up to shake the hands of “Hershey” Miyamura and fellow Medal of Honor recipient George “Bud” Day at the American Veterans Center’s annual conference. At the conference, students are given the opportunity to meet and hear the experiences, first-hand, of America’s greatest heroes.

necessitated the withdrawal of the company Cpl. Miyamura ordered his men to fall back while he remained to cover their movement. He killed more than 50 of the enemy before his ammunition was depleted and he was severely wounded. He maintained his magnificent stand despite his painful wounds, continuing to repel the attack until his position was overrun. When last seen he was fighting ferociously against an

overwhelming number of enemy soldiers. Cpl. Miyamura’s indomitable heroism and consummate devotion to duty reflect the utmost glory on himself and uphold the illustrious traditions on the military service.

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*Hiroshi Miyamura was presented with the first Raymond G. Davis Award for Distinguished Service in the Korean War by the American Veterans Center in 2006. The 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team—the Japanese American outfit that became the most decorated unit in American military history for its size and length of service—was honored with the 2007 Audie Murphy Award at the recent 10th Annual Conference held from November 8-10, 2007.*

*This, and many other episodes of Veterans Chronicles, can be heard at [www.americanveteranscenter.org](http://www.americanveteranscenter.org).*

**Korea**

# THE WAR IN VIETNAM

## AND THE MEDIA'S ROLE

BY EMILY TIBBITTS

*Editor's note: Emily Tibbitts is a junior at Ashland University, majoring in Political Science and Electronic Media Production with a minor in journalism. She is an Ashbrook Scholar in the Ashbrook Center for Public Affairs, and a recipient of Ashland's Presidential Scholarship. Emily served as an intern with the American Veterans Center in 2007, with her major research project being a study of the Vietnam War, the men and women who served there, and the media's role in the war. After much hard work, and diligent research, the final product is the following story.*

### THE EARLY YEARS

The war in Vietnam was not a war like any previously experienced by the American people. The United States was looking for a victory that was non-descript, un-defined and largely misunderstood, making it hard to comprehend why we were there, why we were not winning, and even more importantly, what winning would look like. With the United States military present only as advisors to the South Vietnamese Military for the first years of conflict, it was hard to convey the importance of the war, or why it was even our war. Americans were accustomed to battlefronts and pins on a map that showed progress against a clear enemy who posed an obvious threat to our nation's security. But in Vietnam, we were fighting a war that did not appear to be ours with an end that was difficult to recognize. Though we were preventing South Vietnam from falling to communism it appeared that we were always on the defense, playing world police in hopes to prevent future problems that may or may not arise. It was not successfully communicated to the American public that support of South Vietnam was necessary to prevent the spread of communism that could pose threats to our security.

After the conference in Geneva in 1954, Vietnam was separated as the North and South. The Vietnamese had little experience in participating in their own government, and struggled to form a structure of government that was effective. The North had an advantage by building upon the structure of Ho Chi Minh's communist party, but the

South was left with nothing at almost every level of government. As government organization began in South Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem rose to power gaining the support of Washington along the way. In an attempt to impede the rise of Ho Chi Minh, President Eisenhower provided Diem with an American mission in Vietnam. The U.S. eventually entered Vietnam as military advisors and its commitment continued to grow. The American presence was justified

by noting the relevance of the stability of South Vietnam in relationship to its own national security. In 1959 Eisenhower clarified that:

“Strategically, South Vietnam’s capture by the communists would bring their power several hundred miles into a hitherto free region. The remaining countries of Southeast Asia would be menaced by a great flanking movement.

The loss of South Vietnam would set in motion a crumbling process which could, as it progresses, have grave consequences for the forces of freedom.”

In spite of efforts to explain our presence, many Americans never fully grasped what it was they were to support. In Secretary of State Dean Rusk's nationwide broadcasted statement before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1966, he defended the war with similar arguments to Eisenhower's. He affirmed, “We are not there merely because we have power and like to use it...But we are in Viet-Nam because the issues can profoundly affect the nature of the world in which we and our children live.” He then continued to make clear that we were in “a process of preventing the expansion and extension of communist domination by the use of force against the weaker nations on the perimeter of communist power.” Acknowledging that “[communists] see the struggle in South Viet-Nam as part of a larger design for the steady extension of communist power through force and threat,” he declared, “We cannot leave while force and violence threaten them.”



Even with the threat of communism the American people came to resent military presence in Vietnam. In 1965, the year U.S. troops entered the country, the Gallup Poll revealed that only 24 percent of Americans felt that it was a mistake to commit such forces. As each year progressed the polls show that support for the war dwindled. After the 1968 battles of the Tet Offensive, 46 percent of Americans believed it was a mistake to send troops, and only 42 percent were still supportive of the decision. This was only the beginning of what would seem like endless feelings of regret from the American public.

Public frustration and misunderstanding is a clear problem concerning the history of the Vietnam War that must be properly critiqued to provide the most complete and accurate information possible. In order to do this the press must be examined, as it writes the first draft of history with unmatched influence on public opinion. This influence on opinion is also what sets the tone for years to come. The information provided to the public during the Vietnam War began with negligent reporting styles that often led to misinformation that was never corrected, re-evaluated or well rounded.

This trend was a symptom of a changing media. Suddenly print media was not the only source for news. *USA Today* reporter Richard Benedetto explains “[d]uring Vietnam, vivid daily reports of mayhem and dying were brought onto every living room TV screen, not only shocking Americans, but causing them to question whether the fight was worth it.” Between the inaccurate and sensationalized print media, the casualties from war being brought to our homes, and the natural perplexity of the issue, it is no surprise the country has never been able to understand and accept the Vietnam War as it did previous conflicts. This general lack of understanding is apparent when examining contemporary complaints comparing today’s war in Iraq with the conflict in Vietnam. These two very different wars have generated similar reactions that illustrate the media’s inadequacy to inform the public completely and effectively.

While a war was being broadcasted into our living rooms, print journalism was going through a transformation.

Journalists began to relay their skepticism of government and military actions through their reporting. It is unarguably the job of the press to present the truth in order to keep the government transparent and responsible to the people, but skepticism that leads coverage away from the truth is equally as dangerous as blindly trusting the state. In Vietnam, journalists seemed to find a way to manipulate the truth in order to convey their skepticism. One common practice was the use of unnamed sources to generalize an opinion, a dangerous tactic when trying to appropriately inform the public. While many recognize the turn in public opinion and media support after the Tet Offensive in 1968, Mark



A political cartoon published in the *New York Times* in 1962 before the media noticed the war.

Moyar, author of *Triumph Forsaken*, argues that journalists such as David Halberstam of the *New York Times* presented a contaminated truth during the early years of the war. Misinformation, confusion and critiques of allied performances were common themes from the beginning.

Not recognized as a top story, the Vietnam War drew many reporters who were young rookies becoming acquainted with the field. Halberstam, arriving in Saigon at age 28, was quick to trust as his source the war hero Col. John Paul Vann, who provided biased information concerning the battle of Ap Bac. Vann told Halberstam, and his

colleague Neil Sheehan of the *Washington Post*, that the failures of the battle were to be blamed on the South Vietnamese troops, who “...make the same goddamn mistakes over and over again in the same way.” The next day the *New York Times* headline of Halberstam’s article read: “VIETNAM DEFEAT SHOCKS U.S. AIDES: Saigon’s Rejection of Advice Blamed for Setback.” While the reporters recorded what they heard as accurately as possible, their source was giving them false information. The article continued to critique the performance of the battle, and referred to Vann only as a “United States advisor,” allowing the colonel to place unjustifiable blame on a party that was not given an equal chance to respond. While using un-named sources is an accepted practice among journalists to obtain sensitive information that might otherwise not be obtained, it is important not to misuse this privilege. The use of anonymous sources to place blame somewhere else is not considered responsible journalism.

