

# Peace in Our Times



A Veterans For Peace publication exposing the root causes and enormous costs of war

## Spring Rising Against War



Photo by Ellen Davidson

Veterans For Peace members at national mobilization in Washington, D.C., March 21; more photos on page 7

## Giving Something Back

*Ben Griffin and Veterans For Peace UK*

By Charlie Gilmour

“You get to a river and the water is full of bodies—what do you do?” asks former SAS trooper Ben Griffin. It’s a question he has been grappling with ever since he informed his commanding officer that he would not be returning to his Special Forces unit in Baghdad back in 2005, after eight years of exemplary service. As he revealed shortly before a High Court injunction permanently sealed his lips, he could no longer carry out missions that, as he saw it, were making Britain complicit in acts of “brutal interrogation” and “torture.” Perhaps as a sign of the respect his superiors had for him, he was granted an honorable discharge rather than the court-martial he was expecting, and was sent back to Civvy Street with glowing references. Having turned away from war, the question remained: How best to respond to the horrible scenes wrought by modern conflict?

“One option,” he says, “is to wade into that river and start dragging the people out, trying to save them. That’s

the charity response. Others run off to a phone box to call the authorities and tell them what’s going on—that’s sort of like the whistle-blower response. The third is to go upstream and find out who’s been throwing the bodies into the river in the first place. More often than not you find out that the people chucking in the bodies are exactly the same people the whistle-blowers are on the phone to. That’s one of the things Veterans For Peace tries to bring home.”

Veterans For Peace UK, the organization founded by Griffin in 2011, is made up of former soldiers who, like him, have seen the terrible cost of war and believe that if the public were educated as to its true nature, they would be less likely to lend their support to military intervention of any kind. With 142 members, whose experiences of conflict range from D-Day right up to Iraq and Afghanistan, its perspective crosses continents and spans decades.

One of the unique benefits of Veterans For Peace for former soldiers is that it allows them to turn many of their negative and traumatic experiences into something

*continued on page 14 ...*



Ben Griffin, founder of Veterans For Peace UK

## Letters

### Hypocrisy Is Not Good Diplomacy

I read in the news that Cuba is going to release 50 “political” prisoners as part of normalizing diplomatic relations. Cuba must reform its evil ways, but we can continue ours.

Ironically we still have 122 political “detainees” in Guantánamo, Cuba. Most of them have not been charged or convicted of anything. Of these, 54 have been cleared for release but are still being held.

Estimates of other U.S. “political” prisoners range from hundreds to thousands. We certainly have many “prisoners of conscience” even though they may not have been officially convicted of a political offense. For example, Greg Boertje-Obed, a Duluth resident; Michael Walli, a Vietnam veteran; and Sister Megan Rice, an 83-year-old Catholic nun, are in federal prison today for opposing nuclear weapons. They were convicted of “sabotage” for trespassing and peacefully protesting at a weapons production facility.

We have the largest per capita prison population of any nation. We are known for torture, secret “black site” prisons, drone attacks on innocents, and targeted assassinations. Our CIA is legendary for its illegal actions, including an invasion of Cuba and an attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro. But Cuba must change in order to have normal relations with us!

Hypocrisy is poor policy. It does not advance our national interests or keep us safe. We would be more more effective if we led by example and practiced what we preach.

Phillip Anderson  
VFP Chapter 80  
Duluth, Minnesota

### Lessons Learned

I was fortunate to be able to attend the Shut Down Creech event in March in Nevada with about 40 other VFP-ers. In total, there were about 140 drone warfare protesters from Code Pink, VFP, Nevada Desert Experience, and several other groups. Creech is the main operations center for both the Air Force and CIA drone operations worldwide.

What impressed me was the professional approach and discipline the group had, not only in our conduct but in our signage as well. As a result, the police were very professional, and we received a lot of “unbiased coverage” by the media that reported our concerns with the U.S. killer drone program.

Media coverage civilian-wise included

Las Vegas radio and TV stations. Military-wise, our protest and message was written up in the *Creech Newsletter*, *The Air Force Times* and *Stars and Stripes*. I can’t imagine better coverage of our concerns and our message to the drone operators and support personnel.

So what I learned was that no matter how tempting it might be in such situations, in the heat of battle, so to speak, to lose control or attack verbally and visually those involved is to give in. If you give in, then the news is not about the message or purpose of the protest but the behavior of the protesters.

Tom Madden  
Dallas, Texas  
VFP Chapter 106

### Most Dangerous Man in America?

U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer, the self-proclaimed “Defender of Israel,” may be the most dangerous man in America.

There has always been a problem with Schumer’s love affair with an apartheid state. His determined efforts to support Israel’s continuing slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza have always made him look more like a religious extremist than a representative of the U.S. people. Only a fanatic could wax eloquent about bombing schools and murdering 500 children.

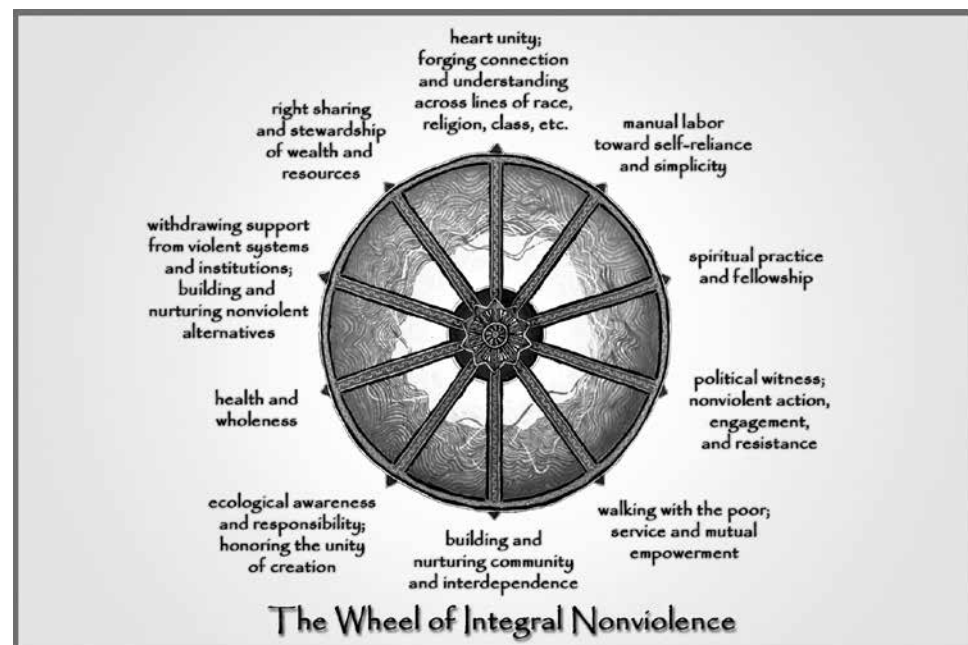
And then there is all that U.S. aid to Israel, three to four billion dollars a year, while our infrastructure collapses and our public schools run out of money. Clearly Sen. Schumer knows that he is robbing the U.S. people to feed the growing militarism of his favorite theocracy in the Middle East.

None of this, of course, makes Schumer truly dangerous to the U.S. people. Supporting ethnic cleansing and racism is despicable behavior and certainly calls into question his belief in what we think of as American values. But it is his support of the rightwing warmongers in our country that presents a clear danger to us all.

Israel wants the United States to attack another country in the Middle East, and is prepared to pay tens of millions to our congressional representatives to get its way. We have seen how effective Israel was in getting the United States to invade Iraq. Now Schumer is leading the charge for war against Iran, again putting religious extremism above the interests of the American people.

Fred Nagel  
Rhinebeck, New York  
VFP Chapter 58

## A Note from the Editors



### Turning the Wheel of Nonviolence: A Community Practice

Confronting so many injustices in the world, coming to grips with the evils of empire and perpetual military-industrial-profits projects ... It’s easy to become disempowered, to feel disillusioned.

In trying to figure out which way to move, where next to step, it helps to have a vision.

The other day my husband Brian and I received this postcard from a man connected with the Chico Peace and Justice Center in California, whom we’d met on the train. The card features a color illustration of Mahatma Gandhi’s “Wheel of Integral Nonviolence” on the front, and on the back, this quote from Gandhi: “I can indicate no royal road for bringing about the social revolution, except that we should represent it in every detail of our lives.”

Around the wheel, ten prescriptions are offered for integrating a wholistic practice of nonviolence into one’s life. “Political witness; nonviolent action, engagement, and resistance” is the practice that often defines Veterans For Peace actions, and yet most if not all of the other nine practices also strongly resonate:

- walking with the poor; service and

mutual empowerment

- building and nurturing community and interdependence
- ecological awareness and responsibility; honoring the unity of creation
- health and wholeness
- withdrawing support from violent systems and institutions; building and nurturing nonviolent alternatives
- right sharing and stewardship of wealth and resources
- heart unity; forging connection and understanding across lines of race, religion, class, etc.
- manual labor toward self-reliance and simplicity
- spiritual practice and fellowship

Clearly, Gandhi’s “integral nonviolence” is a community practice as well as an individual practice. His is a simple list. For the individual, it’s a guide for right livelihood. If you can imagine the whole wheel turning within community, you can begin envisioning a different world. This is a world that is within reach, and that many, many people on the planet, including those within Veterans For Peace, are actively laboring to create.