Blaming mistakes on the shortcomings of South Vietnam gave Americans the opportunity to question their presence and not stand firmly behind the government. This skepticism in itself is not bad, but when being critical of such a sensitive matter it is important that a journalist is equally skeptical of his sources. Had Halberstam investigated this story further he would have discovered that Vann was pushing his own agenda to “expose South Vietnamese flaws as a means of pressuring the South Vietnamese into accepting the changes he favored.” He also would have learned that the shift in blame was to cover the mistakes that Vann had personally made. Failing to tell reporters the positive efforts put forth by the South Vietnamese forces or that the American advisors did not expect a force as large or persistent as the enemy they had faced, Vann successfully contaminated the picture of the South Vietnamese soldiers. If it was true that the South Vietnam was not listening to our advising, as Vann presented it through Halberstam, then our purpose of providing American advisors becomes unclear. While Vann’s accomplishments in other areas of the war are seen as honorable, this move to use reporters to push his agenda should not be allowed by a responsible press corps.



Lt. Col. John Paul Vann (second from right) briefs his colleagues in Vietnam. In 1962 and 1963, Vann served as an advisor to the ARVN, and was a leading advocate for the establishment of an effective Vietnamese military.

*Vann-Sheehan Papers*

Through anonymity Vann had the power to protect himself by making it appear as if all fault was to be attributed to the South Vietnamese, only making the American public’s understanding hazier. At this point no American troops were present, only advisors and it seemed as if the people still had little connection to the war. Vital to the public’s early understanding of the war the coverage of the battle presented inaccurate and incomplete information that could have been avoided by talking to more sources.

As poor reporting continued, parts of the U.S. government as well as public turned against the Diem regime. In June 1963 one of Halberstam’s leads read, “The conflict between the South Vietnamese Government and Buddhist priests is sorely troubling American officials here.” He continued the story without naming sources, saying “...Americans wish to dissociate themselves from the Saigon Government’s role in the religious cause.” A few months later he attributes to

unnamed sources the false information that “the decision to attack Buddhist pagodas and declare martial law in South Vietnam was planned and executed by Ngo Dinh Nhu, the President’s brother, without knowledge of the army.” This trend of accusatory misinformation created feelings of distrust that led the American government to turn a blind eye to the talk of a coup to overthrow President Diem.

To make clear judgments about President Diem’s reign and the need for change in command is difficult in hind sight, as it is clear that the overthrow of the President only enhanced instability causing setbacks in military effort and deeper American involvement. What can be seen is the anti-Diem bias communicated by the press. In August 1963, Halberstam wrote an article of the “somber unhappy time, just after the government’s repression of Buddhist leaders and the sacking of the country’s main pagodas.” The article, complete with a cartoon of Madame Nhu telling a reporter that “[She] is not [her] brother’s keeper,”

Halberstam successfully portrays feelings of hopelessness and, referring to the Vietnamese, “slow decay of the fiber of these people.” He also used un-named Vietnamese sources to say that “if this Government continues, there will be two kinds of people in South Vietnam,

those so angered and embittered by the Government’s actions that they will turn to the communists, and those who will simply sit on their hands and help neither side which will help the communists just as much.” With stories portraying such a suppressive government, it is hard to blame anyone who was opposed to a change in leadership in South Vietnam. America’s hands-off approach is evidence that officials such as U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge believed the country would not succeed with President Diem as leader. The growing dissatisfaction with the South Vietnam president led to a coup that ultimately resulted in the headline on the front page of the *New York Times*: “DIEM AND NHU ARE REPORTED SLAIN, ARMY RULING SAIGON AFTER COUP; KENNEDY REVIEWS VIETNAM POLICY.”

Only weeks after the assassination of President Diem, President Kennedy was shot, leaving the two allied countries

under unexpected new leadership. The first few years following the presidents' deaths were unsettled. The ground that was lost during this time caused the American military to become more involved in the effort. Describing that first year, two-tour Vietnam veteran and former Superintendent of West Point Lt. General Dave R. Palmer called it a "year of turmoil and transformation."

In 1964 North Vietnam made a strategic decision to enter the war while Americans "were standing at the threshold of becoming an American expeditionary force." The growing perplexity of the issue created an interesting position for journalists as the war in Vietnam began to take over both domestic and foreign politics. The U.S. involvement increased and the tone of headlines started to change from reports on events overseas to political bickering. In late March of 1964 a headline in the *New York Times* read: "POLICY IN VIETNAM DIVIDES SENATORS;" and in April: "GOLDWATER, NIXON URGE VIET-NAM WAR BE TAKEN INTO NORTH." With a presidential election on the horizon and an escalating misunderstood foreign war occurring, objective, accurate and complete reporting became complicated.

The correlation between the presidential election, the Vietnam War and the press is vital to the analysis of public opinion during 1964. With Barry Goldwater running a campaign on the idea that "extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice," Lyndon Johnson, the incumbent Democratic nominee, found himself in an easy campaign as he promoted the idea that Goldwater's talk of extremism was dangerous. He reassured voters that he was not Goldwater, and under his leadership he would protect the country from his opponent's extremism. The most memorable commercial from Johnson's campaign that illustrates the situation of the country and the power of the media was his "Daisy" commercial. In the commercial a young girl is seen picking daisies and counting down from ten until a stern male voice takes over and there is an atomic bomb explosion. Fear of war was prominent and it was obvious through both the political and media worlds as demonstrated through print and broadcast

journalism and the overwhelming defeat Goldwater suffered in November 1964.

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the day of the presidential election, a headline read in the *Washington Post*: "AMERICAN UNITS MAY BE SENT IN TO HELP GUARD VIET AIR BASES." In early February 1965 American bombings begin, followed by the arrival of the U.S. Marines on the shore near Da Nang two months later, starting a period of the war that brought about controversy among the American public. As previously stated, only 24 per cent of American people believed in 1965 that it was a mistake to send troops to Vietnam. But this support would not hold on for long, as people soon became weary of war and confused about the purpose of our involvement in the conflict. The drop in support is evident when further examining Secretary



President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles greet South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem at Washington National Airport in 1957.

Rusk's speech to the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations justifying America's presence in Vietnam to remind the public that on December 14, 1961 President Kennedy reaffirmed his commitment made at the end of the Geneva conference in 1954 that the United States was 'prepared to help the Republic of Viet-Nam to protect its people and to preserve its independence.'

While journalists at home were busy covering American political opinion in relationship to the war, a limited number of correspondents abroad continued with their reports from the battlefield. The U.S. ground troop commitment brought not only 500,000 troops by late 1967, but also a number of reporters and photographers to Saigon posts. The U.S. press and television contingent grew from the approximately 20 correspondents in 1965 to 131 in December of 1966 and to 207 by late 1967. Even amid the growth in the number of reporters placed in Vietnam, some major newspapers each with circulations well over one million such as the 31 *Gannett* papers, the 22 *Newhouse* papers, and the 6 *Knight* papers did not have permanent staff abroad to cover the conflict. Even papers with posts located in Vietnam were negligent to the importance of the conflict. The 1967 annual Associated Press Managing Editors convention barely mentioned Vietnam regardless of the large commitment of reporters AP had stationed in Vietnam.

On January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1968, the Vietnamese lunar New Year, what became known as the Tet Offensive began on a day that historically had been a time of peace during all of the years of the war. A surprising decision to “strike out on an audacious, novel strategic course in a Herculean effort to win the war” was made by NVA General Vo Nguyen Giap and President Ho Chi Minh. Allied intelligence knew that the enemy was preparing for something big, but they were unable to identify when it would be. It assumed that military action would happen before or after the first day of Tet, but not on the important Vietnamese holiday. North Vietnam avoided the conflict of not celebrating this important holiday by moving the celebrations to January 29<sup>th</sup> with an excuse that “had to do with the relative positions of heavenly bodies.” A cease-fire went into effect on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January and allied forces looked forward to a time of rest. Shortly after midnight Hanoi began a “most nearly successful campaign.”

### **TET: 1968**

Even though the communists suffered from “devastating losses on the battlefield,” the media provided them with “a psychological victory in world opinion.” This misreported ‘victory’ was never appropriately corrected or reevaluated, leaving Americans believing that their efforts were not enough to win the war.

Reporters were under intense conditions, especially for the wire services that were reporting immediately and had no time to digest the story the way news magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time* could. With pressure to break the story and in a position to believe the worst, the AP carried an erroneous story concerning whether or not members of the Viet Cong were inside the building of the U.S. embassy. AP would not let go of the story that Viet Cong were indeed inside the building despite reports from the State Department saying that they had only “got inside the compound, but they didn’t go into the building.” General William C. Westmoreland also reported similar information that the AP accredited, but justified their original claims by stating, “dozens of persons on the scene said some of the Vietcong were in the lower floors of the main building.” Twelve hours after the original story surfaced AP was still running the doubted story despite attempts to clear up the matter. Peter Arnett, the reporter of the misleading story blamed the instance on sloppy editing, as he tried correct his mistake by 2:09 am.

After the 1968 Tet Offensive there was a short-term period of public support stemming from the public’s “desire to

revenge the sneak attacks.” An early February Harris Survey, published in the *Washington Post* shows that “support among the American people for the war has risen sharply from 61 per cent in December to 74 per cent today.” Regardless of this immediate increase in support the public was disappointed with the lack of forcefulness from President Johnson. Throughout the year, the Gallup Poll illustrates that the public was beginning rethink the necessitous of troops in Vietnam. During the week of February 1<sup>st</sup> 1968 the Gallup Polls show that 46 per cent of the people believed that it was a mistake to send troops to Vietnam, while only 42 per cent continued to support the decision. Despite this sentiment of the public found by the Gallup Poll, the Harris Survey, shows that a 74 per cent of Americans still supported the war, but “less than a majority of the public believes the current battles in Vietnam will result in a U.S. Military victory.” The Harris survey illustrated that public instead believes that “war will continue for a very long time...neither side will win decisively, and that a settlement will be reached through negotiation.” Here we can see that the public had come to understand that this is not an easily decisive war, but had seemed to forget the difficulty in negotiating, as neither side was satisfied when Vietnam was split into two separate parts after the 1954 Geneva Conference.

When evaluating the press corps presence in Vietnam it can be seen that the “fact-finding manpower available in Saigon during the Tet Offensive was far less impressive than the official figures indicated.” Peter Braestrup, the Saigon Bureau Chief for the *Washington Post*, suggests that there were perhaps 60 resident newsmen of publications, agencies and television networks that had national audiences. To add to the lack of “information reaching the U.S. reader-viewer” these 60 reporters were working in competition of one another and not obtaining information collectively to ensure that stories were complete, accurate and well informed. The competitive atmosphere meant that each bureau had to match coverage of the same subject matter. Braestrup also criticizes the coverage of Vietnam by noting that focus was only on American presence, not the “complex and ‘political’ dimensions” that created this conflict. The public could not understand the war, as they had a cloudy view through only a small window into a conflict of great perplexity.

Not all reports of the Tet Offensive brought news of a defeat, but they were not necessarily news of a clear victory either. Peter Braestrup wrote an article in the *Washington Post* that read: “REDS IN SAIGON AREA BELIEVED HURT.” Despite some attempt to present a well rounded

story, Braestrup blames the media of presenting a “portrait of defeat for the allies” and does not see how this could be “counted as a triumph” for the media when historians have concluded that Tet was indeed a “severe military-political setback for Hanoi in the South.” He also continues to blame the press for never clarifying the confusion that was presented during February and early March, instead the “hasty assumptions and judgments...where simply allowed to stand.”

Around this time the talk of sending more troops became an issue. In early March 1968 the *Washington Post* ran an article explaining the strategy of General Westmoreland and the counterstrategy of General Giap. The headline of the article read: “IS THERE CHOICE ON MORE TROOPS?” The same day the *New York Times* ran an article emphasizing the idea that “THE MAN POWER CUPBOARD IS NEARLY BARE.” Reports of a major defeat during the Tet Offensive paired with a possible demand for more troops was a juxtaposition of news that a public did not want to hear.

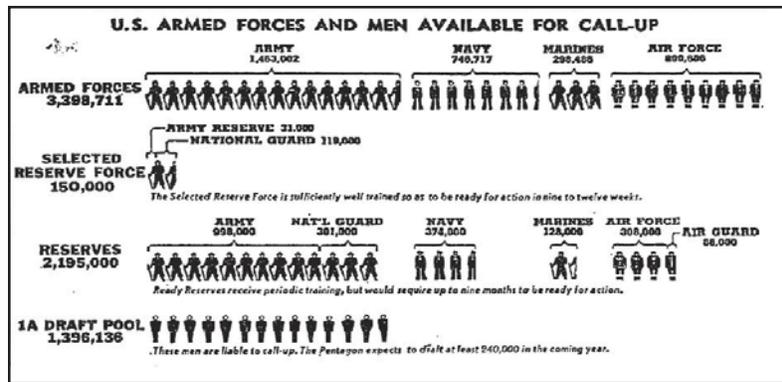


Diagram printed with an article discussing the ‘man power’ left in the country. *New York Times* (03/03/68)

Following the Tet Offensive the Viet Cong was no longer an issue as it had been wiped out during the fighting. This then meant that the war was between North Vietnam and its allied forces and South Vietnam and the United States. Throughout these final years of battle Americans began to demand an end to the fighting, unaware of the progress that was being made, especially after General Abrams took command. A *New York Times* article in early March covers potential Republican nominee, Richard Nixon’s desire to “end the war in Vietnam.” Nixon is quoted saying that “[i]f in November this war is not over, after all of this power has been at their disposal, then I say that American people will be justified to elect new leadership.”

Americans still were not willing to end the war at any cost, as they saw winning as a priority. Yet, incomplete and inaccurate coverage of a war that people did not feel were making any progress in was resulting in a war weary nation. In an article on the front page of the *Washington Post*, Johnson was attributed with the idea that “peace will come to Vietnam.” The article continued to present that Johnson believed that “[t]he courage of the ‘simple people

in Vietnam’ was largely unreported...[and] unnoticed in the anguish of war.” The president also addressed that “progress is going to be harder to see and harder to measure. But the victories you win are the ones on which peace will be built in Vietnam.” The president’s words affirm the difficulty and confusion that was attached to the war. The American people were weary of war and were looking for a way to end this conflict that had been slowly swelling for over a decade. Johnson reminded the public that “[t]he will of the Vietnamese people did not ‘break under fire...Neither shall ours break under frustration.” This public pep talk was reflective of the position held by the American public as well as other politicians and presidential candidates.

Much like the election of 1964, the looming presidential election of 1968 made Vietnam a domestic political issue.

In late April, Senator Robert Kennedy rejected the idea of the ‘Domino Theory’ and asserted that “The worst thing we could do would be to take as our mission the suppression of disorder...everywhere...” He asserted in his speech that “Vietnam is only Vietnam. It will not settle the fate of Asia or of America-much less the fate of the world.” He is quoted

on the front page of the *Washington Post* stressing that “[w]e should give no more assistance to a government against any internal threat than that government is capable of using itself through its own agencies.” The article follows this statement by including that there were “repeated bursts of applause from 3800 Indiana University students” in an overflowing auditorium.

Many of the headlines at this time were concerned with the politics of the war and the public was being informed mainly on what each presidential candidate or member of Congress felt should be done in Vietnam. Little was being done to inform Americans of the conflict as front-page headlines were consistently drawing attention to stories such as “...NIXON PLEDGES END OF WAR” or “KENNEDY REJECTS DRAFT...” While this information is important during an election year it is still important that the public fully understands the conflict, not only American opinions concerning the war.

A large amount of the pre-election reporting in 1968 was concerned with domestic opinions and political conflicts that disregarded the war itself as well as the politics of South Vietnam. To say that there was no coverage of military action in Vietnam would be not only over exaggeration, but a disregard of the truth. The coverage of death tolls continue as it is announced in April of 1969 that “US DEATHS IN WAR PASS KOREA TOTAL...” Two days after this report the Vietnam War sees the front page again with the headline “NIXON HAS BEGUN PROGRAM TO END WAR IN VIETNAM...”