—Becky Luening

### Peace in Our Times

*Peace in Our Times* is published quarterly by Veterans For Peace. Bundles of 80 are \$35, and individual subscriptions are \$15/year. To donate, subscribe, or order bundles, visit [peaceinourtimes.org](http://peaceinourtimes.org) or send a check to Veterans For Peace, 1404 North Broadway, St. Louis, MO 63102. Letters, poems, articles, and images may be submitted to [peaceinourtimes@gmail.com](mailto:peaceinourtimes@gmail.com).

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**Distribution:** Chapter 034, New York City



Red Army troops following T-34 tanks in counteroffensive on German positions Battle of Kursk August 1943

# An American Volunteer in the Red Army

## A Story of Love and War on the Eastern Front

By Mike Ferner

On the 49th day of the 50-day Battle of Kursk in World War II, a young Soviet tank commander became one of that fight's 425,000 casualties. He was only 18. He was a sergeant. And he was from the United States.

Nicholas Burlak, now 90 years old, was knocked unconscious and left for dead on the battlefield that day, but his story got even more remarkable.

Burlak's parents emigrated from Ukraine and settled in Bethlehem, Pa., where Nicholas was born in 1924.

Early in the Great Depression, his father, an engineer looking for work, signed a contract with a Ukrainian steel company looking for skilled workers and relocated his family to Ukraine.

When war broke out in 1939, his parents sent him to live in Kazakhstan with his uncle. Only 16 when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, he tried enlisting in the Soviet Army "to fight the fascists" but was turned away. The following year he succeeded in joining up, quickly learning enough Russian "to get by as a soldier."

The Red Army repelled the Nazis from Stalingrad in February 1943, but not before two million German and Soviet soldiers were killed, wounded or captured. The Soviet counterattack that summer at Kursk became the greatest tank battle in history. A total of two million soldiers, 7,000 tanks, and 4,000 aircraft fought ferociously, ending in a Soviet victory that, as Churchill said, broke Hitler's back.

"We lost three-quarters of the tanks and personnel carriers in our brigade. It was a very sad victory, but it was a victory," Burlak recalled. Then, his voice softening, he added, "It was like a dream ... a terrible dream."

Many times during the battle the young sergeant, in command of the Soviet T-34 after his lieutenant was wounded, said he saw German and Russian tanks get hit and catch fire.



Nicholas Burlak at 90

"The soldiers would jump out of their burning tanks and personnel carriers and continue fighting each other with knives. Seeing that, I ... I can't explain the feeling," he said, his voice trailing off.

Before battle, he recalled, it was traditional to have a cup of spirytus, a potent, 190-proof (95 percent alcohol) distilled spirit. "But you don't feel drunk at all when you're going into a tank attack."

A tank commander goes into battle standing up, exposed, in the tank's open hatch, he said. "It's considered a shame for the tank commander to hide himself inside."

Thus it was that when a grenade went off at the back of his tank, Burlak was wounded. He was found lying on the ground, unconscious, by a funeral squad. They removed his ID tag and were about to throw him into a German trench being used as a mass grave when they saw he still drew breath.

*"During the tank attacks and staying in field hospitals I saw such things that made me hate any wars ... with all my heart I was ready to do anything for peace."*

An 18 year-old Ukrainian nurse named Oksana realized he was still alive and took him to a field hospital. As sometimes happens, the soldier and his nurse fell in love.

Burlak said the surgeon who operated on him "removed a piece of German steel but left a piece as a souvenir. So now when I go through airport scanners I have to show them my hospital document saying that the steel is in me."

After his ID tags were removed from his unconscious body, they were processed with those of the battlefield dead and a death certificate was issued in his name. "When my mother back in Ukraine got it from the mailman, she said 'Mister, send this back where it came from. My son is alive. My heart says he's wounded but he's alive.'"

Burlak later admonished his mother, asking "Why did

you return that death certificate? I could have used it in my book!" But he said he does have a worn photo of himself from official Russian files that says on the back, "Killed near Kiev, August 27, 1943."

After Kursk came the largest Allied operation of the war, Bagration, in June 1944, driving the Germans out of Belarus and Ukraine and into eastern Poland. The scale of this operation dwarfed the Normandy invasion. Along a 130-mile front, two million Red Army troops attacked with a 10-1 advantage in armor, 7-1 in aircraft and a transport unit that included 200,000 Studebaker 2.5-ton trucks made in South Bend, Ind.

In two weeks, the Soviet armor pushed west over 400 miles. In two months, 300,000 Germans lay dead and 120,000 were captured. Thousands of Nazi tanks were destroyed in what was the only major battle on the Eastern Front in which the Red Army suffered fewer casualties than Germany.

But one of the Allied casualties was Oksana, the nurse Nicholas had fallen in love with.

She had successfully requested a transfer from the field hospital where the two met, to be attached to Burlak's armored reconnaissance unit and stay together to Berlin, where they would get married. They even chose names for their first child, Victor for a boy, Victoria for a girl.

But on July 28, 1944, the former sergeant remembered, she and seven others riding on his tank were hit and "turned into pieces ... I picked up pieces of people. We found a bomb crate to bury her in and wrote their names on an empty artillery shell."

Less than a year later, Burlak's recon unit was one of the first into Berlin, where he said they found the bodies of Josef Goebbels and his wife, Magda.

What he experienced as a volunteer in the Red Army never left him.

"I hated war. I hated what I saw. During the tank attacks and staying in field hospitals I saw such things that made me hate any wars ... with all my heart I was ready to do anything for peace. I was not the only one that felt like that and still do. Not only Russia and Ukraine and America ... there's a lot of people who have the same

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The back of this photo identifies Burlak as 'Killed near Kiev, August 27, 1943'

# Operation Paperclip

## *The Nazi Role in the U.S. Military Empire*

By Bruce Gagnon

Many have heard the story about the Nazi rocket scientists brought to the United States after World War II under a secret military program called Operation Paperclip. I think it is an important story to keep in front of the public so that more people can learn about the intimate U.S. connection to many of Hitler's top agents.

I first learned about the story when I read the book *Secret Agenda* by former CNN investigative reporter Linda Hunt. The book told in fascinating detail how 1,500 top Nazi military/scientific operatives were smuggled into the United States through Boston and West Palm

launches to prove they were making significant progress.

Dornberger came to the United States along with von Braun's rocket team during Operation Paperclip. According to author Jack Manno in his book *Arming the Heavens: The Hidden Military Agenda for Space, 1945-1995*, Dornberger was appointed as a vice president at Bell Aviation Corporation in New York and went on to serve on the first military oversight committee that ensured that NASA was controlled by the military from the first days. It was Dornberger who first came up with the idea of "missile defense" as an offensive program that would have nuclear-powered satellites orbiting the

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*Wernher von Braun, the head of Hitler's team that built the V-1 and V-2 rockets, was made the first director of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville.*

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Beach, Fla., by the Pentagon just after the war was over. Some were Hitler's intelligence operatives who were put in charge of the U.S.-NATO "Gladio" assassination and destabilization program to ensure that no leftists took or maintained power in Europe during the Cold War period.

One hundred of Hitler's high-tech scientists and engineers, along with 100 copies of Hitler's V-2 rocket, were brought to Huntsville, Ala., to create the U.S. space program. Wernher von Braun, the head of Hitler's team that built the V-1 and V-2 rockets, was made the first director of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville.

In Germany the Nazis had a concentration camp called Dora, where 40,000 Jews, French resistance fighters, homosexuals, communists, and other prisoners of war (including a black American GI) were brought to build the V-1 and V-2 rockets inside a mountain tunnel called Mittelwerk. By the time the slaves were liberated by the allies, over 25,000 had perished at the hands of the Nazi rocketeers.

Hitler's military liaison to von Braun's rocket team was Maj. Gen. Walter Dornberger. Several times Dornberger and von Braun met with Hitler requesting more money and more slaves so they could step up the rocket production effort. Hitler was anxious to use the rockets to terrorize the cities of London, Paris, and Brussels toward the end of the war as the Nazi army began to lose. Dornberger and von Braun showed Hitler film clips of the V-2 rocket

planet and able to hit targets on Earth.

Kurt Debus, the chief of V-2 launch operations in Hitler's Germany, later became chief of operations for NASA at Cape Canaveral. When tourists converge on the Kennedy Space Center today, they pass by a portrait of the former German SS member that hangs in the entrance in honor of Debus's service as the center's first director.