In the years following the Tet Offensive the belief that sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake grew in popularity. The Kent State shootings illustrate the turmoil and frustration the American public was feeling at that time as well as our general misunderstanding of the conflict. The students were protesting the military expansion into Cambodia when the protest grew out of hand and National Guardsmen killed four. The next morning the front page of the *New York Times* was the headline: “4 KENT STATE STUDENTS KILLED BY TROOPS” accompanied by two pictures, one of a student lying dead as a girl screams and another of the guardsmen in what could be misconstrued as a war zone. Two days after the Kent State tragedy, the *New York Times* reported the closure of 80 colleges due to protest and accused the Nixon Administration of “failing youth.” The Gallup Polls show that in May 1970 only 28 per cent believed that it was not a mistake to enter Vietnam.

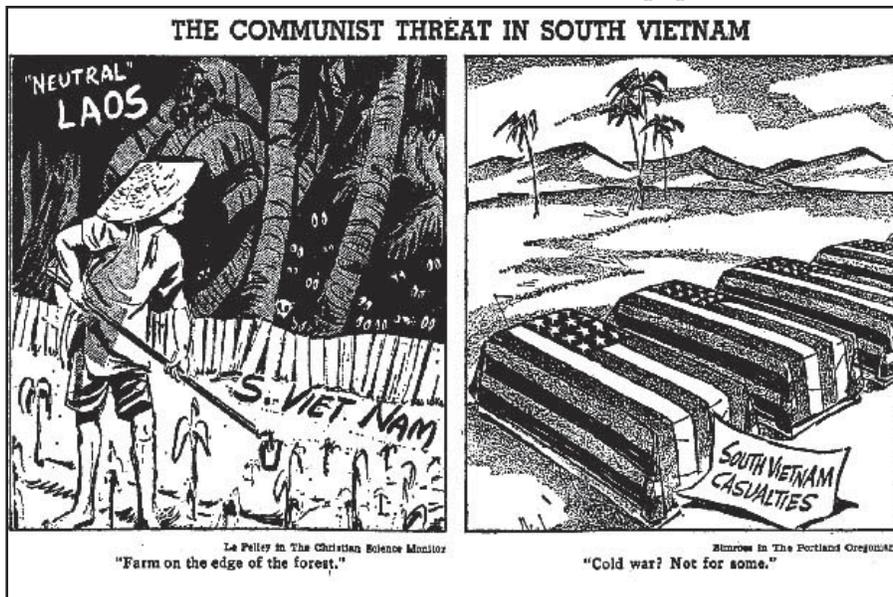
## THE END

In June of 1969 it was announced that two Army brigades and a Marine unit were to be the first to pull out of Vietnam. The next month The *New York Times* ran an article on the front-page with a picture of soldiers being greeted by President Nixon upon their arrival. Later in September Nixon made a 50,000 man cut to the draft but asked for

time for ending the war insisting that the “other side will negotiate only if the U.S. backs his proposals.”

Throughout 1971 the conflict in Vietnam was front-page news, but the news coverage still emphasized the political conflict and differences in opinion, with little time spent concerning the actual war. Headlines brought forward the dissension that was felt by the American people, “VETERANS DISCARD MEDALS IN WAR PROTEST AT CAPITOL,” “MEMORIAL DAY OBSERVED TRADITIONALLY AND BY PROTESTS OF WAR.” While it is debatable as to whether these headlines were a reflection of a popular sentiment shared by many Americans

or an encouragement of anti-war protests, it is clear that the country was uneasy with the United States’ position in the war. Little explanation was provided as to why U.S. forces entered Cambodia and Laos and the public was worn entering the second decade of this misunderstood war.



Political cartoon illustrating the advantage the North Vietnamese held in the restriction of U.S. forces from Laos and Cambodia.

By the middle of 1971 many of the front-page stories in

the *New York Times* concerned retrospective observations and the publication of the Pentagon Papers. While this provided hard information to the public concerning the war, many of the headlines have subjective tones that focus attention to past mistakes. “PENTAGON PAPERS: VIETNAM STUDY LINKS ’65-’66 G.I. BUILD UP TO FAULTY PLANNING,” and “DECEIT IN ’64 RACE DENIED BY RUSK,” are two headlines published in early July that illustrates the media’s attention to retrieving past information to add to the heated debate about American activity in Vietnam.

In March 1972, the year of another presidential election, the communists started a drive that rolled over in three separate waves, beginning with South Vietnam’s northern provinces then to the central highlands to the coast and ending at the area above Saigon. These attacks caused a great number of military and civilian casualties on both sides. American forces in Vietnam were restricted and the

dissent expressed in America was playing a role in the war. North Vietnam's prime minister, Pham Van Dong, was public with his opinion that "[Nixon] has everything to lose except the honorable exit we are determined to enable him to make."

It was not until January of 1973 that it was confirmed that the United States would be leaving Vietnam. While the peace accord had been reached and feelings of relief came to the nation, some still expressed hesitation in how long the peace might be able to last, including South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu. Thieu's reservations were justified, as he declared in 1974 that war had begun again only to be fought for a year before South Vietnam fell to the communists on April 30, 1975.

### **MEDIA'S ROLE**

It was not the media's fault South Vietnam collapsed without the support of the American military. Vietnam was too complicated of a war to place blame on only one party, but the media did not help in clarifying the war for anyone. It is difficult to conclude that the tone of the media was what urged the American government to pull out troops, and it is even a more complex issue to say that the U.S. presence in South Vietnam would have led to peace with no fear of communist takeover. Nonetheless Americans did not have a complete understanding that our presence in Vietnam was justified by our commitment to stopping the spread of communism through our promise to support South Vietnam.

The media's failure to communicate to the public during the war encouraged a mix of feelings concerning our retrospective opinion of the war that has seemed to result in a common tone of disrespect for the effort. Evidence of this lack of respect is seen through false depictions of the disheveled Vietnam veteran that generalizes a generation of men as tragic survivors of this horrible war. Variations of the myth instill ideas that a majority of Vietnam veterans suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), have high suicide rates, and cannot keep a job. Suffering from PTSD less than World War II veterans and having suicide rates no different than the non-veteran, the Vietnam veteran has blended into society and taken on responsibilities at both a respected working class and professional level.

Today we hear a common cry for "not another Vietnam" when discussing the war in Iraq. This statement is telling on multiple levels and can be used by those on either side

of the fence. One understanding of the statement shows that the public views Vietnam as a failure and that this war is heading in the same direction. It also illustrates that the public does not think that it was the troop withdrawal that caused failure in Vietnam, but that defeat occurred much earlier than 1973 and we should have withdrawn much sooner. The public's desire to remove troops also proves that they did not see the conflict in Vietnam as a clear and present danger at the time or believed that it would be in the future. This plea for a complete troop exit strategy is not something that occurred after World War II; there are still troops in Germany and Japan. On the other side it is argued that we pulled out too soon and admitted an unwarranted defeat that cannot happen again.

A significant aspect of the comparison between Vietnam and Iraq that is often overlooked is that these were two different wars, under completely different circumstances yet they have created very similar responses at home. This seems to show that the public will only accept a war where they can see a clear immediate threat to our national security. It is the responsibility of the media to provide information so that well informed decisions and opinions surface ensuring what is best for the country now and in the future. Responsible for the first draft of history, the press is charged with immense power that must not be taken lightly meaning that the performance of the press should be often evaluated, critiqued and corrected.

The failure to communicate with the American public during the Vietnam War explicitly reveals the shortcomings of the press, as well as the great power and responsibility that is by nature a concern for the institution. Americans reacted to the information that was provided with no way of determining the validity of each report. Misused anonymous sources, unchecked information, sensationalized broadcasts, and uncorrected mistakes all led to an uninformed public that must now reexamine the conflict in order to properly understand the reality of the situation.