In a book called *The Hunt for Zero Point*, respected military journalist Nick Cook shared much about the Pentagon's secret "black" budget. For 15 years Cook was a defense and aerospace reporter for *Jane's Defence Weekly*, which some consider the bible of the international weapons community. Cook spent 10 years researching secret military programs in the United States and believes that well over \$20 billion a year is spent on these operations outside the purview of Congress. Cook states, "It [black programs] has a vast and sprawling architecture funded by tens of billion of classified dollars every year. The height of its powers was probably in the Reagan era. But it has not stopped since then. In fact, under the Bush administration it is having something of a resurgence. Stealth technology is a primary example. ... [R]esearch into anti-gravity technology ... has been going on for quite some time."

Cook traces the roots of the U.S.'s secret weapons development program back to the Nazi scientists brought over after WW II in Operation Paperclip. He states, "We know the size and scope of Opera-



**The von Braun rocket team is congratulated by Nazi brass in 1942**

tion Paperclip, which was huge. And we know that the United States operates a very deeply secret defense architecture for secret weapons programs. ... [I]t is highly compartmentalized ... and one of the things that's intrigued me over the years is, how did they develop it? What model did they base it on? It is remarkably similar to the system that was operated by the Germans—specifically the SS—for their top-secret weapons programs."

"What I do mean," says Cook, "is that if

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*Kurt Debus, the chief of V-2 launch operations in Hitler's Germany, later became chief of operations for NASA at Cape Canaveral.*

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you follow the trail of Nazi scientists and engineers who were recruited by America at the end of the second world war, the unfortunate corollary is that by taking on the science, you take on—unwittingly—some of the ideology. ... What do you lose along the way?"

When we see the Pentagon currently supporting the Nazi battalions inside Kiev's military operation against their own citizens in eastern Ukraine, we should pause. U.S.-NATO actions to destabilize and possibly bring "regime change" in Moscow remind one of Hitler's attempt to do the same thing during WWII. That ill-fated plan cost the Russians 26 million people and gave them a hyper-sensitivity to Nazi ideology. It should also be remembered that when Hitler marched through Ukraine on the way into Russia, he was aided by Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera, who today is glorified by the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. Azov is an all-volunteer far-right paramilitary militia that reports to the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs and is a member of the National Guard of Ukraine.

Could this be what former President Dwight Eisenhower was talking about just a few years later when in 1961 he warned the American people to "beware" the power of the military-industrial complex? Could Eisenhower's prophetic warning have been that an ideological contamination had come from America's embracing of the Nazi operatives?

*Bruce Gagnon is coordinator of the Global Network Against Weapons and Nuclear Power in Space and a member of Veterans For Peace.*

# Drone Warfare: Death From a Location Near You

By Brandon Toy

On April 7, my family and 20 or so other people protested drone warfare in front of the main gate of the Battle Creek Air National Guard base in Michigan. Weaponized drone operators were dropping bombs from my backyard.

We stood in the mud on the side of the four-lane highway from noon to 1 pm. A few of us held signs with slogans like “Stop Drone Warfare” while others offered conversation to each other or waved at honking cars. One father and fellow protester brought fresh-popped popcorn, which he passed out in little blue bowls to the few children present. In between piling kernels in their mouths, the kids stomped in the water and slid on the ice that had accumulated at the base of a mountain of plowed snow behind us.

This wasn’t the type of protest that drew the media or police in riot gear. The only law enforcement present was a lone sheriff’s deputy who was on hand to escort

difference at all. I could see how an outsider might consider the showing pathetic. I imagined soldiers and airmen trading snide comments at our expense, and commanders deriding us to their troops in formation. It all seemed a little futile and inconsequential. I’m sure there are a few people reading this that know that feeling.

## A Different Idea

Half-way through the hour, soldiers and airmen started driving onto the base, probably returning from lunch in town. Each drive-by was exactly the same. The soldier(s) would approach and slow down to turn onto the base, avoid eye contact with us, and then disappear through the gate. Each encounter lasted no more than five seconds and never was there any kind of interaction between us.

I wondered what they thought as they drove by. I thought back to my time in the service and remembered the early days of the Iraq war when I used to watch Fox News and listen to rightwing talk radio. I



us across the highway from the muddy field we parked in to our assigned area. He stayed just long enough to see the bulk of us across and then drove off with a nod and a wave. The only pictures taken—outside of the ones we took ourselves—were by a pink-haired woman who slowed down in the median to snap a few pictures with her camera phone.

“Who said we weren’t going to get any press?” I said as she drove away.

I couldn’t help wondering what point or purpose our protest had. Obviously, we weren’t going to shut the drone program down or change U.S. policies on drone warfare. It wasn’t immediately clear how the small group would make much of a

had consumed media that had saturated me with the belief that the United States was the greatest country in the world and that it was our job to teach the people of the lost and misguided nations how to live. What would I have thought if I had seen an antiwar protest at the entrance to the base?

I didn’t know. I never had to pretend to ignore protesters, because the sides of the streets were always bare when I drove to base. All I ever encountered were waving flags, yellow ribbons, and well-wishers who thanked me for my service. It dawned on me that if we weren’t on this corner right now, maybe these soldiers and airmen would have the same experience. Instead of smiling protesters and children



Photo by Crystal Devon

Veterans For Peace participants at Creech Air Force Base antidrone protests

playing, they would see only a dirty snow bank.

Perhaps, this was the purpose. We were inserting an idea into their world counter to those put forth by their bosses, colleagues, and government. Perhaps some of them had thought that there was a consensus around the righteousness of their mission, and our presence had tainted that unbalanced picture. Perhaps we were planting a seed of doubt that would one day blossom into curiosity and eventually lead them to reject the precepts of war and embrace peace. Perhaps.

Then again, maybe it’s more realistic to view our gathering from a more mod-

I know firsthand the enormity of the war machine and the mindless momentum of its consumption and destruction.

My thoughts returned to the scene in front of me. I watched the children throw snowballs and hold signs with their mittened hands. I remembered the stories of the children in the war zones, the ones that live each day with drones hovering above. I thought about the ones in the “wrong place at the wrong time” who were killed indiscriminately by the same drone operators that ignored us as they returned to their war.

The personal belief that drove me to turn my back on the war machine and landed

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est perspective. The hour our small band spent proclaiming our rejection of illegal and institutionalized murder was a drop on a scale that is overwhelmingly offset by the entrepreneurs of war toward the side of injustice. Those who support drone warfare flood the U.S. media with a hundred pro-war messages a day for every minute we stood at that gate.

Daunting indeed, but there we were, banded together, devoting a bit of our precious time to trying to solve a cypher whose key will surely only be revealed by either a true miracle, an epic amount of compounding serendipity, or ages of enlightened human evolution.

And yet, it didn’t feel right to call it either hopeless or pointless. My overriding emotions as I accepted the logic of the situation were peace and serenity. I hadn’t come with any illusions. Like many of us,

me on that roadside occurred to me again: there is no difference between my family and those killed by drone operators. There are no differences between my son and sixth-grader Mohammed Saleh Qayed Taeiman, who was killed by a drone strike in Yemen earlier this year—the latest of dozens of children murdered in U.S. drone strikes in Yemen since 2002. Nor is there a difference between my community in Pontiac, Mich., and the communities of the people that live with the terror of drones every day. And since there is no difference between us, our children are their children, our voices are their voices and their tragedies are ours. “We the people isn’t just a turn of phrase,” it’s an inviolable reality of human life on earth: we are all fundamentally here together.

Or, as President Obama, the com-

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# We Need a Million More Bowe Bergdahls, Says Former U.S. Army Ranger

By Richard Kreitner

The news that the most powerful organization in the known universe, the U.S. military, intends to focus its coercive mechanisms on a frightened, sensitive, traumatized young man, Bowe Bergdahl, has elicited howls of delight from that section of our public arena leased at below-market prices by the guild of belligerent cowards.

"I am shocked at the concerted effort led by pro-war elements to pillory this guy, rather than offer serious compassion," Robert Musil, who wrote an article on Vietnam deserters for *The Nation* in 1973, told me last year. "Where is all that rhetoric about 'we support our troops'? He has suffered a lot, as have others. Where is the understanding, the compassion, the humanity? I frankly think that's the proper response to an American kid stranded in the middle of Afghanistan who feels he has no choice but to go away from his unit."

After I wrote that post, I was contacted by Rory Fanning,



a former U.S. Army Ranger in Afghanistan who served in the same unit as Pat Tillman. Fanning kindly sent me a copy of his book, *Worth Fighting For*, published last November by Haymarket. It is a profoundly moving memoir about his trek across the United States to raise money for the Pat Tillman Foundation, but more important, it is a thoughtful, historically literate, and often hilarious account of Fanning's effort to forge a new relationship with a country he worried he had betrayed and been betrayed by. Disturbed by what he saw in Afghanistan, Fanning briefly went AWOL.

He likely would have suffered the same fate that Bergdahl faces had not imperial stupidity, incompetence, and lying saved him at the last moment. Preoccupied by the fallout from Tillman's death and the attempted cover-up to prevent disclosure that it was caused by friendly fire, military authorities allowed Fanning to leave their custody without charges.

Fanning returned home and a few years later embarked on his transcontinental walk, seeking (and ultimately finding) a more profound connection to the American people, past, and land than he had thought possible when he was growing up.

My first reaction upon hearing the news that Bergdahl would be charged with desertion was to unfurl a string of expletives. My second was to get Fanning on the phone.

"Clearly," he began, "the main reason they're going after him is because they don't want to be responsible for the hundreds of thousands of dollars in back pay that they owe him. I find that ironic, as they've been giving millions to warlords, throwing away trillions since 2001.

"The evidence against him that he's responsible for the deaths of six soldiers is tenuous at best," Fanning continued. "But the bigger point is the fact that the entity to blame for these deaths is the U.S. military, for sending these soldiers into a war that should never have happened. The Taliban surrendered months after the initial invasion. But our politicians wanted blood."

Fanning feels for Bergdahl. "Anyone who has been in Afghanistan could clearly see that the United States had nothing to do in that country," he told me. "We were little more than pawns in village disputes most of the time."

"To be honest with you," Fanning said, "we need a million more Bowe Bergdahls. Anybody who has any degree of common sense or moral fortitude would say, 'This is ridiculous. I'm not gonna fight this war.'"

Fanning told me, as Musil had last year, that it is not at all easy or in some cases possible to declare yourself a conscientious objector once you are in war.

"I could totally relate to this guy," he said. "I consider him a hero. To kill somebody for a cause you don't believe in is potentially worse than being killed yourself, because those scars last forever. Just walking off the battlefield as Bergdahl did seems like an easier route than seeking conscientious-objector status."

Why the wingnut feeding frenzy?

"It's a lot of fear-mongering to prop up this state of perpetual war," Fanning concluded. "Recruitment is down. People are realizing we're not fighting for freedom or democracy, but for empire. They have to make an example out of someone like Bowe Bergdahl."

Richard Kreitner is special assistant to the publisher of *The Nation*, where he edits the archives blogs "*The Almanac*" and "*Back Issues*."

## American Volunteer in the Red Army



*Soviet infantry advance alongside T-34 tanks in the summer of 1944*

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feelings. They are against the wars. Really in my heart I'm for peace. The only explanation I can tell you. It's a true one. It's like a religion."

Because some of his military duties included interpreting secret German and Czech documents, the Kremlin refused to let the young sergeant return to the United States at war's end. Burlak went to drama school and became a theater director, then produced cultural exchange concerts for Duke Ellington, Pete Seeger, and Alvin Ailey, while writing a play that he took on tour to Latin America.

In 1967, Burlak's sister visited Moscow with an American labor delegation, where she met then Premier Leonid Brezhnev and asked him point-blank why he wasn't letting her brother return home. Burlak recalled that within 24 hours of that encounter, he was on his way out of the USSR.

Keeping his vow to oppose war, in 1997 and '98, the

former Red Army soldier joined 200 U.S. and 200 Soviet military veterans for walks from Leningrad to Moscow, Odessa to Kiev and in the United States from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco.

Reflecting on his youth, the nonagenarian vet credited his religious mother and his atheist father with showing the way of peace.

"They loved each other. ... It showed that people of different religion are able to find peace among themselves and love each other. I never heard them argue. They always found common ground in looking for solutions."

Mike Ferner served as a Navy corpsman during the Vietnam war and was discharged as a conscientious objector. He is a former president of Veterans For Peace and author of *Inside the Red Zone: A Veteran For Peace Reports from Iraq*, published in 2006.

# Spring Rising Against the War

Veterans For Peace members converged on Washington, D.C., March 21 to speak out against ongoing U.S. wars around the world. Clockwise from upper right: Col. Ann Wright: 'Fly kites, not drones!'; Marine veteran Lew Monternaggi; former CIA analyst Ray McGovern speaks at the rally; New Hampshire VFP members Art and Nancy Brennan; VFP President Barry Ladendorf addresses the crowd; marching down Pennsylvania Avenue. Photos by Ellen Davidson



## Second Thoughts

(for Nguyen Van Hung)

You watch with admiration as I roll  
a cigarette from papers and tobacco.  
Hanoi. The Rising Dragon. 1985.  
You can't do what I can do  
because it takes two hands

and you have only one, the other  
lost years ago somewhere near Laos.  
I roll another one for you. You smile,  
then shrug, as if deformity from war  
were just a minor inconvenience.

Together we discover what we share:  
Hue City. Tet. 1968.

Sipping Lua Moi, we walk again  
familiar ground when you were whole  
and I was whole and everything around us

lay in ruins, dead or burning.  
But not us. Not you and I. We're partners  
in that ugly dance of men

who do the killing and the dying  
and survive.

Now you run a factory; I teach and write.  
You lost your arm, but have no  
second thoughts about the war you fought.  
I lost a piece of my humanity,  
its absence heavy as a severed arm—

but there I go again: those second thoughts  
I carry always like an empty sleeve  
when you are happy just to share  
a cigarette and Lua Moi, the simple joy  
of being with an old friend.

—W.D. Ehrhart

William Daniel Ehrhart served three years  
in the Marines, including 13 months in  
Vietnam. He has authored or edited 21  
books and is the subject of *The Last Time I  
Dreamed About the War: Essays on the Life  
and Writing of W. D. Ehrhart* (Jean-Jacque  
Malo, ed.).

## Drone Warfare

... continued from page 5

mander-in-chief of U.S. drone warfare,  
succinctly stated: "There is no us and  
them, only us."

The only borders that truly separate  
us are the ones we construct in our own  
minds. None of the superficial differences  
we perceive with our senses justify a dis-  
parate application of fundamental human  
rights. However, both consciously and  
subconsciously, the inverse belief per-  
meates our military actions, the propa-  
ganda that supports it and the resulting  
public discourse. A schoolboy in Iowa  
has no more right to life and liberty than  
a sixth-grader in Yemen. Yet, dropping a  
bomb on the former to kill his criminal  
brother would be front-page news in ev-  
ery media outlet in the country, if not the  
world. Meanwhile, the U.S. media barely  
acknowledges Mohammed's story or any  
of the dozens like it.

Luckily, there are no drones hover-

ing in the skies above me today. It's this  
accident of geography that allows me  
to protest safely as my children play in  
the snow, while our brothers and sisters  
downrange from the drones can only pray  
that firebombs are not dropped on them  
from thousands of miles away by some-  
one behind a computer screen sipping a  
latte. Since they can't be here to remind  
the soldiers—and the rest of us far re-  
moved from the war zone—that they are  
also sentient beings with a right to life, we  
have to do it for them. Even if it's drop by  
drop, one hour at a time.

Brandon Toy is a father, husband and  
active member of the progressive commu-  
nity in the greater Detroit area. He serves  
on the board of directors of the Michigan  
Coalition of Human Rights. In 2013, he  
publicly resigned his position at General  
Dynamics Land Systems where he had  
worked for five years on the Stryker Com-  
bat Vehicle Program. He is an Army vet-  
eran who was deployed to the Baghdad  
neighborhoods of al-Muthana and Sadr  
City.



## To End War, We Must End Patriarchy

*This article discusses why agricultural societies inevitably raise armies, conquer lands, and eventually collapse. Even if a civilization is not entirely run by violent men, if the set of living arrangements they have adopted necessitates increasing acquisition of land, their behavior will be patriarchal in essence. Otherwise they will be unable to sustain their way of life, and thus will collapse.—Editors*

**Patriarchy** (noun): a general structure in which men have power over women. A patriarchal society consists of a male-dominated power structure throughout organized society and in individual relationships.

**By Kourtney Mitchell**

Patriarchy is war. For roughly ten thousand years, since the spread of agriculture across the world, militaristic societies have been waging a veritable war on the Earth, drawing down the life support systems of the planet in order to bind living communities into producing food exclusively for human use at the expense of every other life form. Agricultural societies often became militaristic. They required that persons toiled and struggled when tending annual monocrops, labor that vir-

tually no one willingly takes on unless their land was stolen, their way of life erased, and they were forced to work for the king or (now) the corporation in order to survive. Agricultural societies became violent and oppressive to protect the surplus and maintain and expand the power hegemony of whoever ruled.

However, patriarchy pre-dates agriculture, and it is in this fact that we first begin to see the connections between ecocide and femicide, between human supremacy and misogyny, between the violation of the land and the violation of women's bodies. Patriarchy is indeed the original oppression if one carefully considers a broader definition of what patriarchy actually is, and what its resulting misogyny entails for the lives of women, children, and all life on the planet.

The late Dr. Gerda Lerner, in her now classic 1986 work *The Creation of Patriarchy*, finds that patriarchy is a historic creation that took nearly 2,500 years to become as well established as it is today. She writes: "The sexuality of women, consisting of their sexual and their reproductive capacities and services, was commodified even prior to the creation of Western civilization."

Lerner continues, stating that it was the development of agriculture in the Neolithic period that fostered the inter-tribal "exchange of women," not only as a means of

avoiding incessant warfare by the cementing of marriage alliances but also because societies with more women could produce more children. In contrast to the economic needs of hunting/gathering societies, agriculturists could use the labor of children to increase production and accumulate surpluses."