*Sources for this article include Triumph Forsaken by Mark Moyar, (Cambridge University Press: 2006), Summons of the Trumpet by Dave R. Palmer (Presidio Press: 1978), The Big Story by Peter Braestrup (Presidio Press: 1994), Vietnam: A History, by Stanley Karnow (Penguin Books: 1984), and Vietnam: The Necessary War by Michael Lind, as well as newspaper and magazine articles contemporary to the war.*

*The editors would like to thank Lt. General Dave Palmer, Dr. Mark Moyar, and Dr. Lewis Sorley for being available for interviews, suggestions, and support.*

**VALOR**

# VIETNAM AND BEYOND: THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY

BY JOHN M. DEL VECCHIO

This may sound odd, but I remember the cold in Viet Nam more than the heat. Maybe it's because I expected the heat, expected those days when the hot air sucked the breath from your lungs. But I had never been told about the cold, up north in I Corps, about the chill effect of the northeast monsoons from October to April—the opposite of most of the country which was hit by the southwest monsoons from April to October. The NE monsoons were not like those from the SW. The latter were caused by prevailing winds coming from the India Ocean across the Gulf of Siam, rising up the east side of the Annamites, building all day until mid-afternoon when it would pour like crazy for three hours. The NE monsoons came in from the Pacific—cold, gray, oppressive. Once they began in earnest, they didn't stop. 1970-



71 was a bad weather year in I Corps. By late October the rain was continuous, every day all day, until late February. Hue flooded. We ran rescue missions along with MedCaps. The humidity was so thick—this was cold, dank humidity—in the rear we threw away all the mattresses because they were soggy, wouldn't dry, became moldy. Every few weeks there was a break lasting perhaps an hour. The roads of Camp Eagle were linear morasses, nearly impassable red-orange muck 12 to 24 inches deep. When the sun did break through it would immediately dry the surface of the mud down to about ¼ inch, and the wind would pick up the dust and stick it to every exposed surface. If you look at pictures of guys from that time, you'll see everyone looks orange—black guys, white guys, brown guys—all orange. On Christmas Eve 1970 I was in a foxhole atop the steep pinnacle of OP Checkmate. Cold, cold, cold—cold because all we had were our jungle fatigues, jungle sweaters, jungle boots soaking in the mud and slosh, and thin nylon poncho liners. That night it snowed. Only brief flurries, but snow! The good thing about the rains, when they were at their heaviest, was the NVA couldn't move. As you got away from the coast, the deluge lessened but the fog thickened.

The mountains were soaked in. In early October I spent eight days on Firebase Whip at the edge of the A Shau. It soaked in the first afternoon. We couldn't get in Medevacs or resupply birds, and a C-130 aerial drop of food on the fifth or sixth day missed the hill and was never found. On the eighth day the sky broke—just long enough to withdraw the tubes and evacuate all personnel.

I mention this cold because everyone knows about the heat. The heat is part of the “standard narrative,” the “mainstream interpretation,” the “pressroom boilerplate,” or in a term I prefer, an element of the “ambient cultural story.” The narrative, the boilerplate, the cultural story isn't accurate—is always, at best, only partially correct. And this is a problem.

We have a media problem in this country. And it is not simply media bias. It took me years to understand that there was a problem, more years to get a grasp on definable elements. I did not understand it in the fall of 1972 when I wrote the first draft of *The 13<sup>th</sup> Valley* in an old farmhouse in the woods of Maine. In early 1975 I was living in California when South Viet Nam was falling. Locally, defunct Hamilton Air Force Base was reopened to handle the influx of refugees. Newspapers and news magazines carried daily articles following the collapse, and for a year articles about who we were as the American military in Southeast Asia. I didn't recognize the verbal pictures they painted. I didn't know the extent of the inaccuracies, but I knew they had it all wrong if they were lumping the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne (Airmobile) into their generalizations. From late 1976 to mid-1979 I researched and wrote and rewrote the story of *The 13<sup>th</sup> Valley*. I was out to set the record straight for the One-Oh-One. I didn't disbelieve the news I was seeing, I simply thought they were describing others.

My education about the war and about Southeast Asia did not truly begin until after that novel was published in 1982.

Within the next year I received approximately 3000 letters, perhaps 60% from veterans, many asking if I was describing a particular operation of the writer's unit—a very broad swath of Marine and Army units covering almost the entire duration of the American conventional force ground commitment. There was a repeat refrain, “We operated like that,” or, “Yeah, we were good like that.”

“Huh?!” My thoughts at the time... “But the media said...” Over and over again, “This is what we did, how we did it, what we accomplished.” A long string of successful operations—some relatively easy, some against immense odds. Over and over again descriptions of progress, pacification, protection of populated areas. That letter-base, along with hundreds of follow-up interviews and deep involvement with veterans' causes and issues became the source and impetus for what was to be my second novel, *Carry Me Home*.

A section of that story was to be about a Cambodian boy captured by the Khmer Rouge and re-educated in cruelty and terror. The more I researched about the communist side, the interconnections between the rival gangs—that's really what the communists and today's terrorists are—in Hanoi and the backwaters of Cambodia, the support of the Maoist from China and the Stalinist from the Soviet Union, the more my understandings and attitude changed. As a college student on the late 1960s I'd been told over and over, “There is no such thing as Good and Evil, there are only shades of gray.” No one, absolutely no honest person, can spend five years studying the lead up to and purposeful implementation of the Cambodian Holocaust without believing in the existence of evil. That small section of *Carry Me Home* became *For The Sake of All Living Things*. *Carry Me Home* was published four years later.

In *Carry Me Home* I put the media on trial for its part in the final outcome of the war. The story is perhaps more complex than most novels; there's lots that proceeds it—one doesn't hit the Opening and Closing Arguments and Highlights of the Great Media Trial until page 734:

*“The Media,” Bobby began, “is hereby defined as the information promulgation branch of our society... [It] includes, but is not limited to the major news organizations of radio, TV and the press; the entertainment adjuncts of film, TV, the visual and audio arts and literature; plus public historical, political and commercial presentations. We name here as co-defendants the Free World and United States television networks; news magazines and newspapers; film studios; academia... the national political parties and their information arms...”*

*“Bailiff, read the charges...”*

*“Sir,” Kevin Riffkin acknowledged Wapinski... “The media is hereby charged with: collusion with the enemy resulting in Communist victories in Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia; with willful misrepresentation leading to the polarization of American society; with conspiracy to undermine the U.S. government and military; with the malicious skewing of information which has damaged the democratic aspirations of peoples around the world; and with incompetence.”*

*“How does the defendant plea?” Wapinski asked.*

*“Not guilty on all counts,” Sherrick answered.*

Several years after *Carry Me Home* was published I delivered a paper at Texas Tech titled *The Importance of Story*. The essence of the theory: *The story we tell ourselves of ourselves, individually or culturally, creates our self-image. Behavior, individually and culturally, is consistent with self-image. Story determines behavior. As story changes, self-image changes; as self-image changes, behavior changes; as behavior changes, the results of behavior changes. Personal and cultural story have ramifications.*

Because story has ramifications, it is necessary to analyze and to understand the current story that we are telling ourselves of ourselves. If one sees oneself as a writer or as a builder, as a soldier or a patriot, as a radical or a victim, one behaves in a pattern consistent with that self-image. Behavior is consistent with self-image. That is a basic tenet. There are individual deviations, and group self-image is necessarily more complex than individual self-image; still self-image controls attitudes and actions.

When we, as a nation, believed in Manifest Destiny, our policies and actions reflected that belief. When we viewed ourselves as an altruistic nation willing to go anywhere, to bear any burden in the defense of freedom, our actions and foreign policy tended to be in accord with those principles, with that idealism. Again, from *Carry Me Home*—one character addressing the mock trial expressed his views of our altered cultural story:

*Now we exist in a time in America where we believe in looking out for number one, in the me generation, in getting our piece of the pie no matter whom we screw-over or abandon. Once duty was considered a virtue. Now it is equated with depravity. The ancient Greeks used to say, Ethos anthropou daimon. A person's story is his fate. And a nation's myth, the story it tells itself of itself, is a nation's fate.*

The behavior of government often is a reaction to the ambient cultural story. The story is often created by the media. The media often skews the story. For whatever reason the story is skewed, the behavior or reaction then is often inappropriate for the reality of the situation. The ‘defense counsel’ in *Carry Me Home* explained it this way:

*There is a politically correct way to think about the Viet Nam War. There is an academically acceptable perspective from which to write about the war. There is a socially agreeable position; and there are media-tolerable project-ibles. These manners, perspectives, positions and projections have fluctuated over the years but have swayed only slightly since 1968 when London Johnson declined to run for a second full term, and when Walter Cronkite converted and established an acceptable antiwar posture for non-radicals. That these ossified perspectives are narrow seems to have bothered few politicians, academics, John and Jane Does, reporters, editors or filmmakers. And after nearly a decade and a half most everyone is in agreement—and most everyone, because of the exact narrowness of the perspective, is half wrong.*

More recently a friend, veteran and Southeast Asia scholar William Laurie, wrote to me stating:

*Films and pseudo-documentaries can be as insidiously deceptive and misleading as they are convincing... “Hearts and Minds,” “The Uncounted Enemy,” and the PBS 10-part Viet Nam pseudo-history are cases in point. Lacking sufficient knowledge and background information, an unwitting viewer emerges convinced of the veracity of these ... deceitful distortions of history. They are verifiably fraudulent hallucinations artfully peddled, and too widely accepted as truth.*

Today, there is a new crop of films—dramas and documentaries—about the American military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because of concerns about how our new ambient cultural story is being developed, and specifically the story as it relates to our military, and because of a belief in the power of heroic stories to influence macro behavior for the good, I have joined with four other combat veterans with service from Viet Nam to the current conflict in Iraq, to form a new multi-media company, Charlie Foxtrot Entertainment. We have further affiliated ourselves with

long-time Hollywood military advisor, Marine Corps Captain (Ret.) Dale Dye, who will direct our first feature length film, *City of Fire*. We will leave it to more traditional Hollywood types to seek out and tell the stories of the worst of the American military. Without whitewash, we will tell the stories of the best, of the heroic, of the inspiring—stories that are poignant and thrilling, that accurately portray the guts and sacrifices of our men and women in uniform. We hope viewers will leave the theater desiring to emulate these heroes—heroes that have inspired us. Below is a portion of our mission statement:

In large measure America is a nation of empathetic, good-hearted people who care about the suffering of others around the world. We oppose injustice, and hate tyranny and despotism. We send our fighting men and women to the far corners of the earth to assist those in dire need, and to do battle in the global war on terrorism.

Despite being inundated via radio, television, newspapers, magazines and movies, we seldom see our nation or its military portrayed in a positive, or even realistic, light. Often the images are negative. Rarely

do the show the actions and accomplishments of America’s military as constructive, inspiring or heroic. As a people, we are tormented by contradictory images; and we are confused about why others don’t understand who we are, or for what we stand.

Charlie Foxtrot Entertainment strives to inspire. As Theodore Roosevelt noted, heroic stories “...possess... the power to thrill the souls of men... to lift them out of their common selves to the heights of high endeavor.”

*John M. Del Vecchio is a Bronze Star decorated veteran of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) in Vietnam. He is author of the classic Vietnam War novels The 13th Valley, Carry Me Home, and For the Sake of All Living Things. He is co-founder of Charlie Foxtrot Entertainment, a veteran owned and operated film production and publishing company. To learn more about the work of Charlie Foxtrot, visit [www.charliefoxtrotfilms.com](http://www.charliefoxtrotfilms.com).*

**VALOR**

# SO THAT OTHERS MIGHT LIVE

## THE STORY OF JASON DUNHAM

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*On January 11, 2007, President George W. Bush presented the Medal of Honor to the family of Marine Corporal Jason Dunham. "Since World War II," the President said, "more than half of those who have been awarded the Medal of Honor have lost their lives in the action that earned it. On a dusty road in western Iraq, Cpl. Dunham gave his own life so that men under his command might live."*

*It was on that road in Iraq that Jason Dunham fulfilled a promise made to the Marines under his command—that each of them would go home alive. Near the Iraqi town of Husaybah, Cpl. Dunham and his men were ambushed by insurgents hiding in a car. While wrestling with one of the insurgents, Cpl. Dunham noticed a grenade in the man's hand, which he soon dropped to the ground next to them, and at the feet of two of Dunham's fellow Marines. Acting immediately and instinctively, Cpl. Dunham covered the grenade with his Kevlar helmet. The ensuing blast left Dunham grievously wounded, but the two other Marines, while hurt, were able to walk away. Eight days later, Jason Dunham succumbed to his wounds. Had he not acted, all three Marines would have been killed.*



*Maj. Trent Gibson was commander of Kilo Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marines—the company in which Cpl. Dunham served. Sgt. Jason Sanders served alongside Cpl. Dunham, and witnessed the act which led to his receiving the Medal of Honor. In this issue, we have asked them both to share their memories of Jason Dunham, and his own story of valor.*

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*Jason L. Dunham was born on November 10, 1981—the 206<sup>th</sup> birthday of the United States Marine Corps. At a young age, he excelled at sports, and displayed a natural ability to lead. He took that ability with him to the Marines, where he would be assigned to Kilo Company, Third Battalion, Seventh Marine Regiment in September of 2003. Shortly after, then-Captain Trent Gibson, commander of Kilo Company of 3/7, sought to reorganize the company following its first tour in Iraq, making it better suited for the unconventional warfare the Marines faced in Iraq. Each platoon, squad, and fire team needed leaders who could be counted on to make sure each Marine was fully prepared for battle.*

**Maj. Gibson:** When I reorganized the company, I made the decision to spread load the new blood, as well as the weapons specialists and leadership and expertise in the company so that all four rifle platoons would be as equally capable as possible. So I dumped the company into a pile and told the platoon commanders and sergeants to put

together a draft of their top choices for leaders, starting with squad leaders, fire team leaders, and weapons specialists. Then-SSgt. John Ferguson, platoon sergeant of Kilo Four (4<sup>th</sup> platoon), chose Cpl. Dunham as one of his first picks to be a squad leader, despite the fact that Dunham had come from a machine gun section and was not a rifle squad leader. Still, everyone in the company had

already gotten the idea that Cpl. Dunham was a very capable leader. He was genuine, engaged, and a concerned leader, who commanded the respect of his seniors, subordinates, and peers alike, because he was a genuine individual. He did not lead by intimidation—he led by example.

*Cpl. Dunham quickly became among the most respected Marines in Kilo Company, and he worked to live up to the highest standards of the Corps. His dedication to his fellow Marines went above and beyond the call. Prior to 3/7's redeployment to Iraq, he told another Marine of his desire to extend his enlistment to remain with the battalion for its entire tour. "I want to make sure everyone makes it home alive," he said.*

*On April 14, 2004, Cpl. Dunham and the Marines of Kilo Company, 3/7 were serving in western Iraq, and preparing for a patrol in the town of Karabilah, not far from the Syrian border. Their mission was to link up with the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Matthew Lopez, at the town's police station, and to conduct a site survey of an adjacent water treatment facility which the company was to occupy as the base for an upcoming patrolling operation.*

**Maj. Gibson:** We were to conduct patrols along with the Karabilah police department, which had just received 36 new recruits that had been trained up at a homemade police academy that our MP platoon had put together for us. Col.

Lopez had sent them up for me to use in Karabilah, and the best way for me to get them trained was to put them into a patrolling operation with us. During the four-day operation, SSgt. Ferguson and 4<sup>th</sup> platoon were to be in charge of perimeter security while the company occupied the patrol base.

After the battalion commander's patrol had left the police station and headed west toward the Lima Company position near the border checkpoint with Syria—about 10 minutes after we had arrived at the treatment plant—we heard a number of explosions to the west. Lima Company had been getting mortared on a daily basis for the previous two weeks, and catching the guys who were shooting at them had proved problematic. This sounded like an opportunity to get a jump on the insurgents who were mortaring Lima Company, where we thought the explosions were coming from. Cpl. Dunham came up to me when he heard the explosions, and I said to him, "What do you think?" "I think Lima is getting hit," he told me. So I said, "Well let's go get them!"