Patriarchy is male rule, but not just rule. This institution of male supremacy necessitates the gender hierarchy of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity, based upon what many feminists call a violation imperative, the socially imposed behavioral and psychological conditioning, compels men to violate the boundaries of life. In order to do this without the natural human aversion to violence, he must first objectify, reducing life to "other," to an object.

So when men rape women and children, when men clear cut forests and draw down aquifers, when men split the atom in order to kill, and when men invade other nations; we are acting in accordance with the violation imperative of masculinity, the outgrowth of patriarchy. And since monoculture agriculture, especially, often results in the death of the land, those communities reliant upon this destructive practice must continue to expand their territory. This necessary expansion requires militarism and war. No community willingly gives up its land and resources unless it is forced to do so. That is part of the reason why the United States must have the world's most powerful military.

It is no wonder rape is a war tactic, and soldiers buy prostituted women in countries ravaged by militarism. It is no wonder the United States military is the world's largest consumer of fossil fuels and the world's biggest polluter. It is no wonder this government is responsible for coups, overthrows, and illegal occupations; creating terrorist organizations or the conditions for their creation; and puppet regimes to secure military and economic interests. A nation cannot just invade and occupy; it must also consistently oppress, and input ever-increasing levels of violence to terrorize conquered communities into sub-

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*As long as nations exist within patriarchal systems, violence and domination are inevitable.*

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ordination. As rape is everyday terrorism against women, war is everyday terrorism against all life.

As long as nations exist within patriarchal systems, violence and domination are inevitable. Just as men buy and sell women and children, just as we buy and sell land, we also buy and sell nations. If we refuse to address the roots of the problem—patriarchy and male violence—we will continue to fight a losing battle against the war mongers. We can and should protest against soldier rapes and torture, against land grabs and occupations, against vicious economic sanctions, but these protests will not lead to genuine liberation until we tear this invasive system up from the root.

In order to end war, we must end patriarchy, and we must end it right now. Male peace activists must begin to educate ourselves on profeminist advocacy and action, give up our privileges as men within patriarchy, and do whatever it takes to form genuine alliance with women and all oppressed communities. We must move beyond equality, beyond equal rights, and shift toward complete liberation for women. As long as patriarchy and misogyny persist in all its oppressive forms we will not attain peace.

When patriarchy falls, communities can regain autonomy and self-determination. And when that happens, so

*continued on next page ...*

## Unexploded Ordnance: A Ballad

*for Chuck Searcy and the thousands of Vietnamese who have labored off and on since 1975, working to undo what we have done*

So I was maybe all of twenty-one  
When they whipped me  
into some kind of soul-less shape  
Yet another one of America's  
weeping mothers' sons  
Sent forth into this world

to raze, pillage, and rape  
And now it's coming on  
to another Christmas Eve  
And songs of joy and peace  
fill up our little town  
How I ask myself  
could I possibly believe  
I could do what I did  
and not reap what I had sown

In that land far away  
from what I call home  
A grandfather leads  
his granddaughter by the hand  
Into a field where we did  
what had to be done  
They trip into a searing heat  
brighter than a thousand suns

—Doug Rawlings

# Sexual Violence Is a Trademark of Imperialism

By Brian Platt

A new report from Colombia reveals that between 2003 and 2007 U.S. military personnel and contractors stationed in Colombia raped at least 54 children and dozens of women. According to Renan Vega, the lead author of the report, “There is abundant information about the sexual violence, which occurred under absolute impunity because of the bilateral agreements and the diplomatic immunity of United States officials.”

In 2004, 54 girls in the town of Melgar were sexually abused by American military contractors. The abuse was filmed and sold as pornography. The victims and their families were then forced to flee the town under threat of death. In 2007 an Army sergeant and a contractor raped a 12-year-old girl inside a U.S. military base. Colombian authorities were blocked from making an arrest by the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) foreign nations sign when forced to host U.S. soldiers. The perpetrators were then flown back to the United States to evade charges.

Horrific as these actions are, they are nothing new or unusual. In 2006 U.S. soldiers raped 23 women in Colombia. In 2007 there were another 14 reported cases. Nor are these actions relegated to just Colombia. The vast overseas network of U.S. military bases that buttresses the empire represents also a vast system of rape and violence. Twenty years ago, 85,000 Okinawans took to the street in protest after two U.S. Marines and a sailor kidnapped and raped a 12-year-old Okinawan girl “just for fun,” according to one of perpetrators. Admiral Richard C. Macke, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, heaped insult onto injury when he responded to ques-



Mural at the U.N. headquarters by José Vela Zanetti

tions about the rape, “I think that [the rape] was absolutely stupid. For the price they paid to rent the car, they could have had a girl,” meaning a prostitute from one of the many brothels set up for the use of U.S. servicemen.

Indeed the life of Okinawans is considered cheap by their U.S. occupiers. As historian Chalmers Johnson notes, between 1988 and 1995, 169 soldiers in Okinawa were court-martialed for sexual assault. This rate was twice the rate of the general population in the United States, a startling fact considering the great lengths the military goes to cover up rape at its overseas bases and the immense social pressure on women in places like Okinawa not to report. In fact, 169 must be a vast underestimation of the actual level of victimization.

In South Korea, rape was baked right into the U.S. occupation. According to historian Bruce Cummings, during the Korean War the South Korean armed forces reformed the network of “comfort women”—mostly Korean women forced into slavery to serve as prostitutes for soldiers—that the Japanese military had built during its occupation of China and Korea. U.S. soldiers took part in the rape of comfort women during the war. And after the war when many of these women were too shamed by a sexist society to return home, they formed the original labor force for the brothels that ring American bases in South Korea.

During the 1960s, revenue from prostitution in these camp towns made up 25 percent of South Korea’s GNP. At one point South Korean dictator Park Chung-Hee even pushed for the importation of women from the southern part of the country to these rape camps out of fear that he was losing sex tourism revenue to Japan.

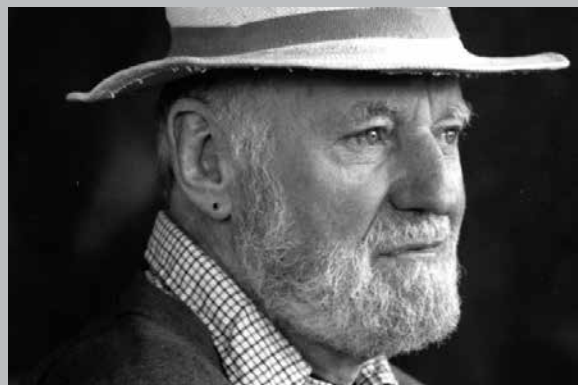
Sexual violence continues around U.S. bases in Korea today. In 2011, Private Kevin Lee Flippin robbed, beat, and raped a 17-year-old Korean girl at knifepoint. That same year, another Camp Casey soldier broke into an elderly couple’s home and beat them with a piece of lumber before trying to rape the 64-year-old woman. These incidents are exceptional only in the fact that they sparked mass outrage in Korea, forcing the U.S. press to report them.

When revelations of torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq first appeared in late 2003, the pattern of sexual violence described differed only in type from that vis-

ited on those surrounding U.S. overseas basis. At the infamous prison, U.S. soldiers and their contractors sodomized prisoners with broom handles and chemical lights. Inmates were raped while soldiers watched and took pictures, perhaps “just for fun” like their compatriots in Okinawa. When the Senate torture report investigating activities at Guantánamo Bay was released late last year, it was revealed that sexual assault again played a large role in America’s imperial prisons.

Today the major U.S. news organizations remain silent regarding this explosive report from Colombia. The network of overseas bases that hold up the U.S. empire and the violence that they bring to those around them are too important to U.S. capitalism to risk. News organizations see no need to get Americans riled up about imperialism and occupation as the United States stands to increase its military commitment in Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East all in the name of “democracy” and free markets. For the people in the 130 countries in which the U.S. military currently operates, however, this report represents something very different. This violence deeply rooted in racism and sexism is the face of U.S. imperialism around the globe. It is time the empire was torn down.

*This article was originally published by Counterpunch. Brian Platt is an aerospace machinist living in Seattle.*



## Pity the Nation

**Pity the nation whose people are sheep,  
and whose shepherds mislead them.**

**Pity the nation whose leaders are liars, whose sages  
are silenced, ...**

**and whose bigots haunt the airwaves.**

**Pity the nation that raises not its voice,  
except to praise conquerors and acclaim the bully  
as hero**

**and aims to rule the world with force and by torture.**

**Pity the nation that knows no other language but its  
own**

**and no other culture but its own.**

**Pity the nation whose breath is money  
and sleeps the sleep of the too well fed.**

**Pity the nation—oh, pity the people who allow their  
rights to erode**

**and their freedoms to be washed away.**

**My country, tears of thee, sweet land of liberty.**

—Lawrence Ferlinghetti

## End Patriarchy

*... continued from previous page*

goes capitalism, militarism, and white supremacy. When masculinity, the underlying tendency of male dominance, is deconstructed, men reconnect with life, and begin to adopt life-affirming values rather than destructive ones. Patriarchy is war and we cannot separate that from our activism. If we truly value peace, we must dismantle the root causes that prevent it. Let us get to work.