Sgt. Sanders called up our vehicles which had been patrolling around the police station and in Karabilah, and Cpl. Dunham got the patrol pushing west on the run, to link up with those vehicles. By the time we linked up, we had figured out from the radio traffic that it wasn't Lima Company that was getting hit, it was the battalion commander's patrol that had been ambushed in an area that we called the "H-K Triangle." It was a little triangular shaped village between Husaybah to the west by the border, which was Lima Company's area of operations, and Karabilah, in my zone. Most of the insurgent activity during our previous three weeks in the area had taken place in the H-K. By the time we realized it was the battalion commander's patrol being hit, we were right at the H-K Triangle, and right near the thick of it as an RPG flew over one of our trucks. After we saw the RPG, we realized we were at the ambush site and took up a position against a wall for cover. Cpl. Dunham came over to me, and we decided to start pushing south through the H-K to clear

out the ambush, while the vehicles went to the southern end of the H-K in order to cordon it off to keep the insurgents from escaping. Cpl. Dunham said he would take one fire team and start pushing south on the eastern edge, and I would go with the other fire team toward the western edge. The two fire teams pushed south, a few hundred meters from each other, when we ran into several vehicles attempting to get around the ambush.

**Sgt. Sanders:** We had been in this area before, and noticed that there were a lot of vehicles in a place where there normally is not. Cpl. Dunham looked at SSgt. Ferguson right off the bat and said, "Let's do it," and went out to inspect the vehicles, since we knew that something fishy was going on. We were moving along at a pretty quick pace, when at the second or third vehicle down, it all started happening.



The Medal of Honor is presented to the family of Cpl. Jason Dunham during a White House ceremony on January 11, 2007. Cpl. Dunham was the second service member to be awarded the Medal of Honor in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the first Marine to receive our nation's highest military honor for heroism in Iraq.

A guy jumped out of the car, then a couple more jumped out, and one of them started wrestling with Cpl. Dunham. Pfc. Kelly Miller and LCpl. William Hampton ran up to them, and I was right behind, when Cpl. Dunham yelled for us to watch the insurgent's hands. The next thing I knew, there was an explosion, and I thought I was looking at four dead guys right in front of me. That's when Miller got up and started walking back toward me. I told him to get the hell out of there and back behind the wall. He and Hampton were bloody, and beat up pretty bad, but alive. The insurgent jumped up, took a look at me, and took off running. I shot him a few times, and told SSgt. Ferguson that I was going down to get Dunham. Everything went into slow motion—I started making radio requests for medevacs and tried to get anybody there that I could to help the three wounded Marines.

I knew Cpl. Dunham was in pretty bad shape. I tried talking to him, and though he was still breathing, I could tell he wasn't right. Out of nowhere, one of the corpsmen appeared, "Doc Chops" we called him, because of his sideburns, and he started administering first aid to Cpl. Dunham.

The way he was laying on the ground, I could tell that Cpl. Dunham had placed his body over the grenade. But it wasn't until later on, when Maj. Gibson and I were looking around, that we saw the shredded pieces of fiberglass from the Kevlar of Cpl. Dunham's helmet. That's when I put it all together, and knew exactly what he had done.

**Maj. Gibson:** The next day, Sgt. Sanders told me of a conversation that Cpl. Dunham had with some of the other Marines in the platoon, including the platoon commander, Lt. Robinson, and SSgt. Ferguson. In their conversation, Cpl. Dunham spoke of how it might be possible to use a helmet to cover a grenade and shield the blast. He was convinced that if you did it fast enough, it would work, and he even demonstrated how it could be done. It was clear that he had thought about this, and even rehearsed it. Lt. Robinson had warned him that the helmet alone would not be enough to stop the blast, and that it would still mess you up, so it was no wonder that after his actions, we found the helmet in two large pieces and about two thousand smaller ones.

Knowing that the helmet had been subjected to a massive concussion, and then hearing this story from Sgt. Sanders, it was obvious what Cpl. Dunham had done. I walked right over to the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Lopez, and spoke with him about it. I told him that I think he covered the hand grenade with his helmet on purpose. He said to me, "Yeah, it sounds like it. And that is Medal of Honor material." So, I went back to the company, had Lt. Robinson draft up a version of the citation, then myself and my company executive officer, Lt. Salcido, worked on it and submitted the final draft up to Lt. Col. Lopez, who forwarded it to division.

*Though Cpl. Jason Dunham survived the initial blast, he never regained consciousness. He was evacuated to Baghdad, and then Germany, before finally making it home to the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda Maryland where the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Michael Hagee, pinned the Purple Heart on his hospital bed's pillow. Eight days after the actions which saved Pfc. Miller and LCpl. Hampton, Jason Dunham died.*

*On November 10, 2006, the Marine Corps 231<sup>st</sup> birthday—and Jason Dunham's 25<sup>th</sup> birthday—in a ceremony at the opening of the National Museum of the Marine Corps at Quantico, Virginia, President Bush announced that Cpl. Dunham would be awarded the Medal of Honor. He was the first Marine to be awarded the Medal of Honor for Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the second American serviceman overall. What kind of reaction does this*

*bring to the Corps as a whole? Obviously there is pride, and recognition, but at the same time it is much tempered by the loss of a comrade and friend that is tremendously difficult to bear.*

**Maj. Gibson:** The award produces a sacred reverence for Cpl. Dunham's actions. And the military service, as a whole, fundamentally relies on the notion of self-sacrifice for the greater good. And, Cpl. Dunham, the man, exemplified that. His actions on that day were really just a confirmation of not only who he was as a person, and as a Marine, but also of a long, proud tradition of self-sacrifice and service to others that the Marines, soldiers, sailors, and airmen have established throughout our nation's history.

**Sgt. Sanders:** He was a real human being. I know that he will forever be in our history, but he was a real person, who cared for us all. He loved what he was doing, and never forgot what he was doing. It takes a strong person—a very strong person—to talk about something, but then go ahead and act in the manner that he did, in the place that he did. I will never forget it.

**Maj. Gibson:** As a Marine, there are three things that I believe in: leadership by example, self-sacrifice for the greater good, and that one man can make a difference. These three virtues describe what kind of person Jason Dunham was. In that one act of selflessness, covering the grenade with his own body and saving the lives of his fellow Marines, he exemplified self-sacrifice for the greater good, leadership by example, and the fact that one man can make a difference. He made them all a promise, upon deployment, that he was going to bring them all back alive. In that one moment of selflessness, he held that promise true. He gave his life so that others might live. Every Marine in his squad came home alive. He fulfilled his promise. And now, nearly three years later, Sgt. Bill Hampton is the proud father of a baby girl. That would not have been possible without Cpl. Dunham's sacrifice. Life begets life.

*Jason Dunham's story is told in the book, The Gift of Valor by Michael Phillips, available in bookstores nationwide. Additionally, the Corporal Jason L. Dunham Memorial Scholarship Foundation has been created in his memory. Its mission is to provide college scholarships to Marines and Corpsmen who wish to further their education. To learn more, visit [www.jasonsmemorial.org](http://www.jasonsmemorial.org).*

**AVQ**

Coming to Washington, DC this Memorial Day...

# The Fourth Annual National Memorial Day Parade Presented by the American Veterans Center



Grand Marshals of the 2007 National Memorial Day Parade, our service members wounded in the line of duty, with Honorary Marshal Gary Sinise, star of *CSI: New York* and *Forrest Gump*.

**MONDAY, MAY 26, 2008  
2:00 PM  
CONSTITUTION AVENUE  
WASHINGTON, DC**

[www.nationalmemorialdayparade.com](http://www.nationalmemorialdayparade.com)

The American Veterans Center cordially invites you to join 250,000 of your fellow Americans on May 26, 2008, as we honor all who have served, in the Fourth Annual National Memorial Day Parade. Proceeding down Constitution Avenue along the National Mall will be nearly 5,000 individuals from over 200 veterans groups, marching bands, youth organizations, and active duty military personnel, each helping us to honor American service men and women who have answered the call of duty from the American Revolution through Operation Iraqi Freedom.

On our military's most sacred day, we hope that you will join us as we pay tribute to the sacrifices of our heroes of every generation.



## *A Planned Gift to the American Veterans Center is a gift planted in the hearts and minds of America's youth*

America's veterans meeting with America's youth; we believe that that is the shortest path to opening a mind, shaping a heart, and endowing a spirit with knowledge, love and appreciation for our nation—and those who have sacrificed so much to preserve her.

And everyday we reach out to the next generation and arrange opportunities for our veterans and youth to meet, shake hands and learn the lessons of America's past from those that lived it.



Primarily dedicated to youth education, as well as the delivery of veterans' stories through all forms of media, the **American Veterans Center** is proud serve nearly 200,000 veterans and their families across the nation.

As a 501c3, we rely solely upon the generous gifts of individuals, corporations and foundations to fund all our programs. And if you receive *American Valor Quarterly*, you are one of our most generous donors.

The **American Veterans Center** is fully capable to handle your inquiries. To discuss a planned gift call :

**James Michels**

Development Director

**American Veterans Center**

1100 N. Glebe Rd., Suite 900 Arlington, VA 22201

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Email: [jmichels@radioamerica.org](mailto:jmichels@radioamerica.org)

# THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

The American Veterans Center, with its two divisions - the World War II Veterans Committee and the National Vietnam Veterans Committee - is grateful for your continued support in our shared mission of preserving the history and legacy of America's veterans and service members. Through its various programs, the Center has sought to provide an outlet for veterans to share their experiences with the public, and to teach their lessons to the younger generation. The support of thousands of individuals across America has allowed the Center to expand its efforts over the years, instituting a number of quality projects, including:



## ➤ The National Memorial Day Parade

Held each year along the National Mall in Washington, DC, and featuring nearly 200 elements and over 250,000 spectators. Since its creation in 2005, the parade has grown to be among the largest in the nation, and serves to remind Americans of all generations of the sacrifices made by our uniformed men and women.

## ➤ Documentaries and Radio Series

The Center has a long history of producing quality radio documentaries in association with the Radio America network. Included is the award-winning *World War II Chronicles* on which this publication is based, *D-Day: They Were There* and *Pearl Harbor: 60 Years of Echoes*. More recently, the Center has sponsored two weekly radio series, *Veterans Chronicles* and *Proudly We Hail*, both programs featuring interviews with America's great heroes.

## ➤ Annual Veterans Conference

Every Veterans Day weekend America's greatest veterans gather to share their experiences with an audience of several hundred students, fellow veterans, and the public. The 2006 conference was televised live on C-Span, and viewed by thousands of Americans.



Honoring those who have sacrificed. The American Veterans Center is proud to support those veterans and service members who have been wounded in the line of duty. Pictured above is Medal of Honor recipient Col. Robert Howard with our wounded service members and representatives of the Young Marines.

## ➤ American Valor Quarterly

Our quarterly publication, which provides the opportunity for veterans to share their stories, in their own words with an audience of tens of thousands of people. Copies of *AVQ* are also donated to nearly 200 VA hospitals and vets centers around the country, as a way to say "thank you" to our veterans, and those who care for them.

## ➤ Youth Activities and Educational Outreach

The underlying theme of each of our programs is to build an appreciation of America's veterans and military history among young people. Students and youth groups are encouraged to participate in AVC activities, and the Center sponsors essay contests, a high school and college scholarship, and an internship program, all providing an opportunity for young people to learn about - and from - America's uniformed heroes.

## ➤ Supporting Our Troops

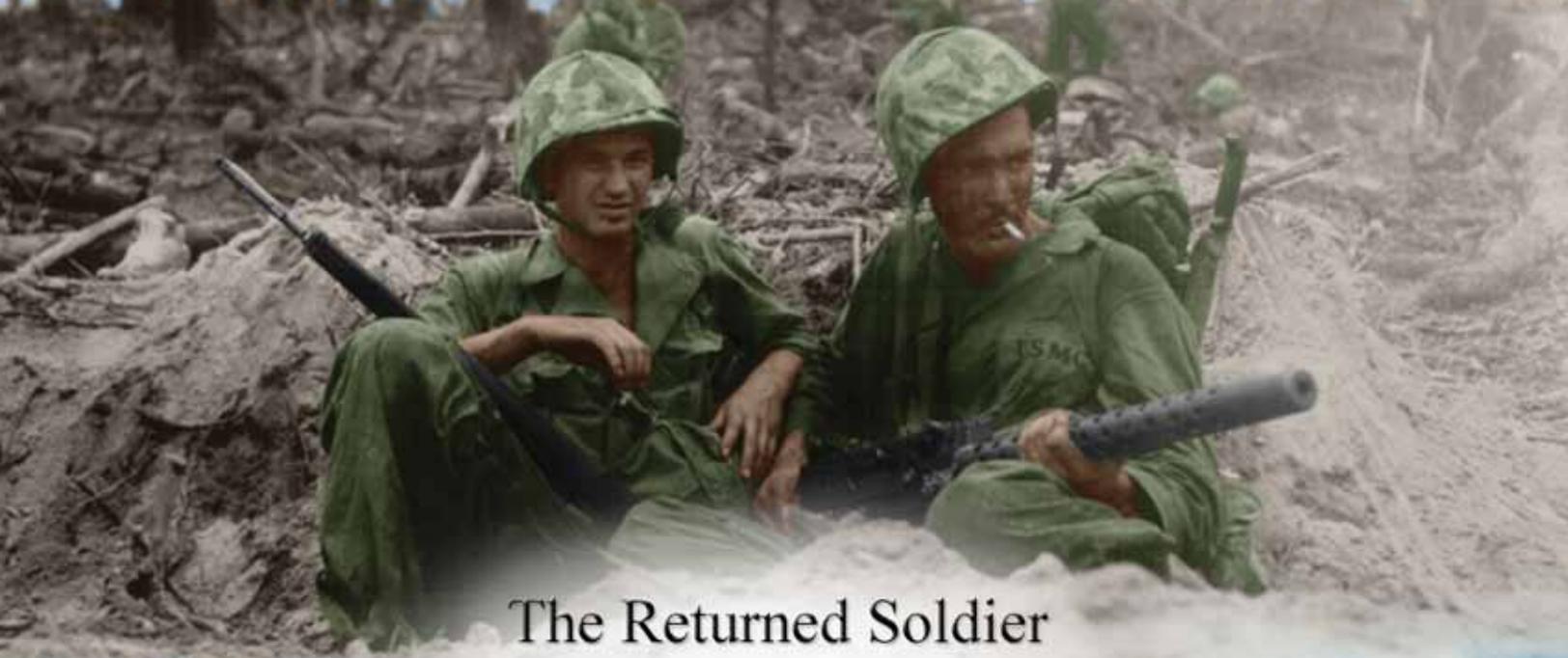
In addition to featuring the stories of those currently serving in our publications and radio programs, and including them in the National Memorial Day Parade, the Center is proud to sponsor regular events for our wounded heroes currently undergoing rehabilitation at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Bethesda Naval Hospital.



Interns and students are given the opportunity to meet, and learn about, America's greatest battlefield heroes. Here, former intern Michael O'Donnell visits the grave of Joe Ronnie Hooper, the most decorated soldier of the Vietnam War. Michael researched Hooper's story, which he wrote for publication.



From the Greatest Generation to the latest generation. It is the lessons and inspiration provided by those veterans who have come before that is so valuable to the young people of today. Through the American Veterans Center's many events, we seek to bring these generations together, as above, where young ROTC students speak directly to the legendary Tuskegee Airmen at the 2007 conference.



## The Returned Soldier

The soldier, full of battles and renown,  
And gaping wonder of each quiet town,  
And strange to every face he knew so well,  
Comes once again in this old town to dwell.  
But man alone is changed; this very tree  
He sees again where once he used to swee;  
And the old fields where once he tented sheep,  
And the old mole-hills where he used to leap,  
And the old bush where once he found a nest,  
Are just the same, and pleasure fills his breast.  
He sees the old path where he used to play  
At chock and marbles many a summer day,  
And loves to wander where he went a boy,  
And fills his heart with pleasure and with joy.

- John Clare (1793-1864)



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