*Kourtney Mitchell has been active in social justice movements for over a decade. He served in the Army National Guard as an infantry soldier from 2011 to 2013 and is now a Veterans For Peace National Board member.*

# !Basta ya!

## *Zapatistas Provide a Powerful Example for U.S. Movements*

By Hilary Klein

For the past several months, protesters have taken to the streets—in the United States over the killing of unarmed black men and the lack of accountability for the police officers who killed them. In Mexico, there were protests over the disappearance of 43 students from the Mexican state of Guerrero, and the lack of accountability for those responsible for their disappearance.

### Bring Them Back Alive

On September 26, 2014, in the Mexican city of Iguala, local police ambushed several buses of students from a rural teachers college in the nearby town of Ayotzinapa. The teachers college has a history of student organizing and the buses were on their way to a protest. The police, together with unidentified gunmen, opened fire on the students, killing six people and wounding more than 20. They also “disappeared” 43 students. The mayor of Iguala and his wife have been accused of orchestrating the attack, and state and federal officials have shown little appetite to do more than offer cursory explanations.

Although Mexico has been

plagued by widespread violence in recent years, this particular incident has shaken Mexican society. And although the students are widely presumed to be dead, their families and fellow students continue to demand, “Bring them back alive.”

In the United States, police violence in black and brown communities is nothing new, either. According to the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, a black man is killed by the police every 28 hours. The 2012 killing of Trayvon Martin by a neighborhood watch volunteer and the 2014 deaths of Mike Brown and Eric Garner at the hands of the police each triggered a wave of outrage and protest. The militant and sustained response in Ferguson, Mo., a working-class, predominantly African-American city, brought the issue of police violence into the mainstream in a new way. And the shocking video of Eric Garner being placed in a chokehold by a police officer generated a new level of moral indignation. The failure to indict the police officers who killed Mike Brown and Eric Garner, coming just days apart, sparked a fresh round of protests all over the country.

For anyone interested in seeing these sustained and coordi-



*The Zapatista movement has worked to improve the lives, and rights, of*

nated actions coalesce into social movements of real magnitude in Mexico and/or the United States, it is valuable to look at the history of other social movements for ideas and inspiration.

Twenty-one years ago, in January 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) captured the world’s imagination when it rose up to demand justice and democracy for the indigenous people of Chiapas, taking on the Mexican government and global capitalism itself. The EZLN is named after Emiliano Zapata, a hero of the Mexican Revolution, and it took up his rallying cry of *tierra y libertad* (land and freedom). From its formation in 1983 until its 1994 uprising, the EZLN was a clandestine organization. Since its brief

armed uprising, the Zapatista movement has become known primarily for its peaceful mobilizations, dialogue with civil society, and structures of political, economic, and cultural autonomy.

The Zapatista movement has inspired grassroots activists around the world for over two decades, including the students from Ayotzinapa. The EZLN recently hosted a two-week Festival of Resistance and Rebellion against Capitalism, where family members of the disappeared students were guests of honor, and 43 empty seats during the festival’s inauguration noted the absence of the 43 students. During this event, Omar García, a student at the Rural Teachers College of Ayotzinapa, said, “The most powerful reference point for us, in terms of knowing that it is possible to change things at their root, are the Zapatista compañeros and their autonomous municipalities.”

### Long-term Vision and Holistic Solutions

The EZLN timed its uprising on January 1, 1994, to coincide with the day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, identifying neoliberal capitalism as the underlying problem. This systemic analysis has always been key for the Zapatistas, and their vision for a society of justice and dignity has been just as broad. The EZLN’s First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle begins with “*Hoy decimos ¡Basta!*” (Today we say,

“Enough!”). Stating, “We are a product of 500 years of struggle,” the EZLN made its case for going to war with the Mexican government, asked for the support of the Mexican population, and laid out 11 demands: work, land, housing, food, health care, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace.

We see elements of this same struggle in the current unrest in Mexico as well as the United States. And on both sides of the border, broad sectors of the population have joined the protests, signifying that many people—aside from those directly affected—have come to the same conclusion: that something is deeply wrong with society. In Mexico, the disappearance of the 43 students has come to represent the corruption of the state, and in the United States, the issue of police violence is one of racial and economic justice.

### It Was the State

Another aspect of systemic analysis is holding the state accountable. This is not a lesson learned specifically from the Zapatista movement: ¡Fue el Estado! (It was the state!) has been a rallying cry throughout Mexico since the disappearance of the 43 students. In New York City, during the protests following the grand jury’s failure to charge the police officer that choked Eric Garner, a common chant was, “Eric Garner, Mike Brown, shut the whole system down,” and a number of signs read, “Indict the system.”



*Mural on a Zapatista school in Chiapas*



of indigenous women in Chiapas

Nevertheless, there is much to be learned from the EZLN's insistence on holding the state (and the capitalist system) to account for the high levels of poverty, marginalization, and violence in the indigenous villages of Chiapas. When paramilitary violence flared up in Chiapas, for example, the EZLN blamed the Mexican government for arming and training these paramilitary groups, and resisted being drawn into a cycle of violence with other indigenous peasants.

The EZLN's critique of the state—and of electoral politics—has not always been popular. During the presidential campaign of 2005, the EZLN insisted that change would not come about through electoral politics, and that Andrés López Obrador of the left-leaning Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) was a “neoliberal-light” candidate. The EZLN's oppositional stance toward López Obrador caused a significant loss of support for the Zapatistas, but the EZLN stood firm. Personally, I believe there are multiple paths to achieving social change and that it is not necessary to reject the exercise of political power or a change in government as one possible strategy. But the EZLN's unwavering critique of state power and complete lack of interest in converting into a political party has represented an important ideological pole.

It has also allowed for the creation of Zapatismo, a political philosophy that focuses on social transformation rather than seizing state power, and maintains that power is created from below.

### Autonomy

An important aspect of creating power from below is building alternative institutions. In 1996, the EZLN signed the San Andrés Accords with the Mexican government, which recognized indigenous rights and promised indigenous autonomy. But, as it became increasingly apparent that the government had no intention of implementing these accords, the Zapatistas decided to put them into practice on their own. The Zapatista project of indigenous autonomy has meant that rural villages in Chiapas have gained access to rudimentary health care and education, which they were previously denied. They exercise self-determination through autonomous village and regional governments, and generate resources back into their communities through economic cooperatives that organize the production of goods.

In this small corner of the world, the Zapatistas are experimenting with their own government, alternative education and health care infrastructure, along with an economic system based on cooperation, solidarity, and relationships of equality.

The Zapatista project of indigenous autonomy has represented, for many, an inspiring example of viable alternatives to global capitalism. During the Festival against Capitalism, Omar García, a student from Ayotzinapa, also said, “Our school, as part of a national student organization, has always been supportive of and participated in the new tendencies, the new forms of organ-

ization inaugurated precisely by the Zapatistas in 1994. The horizontal structures, the forms of self-government, of autonomy, these are now part of who we are. For those of us who are members of the student committees and councils in the rural teachers colleges, these things now form part of our vocabulary.”

### Dialogue with Civil Society

Another element of Zapatismo is the belief that none of us has all the answers—that we make the road by walking. This means starting down the path and learning as we go, but it also means listening to and learning from each other. Since 1994, the EZLN has engaged in dialogue with national and international civil society, organizing numerous conferences, gatherings, and mass mobilizations in an effort to coalesce a broader national and international movement.

In 1996, the EZLN held the First Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism, inviting all those who had been negatively affected by global capitalism to come to Zapatista territory to share ideas and form alliances. Almost 5,000 people from more than 40 countries attended, and this event helped jumpstart an international anti-globalization movement.

The Zapatistas have also traveled throughout Mexico several times to meet with people in their own towns, villages, and cities. The EZLN has organized a number of events together with the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), which has helped strengthen the indigenous rights movement throughout Mexico.

Maite Valladolid, a young



Subcomandante Marcos

Chicana photographer who accompanied a Zapatista caravan traveling around Mexico in 2006, described what she saw. “I remember the very first meeting I attended. It was in Tonalá, Chiapas, and it was in an old movie theater. I was sitting there sweating, but I was so impressed with the dynamics of the meeting because Subcomandante Marcos just sat there, listening, while people shared their stories, talking for hours. We went to other meetings where there were no chairs, no tables, and we all stood around in a circle under a roof made out of sticks and straw. Listening to these meetings I realized that all people really wanted was to be heard.”

### Hope

Many of these lessons come together in perhaps the least tangible but most important lesson from the Zapatista movement, one of hope. Since 1994, the Zapatista movement has come to represent the voice of the voiceless—the resistance of the marginalized and the forgotten against the powerful. The Zapatistas have inspired hope with militant, well-organized actions:

the 1994 uprising, a series of land takeovers that altered the economic balance of power in Chiapas, tiny indigenous women with sticks in their hands defending their villages from well-armed Mexican soldiers.

They have inspired hope with their patient, steady construction of indigenous autonomy—modest in scale, perhaps, but proving that alternatives to global capitalism are possible. Because of the Zapatistas' conscious efforts to dialogue with civil society, their message has reached a much broader audience. And the EZLN has been exceptionally good at capturing its long-term vision in terms that are poetic but simple, specific to southeastern Mexico but universal enough to resonate with change-seekers throughout Mexico and the world.

*Originally published in Z Magazine March 2015.*

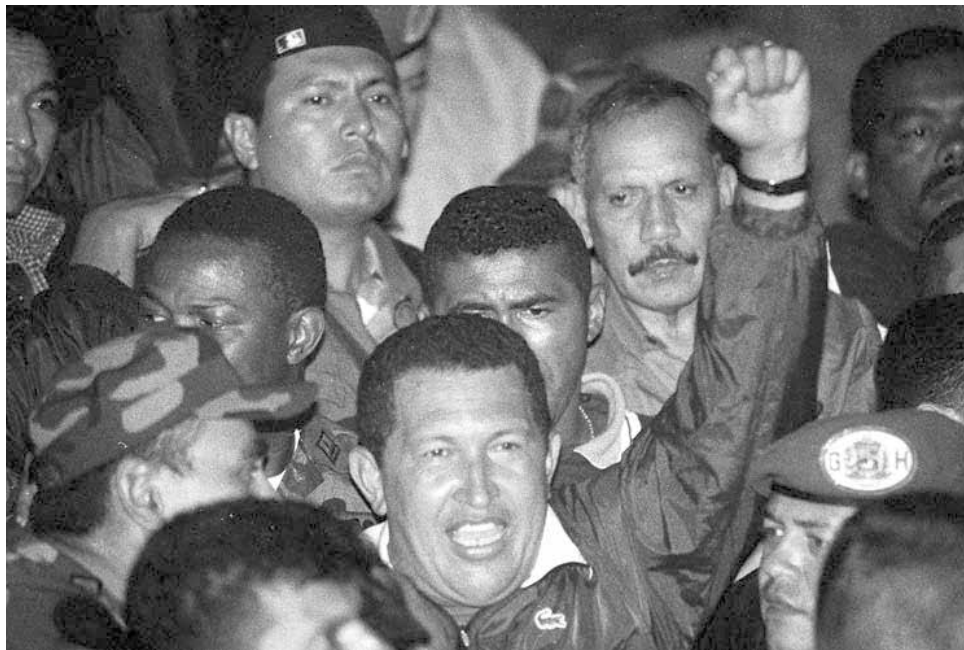
*Hilary Klein is author of Compañeras. She is a community organizer and worked with the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, for six years. She currently works with Make the Road in New York, helping immigrant and working-class communities.*



Zapatista movement celebrates 20th anniversary in 2014

By W. T. Whitney Jr.

# The Untold Story of U.S. War-Making in Latin America



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez after failed 2002 coup attempt against him

Bolivian President Evo Morales took offense when Secretary of State Kerry in 2013 referred to Latin America as the U.S.'s "backyard." Morales responded by expelling USAID from Bolivia. His action harked back to Simon Bolivar, the "Liberator," who in 1829 observed: "The United States appears to be destined by Providence to plague America with misery in the name of liberty."

The "America" in question was the "Our America" José Martí envisioned in 1891. Cuba's national hero set its northern border at the Rio Grande.

Backyard or not, mainstream U.S. media and even left-leaning political activists often look the other way when it comes to Latin America. Yet a heavy U.S. hand is a fixture there, and its essence is war. U.S. puppet dictators, invasions, proxy terror attacks, military occupations, and gunboat diplomacy came first. Subsequent tactical adjustments led to sanctions, economic blockades, subsidized political oppositions, proxy wars, media wars, diplomatic strangleholds, and "dirty-war" intrusions.

President Obama on March 9 announced sanctions against Venezuela. He designated the oil-rich country as an "extraordinary threat to the national security ... of the United States." Yet reaction to

such hyperbole from U.S. Americans who know better has been quiet.

Surely it's past time for a wake-up call: all out to end U.S. war in Latin America and the Caribbean! From human rights and humanitarian perspectives, the stakes

are high. A few examples of grief at U.S. hands make the point:

The anti-Cuban economic and commercial blockade continues. Strictures on health-care imports and on foreign banks cause human suffering. U.S. scheming with government opponents, and payments, are non-stop.

A U.S.-friendly government has ruled in Honduras since June 2009 when a U.S.-sanctioned military coup removed a democratically elected government. Thereafter poverty intensified, neoliberalism flourished, and murders of agrarian rights activists, journalists, gang members, and children multiplied. U.S. military installations and aid complete the picture.

A U.S.-coordinated "parliamentary coup" removed left-leaning Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo in 2012. Since then, a big-landowner government has advanced industrial-scale agriculture and assaulted peasant resistance. The U.S. military on February 22, 2014, inaugurated its own \$1.7 million facility, allegedly for natural-disaster relief. Leftist insurgents operate nearby.

On February 1, 2015, the first contin-

gent of some 3,500 U.S. troops arrived in Peru, supposedly to instruct Peruvian counterparts on drug-war tactics. Some will remain for a year. Two years ago Peru regained its former position as the world's top coca producer. Yet Shining Path guerrillas have revived, and press reports hint at a U.S. role in fighting terrorism.

Since 1948, the United States has helped finance and train Colombia's military and military-backed paramilitaries and used bases and personnel to participate directly

*Surely it's past time  
for a wake-up call: all  
out to end U.S. war in  
Latin America and the  
Caribbean!*

in Colombia's civil war. Some 200,000 Colombians have died and five million were displaced. Peace negotiations between the leftist FARC guerrillas and Colombia's government are ongoing. The U.S. role in a brutal war, ideally, will prompt U.S. peace advocates actively to support that process.

Comments from U.S. Southern Command head Gen. John F. Kelly, overseer of military interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean, testify to U.S. war-makers' complicity in promoting destabilization and domination. Speaking to reporters about an attempted coup in Caracas on February 12, 2014, he exclaimed: "A coup? You know, I don't know anyone that would want to take that mess over, but it might be that we see, whether it's at the end of his term or whatever, I wouldn't say—I wouldn't (say) necessarily a coup, but there might be with—the same ruling party ... some arrangements to change leadership."

*W.T. (Tom) Whitney Jr., formerly a health worker, is active with Let Cuba Live of Maine, the Maine chapter of Veterans For Peace, and the International Network in Solidarity with Columbia's Political Prisoners (INSPP.org).*

## David Hartsough

... continued from page 18

for trying to stop the flow of munitions to El Salvador and Nicaragua, where they were being used to murder and maim thousands of campesinos struggling for justice after decades of brutal, U.S.-supported repression. President Ronald Reagan had signed new executive orders to counter "terror" at home and abroad, in effect re-instituting the FBI's feared COINTELPRO—orders that remain in effect today. Reagan claimed that impoverished people in Central America were creating a Soviet-inspired Communist beachhead "just two days driving time from Harlingen, Texas," and that the U.S. Americans dissenting from his policies of murder were terrorists themselves.

On Sept. 1, 1987, three veterans, after providing plentiful notice and surrounded by 40 others in solidarity, including Hartsough, began a munitions train blocking action just before noon. The train speed limit was 5 miles per hour; legal protocol required trains to stop and await police response when demonstrators were present on the tracks. As always two Navy spotters stood on the front platform of the locomotive in radio contact with the engineer to assure clear tracks. On this particular sunny day, the locomotive accelerated to 17 miles per hour, more than three times the legal speed limit, catching everyone off guard. One blocker (this reviewer) was unable to get off in time, losing both legs

below the knee and suffering a fractured skull among a multitude of injuries. Hartsough, standing immediately next to the tracks, had his arm struck by the speeding locomotive knocking him to the ground, and from that vantage point he observed the dragged blocker "getting smashed from side to side as the train continued another 400 feet before stopping." Of all of his years of resistance, Hartsough described this as "the most horrible experience of my life."

In 2003, as a result of his many observations of conflicts in various countries, Hartsough helped launch the Nonviolent Peace Force, deploying teams of multinational citizens trained in nonviolence to accompany and stand in defense of endangered people in critical global locations.

Hartsough's inspiring life story teaches us so much about the power of conscience and militant nonviolence, shaped by his years of participation with thousands of others in creative and educational resistance actions. He and his family also have modeled "right livelihood," with modesty and humble simplicity, conscious of the old motto, often ascribed to Gandhi, "live simply that others may simply live."

This is a primer for learning many practical approaches to militant, nonviolent revolution. Read and study it. You will not be sorry.

*S. Brian Willson is a Vietnam veteran, lawyer, long-time peace activist, and member of Veterans For Peace. He is author of Blood On the Tracks, a memoir.*



2009 U.S.-sanctioned coup d'etat in Honduras

# The Invasion of the Dominican Republic, 50 Years On

By the VFP Latin America/SOAW Working Group

The 1965 U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic has been overshadowed by the Vietnam War, the defining event of 1960s U.S. foreign policy. Few Americans, then or now, are aware that Lyndon Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic on April 28, 1965, ever occurred, let alone understand its ramifications.

Between 1866 and 1870, initiatives from both countries sought to bring the Dominican Republic into the United States. Annexation would give U.S. Navy ships a coaling station in the Caribbean. President Ulysses S. Grant also wanted to give newly freed slaves a place to migrate where race relations were better than in the American South, an idea supported by Frederick Douglass.

Political stability had eluded the Dominican Republic since independence in 1844. Joining the United States, which by 1870 boasted the largest economy in the world, would have helped the island tremendously.

Not everyone was for annexation, though. Sen. Charles Sumner saw it as imperialistic expansion into the Caribbean. And racist senators were uncomfortable with the idea of inviting so many people of

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*President Johnson sent nearly 43,000 military personnel ... to the Dominican Republic in a move called Operation Power Pack.*

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mixed-race ancestry into the Union.

Despite these failed initiatives, U.S. policy was by no means hands off, and when political instability continued, the United States saw fit to intervene in the Dominican Republic twice, in 1905 and in 1916.

The 1905 invasion was justified under the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. The Dominican Republic had racked up enormous debts with European banks and corporations, and Italy, Germany, France, and The Netherlands sent warships to enforce payment. Rather than risk having European powers in the Caribbean, Teddy Roosevelt dispatched the U.S. military to the customs house in the capital of Santo Domingo to ensure the debt was paid.

Political instability was the rationale when the United States intervened again in 1916 under President Woodrow Wilson. During a military occupation that lasted until 1924, thousands of peasants



**Bruce Palmer Jr., Commander of U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic**

were dispossessed from their lands, only to have them fraudulently repossessed by large sugar companies. The occupation was almost universally resented by Dominicans. Unfortunately, the National Police Force created by the U.S. Marines to help fight anti-U.S. guerrillas eventually facilitated the rise to power of infamous dictator Rafael Trujillo.

Trujillo, a.k.a. *El Jefe* ("The Boss"), came to power in 1930. It cannot be denied that his tenure was a period of economic growth, but most of the wealth went to Trujillo and his supporters (his estimated worth at the end of his presidency: \$800 million), at great expense to the majority of Dominicans. Human rights were practically nonexistent during El Jefe's reign; repression was rampant, torture commonplace.

The United States consistently supported Trujillo throughout his reign of terror, and only broke with him after his agents attempted to assassinate Venezuelan President Romulo Betancourt. When Trujillo himself was assassinated on May 30, 1961, in an ambush planned by his opposition, the CIA supplied the guns.

Political chaos reigned for the next few years. In February 1963, Dominicans democratically elected a center-leftist named Juan Bosch, but his presidency lasted only seven months before he was ousted in a coup by a junta known as the Triumvirate. On April 24, 1965, a group of Constitutionlists led by Colonel Francisco Daamaño Deñó—the April 24 rebels—seized power briefly, seeking a return to constitutional rule and the reinstatement of Bosch to the presidency. As the uprising commenced, U.S. Ambassador William Tapley Bennett falsely reported to President Lyndon B. Johnson that the embassy was under fire and U.S. citizens were in danger.

Worried about the potential creation of a "second Cuba," on April 28, under the guise of stopping communism in our backyard, President Johnson sent nearly 43,000 military personnel from the Marines, the Army's 82nd Airborne Division, and Special Forces to the Dominican Republic in a move called Operation Power Pack.

The decision to invade the Dominican

Republic was Johnson's alone. His advisers opposed U.S. intervention, the Bay of Pigs fiasco undoubtedly fresh in their minds. The Organization of American States (OAS) approved the invasion, but the United Nations did not.

About a month later, on May 23, 1965, the OAS sent in an Inter-American Peace Force (IAPF) made up of military and police personnel from Brazil (1,130), Honduras (250), Paraguay (184), Nicaragua (160), Costa Rica (21), and El Salvador (3). Sporadic fighting, concentrated mainly in the capital city of Santo Domingo, lasted until early September. Some 4,000 Dominican combatants were killed and 9,000 wounded. Forty-four U.S. soldiers were killed and 283 injured. A handful of Brazilians and Paraguayans were injured.

U.S. troops occupied the country until September 1966 when the last of the 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers were finally withdrawn. The Brazilians then took command of the operation, and the IAPF was disbanded in 1967.

In presidential elections held in June 1966, while the country was still under heavy military occupation, Juan Bosch was pitted against Joaquin Balaguer, a U.S. puppet who had been a protégé of Trujillo's. The CIA closely monitored voting while occupying soldiers fingered their weapons, and Balaguer won the fixed election. He held office until 1978, and again from 1986 to 1996.

## The Dominican Republic Today

To this day, Dominicans commemorate April 24 as the day that the Constitutionlists overthrew the junta. The U.S. military participates annually with the Dominican Republic in a joint exercise known as Operation Beyond the Horizon, "a humanitarian and civic assistance mission deploying U.S. military engineers and medical professionals to the Dominican Republic for training and to provide humanitarian services."

Is it legal or ethical or even good policy to invade other countries because we are unhappy about their policies or their leaders? Large segments of civil society in the United States and Latin America condemned that spring 1965 U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic. It wasn't hard to see through the false pretexts. By Johnson's own figures, only 58 communists were on the island in 1965. Later analysis proved that even that number was overblown.

This little-known history of U.S. intervention in the affairs the Dominican Republic represents a longstanding pattern of a foreign policy that continues to undermine the sovereignty and destabilize the lives of many people around the world. Nearly 90 years ago, the United States signed the Kellogg-Briand peace treaty that outlaws war. Too bad our political leaders do not take that pact seriously.



**Members of the 82nd Airborne searching a civilian in Honduras**

# Ben Griffin and Veterans For Peace UK

... continued from page 1  
positive.

"We've got a fair few people who have been through homelessness, drug use, alcohol abuse, broken families. Some of our members have been in prison," says Griffin. "Not everyone's got a problem with alcohol, not everyone's got a problem with drugs. ... But I would say that most veterans have been affected by their service in the military."

The educational work that Veterans For Peace carries out provides a sort of therapy for these men, many of whom have witnessed or even carried out acts of extreme brutality while serving in the armed forces.

"But," says Griffin, "as an organization we prefer to look at the bigger picture. For every homeless veteran, there are probably ten or even a hundred homeless in Iraq or Afghanistan; for every veteran with PTSD there

ple's countries, in killing, in torture, destruction—Veterans For Peace is an outlet for them to try and give something back, to try and rectify that."

## Children

Britain stands alongside North Korea and Iran as one of the few countries in the world to recruit under-18s—children can apply from the age of 15 years and 7 months with their parents' consent—so the nation's classrooms are a key battleground in the fight for peace. And, as in any serious conflict, the most important prizes to be won are hearts and minds.

"Ask a child what it's like to be in a war," says Griffin, "and they'll tell you what it's like to be a soldier in a war. 'You might see your friend be killed.' 'You might be killed.' 'You might have to kill someone.' But none of the kids in the workshops I run ever—or at least very rarely—answer the

for action. He is pre-warfare. We're working with the artist Darren Cullen to show people PTSD Action Man, Paralyzed Action Man and Dead Action Man and reveal some of the hidden costs of warfare."

## Northern Ireland

With what some members worried was a near-suicidal commitment to practicing what one preaches, Veterans For Peace recently sent a delegation of eight back to the Republican communities in Belfast, Derry, and South Armagh in which they had once been deployed as soldiers. Billed as "A Different Kind of Tour: Finding Understanding Through Dialogue," the four-day mission saw them reach out to former enemies—including Brighton bomber Patrick Magee—and engage for the first time on a human level with the civilians whose lives they had affected so deeply.

"The idea was to go over there and listen to those communities," says Griffin, "but also to answer their questions. One of the questions they asked again and again was 'Why did you join the army?' 'What did you think about us while you were serving here?' They had a real need to understand who we were and why we did these things."

As a paratrooper, Ben Griffin spent almost a year and a half in Northern Ireland in the late nineties. "I never once thought about how our presence affected the people who lived there," he admits. Military service in Ireland was, for him, "mundane." "We saw it as a sort of prison sentence," he recalls.

Hearing the experiences of the communities they had been deployed into was, for him and his comrades, a revelation.

"What was very mundane and boring for me was, for the people of South Armagh, intimidating and frustrating. Having those watchtowers constantly looking over you, tracking your every move, to be in your farmhouse and a patrol comes through your back garden, to be driving your kids to school and getting stopped on the road—it's a completely different experience. People I met when I was over in the North of Ireland this last time were telling me how, especially when they saw paratroopers, but when they saw any infantry soldiers on the street



Photo by Giles Perass

Bogside area of Derry in Northern Ireland

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*'Rather than the focus being solely on our own veterans, we would like to see a focus on the people we have damaged in foreign countries. ... All of us in the British Army ... volunteered. ... No one in Iraq or Afghanistan volunteered to be invaded by us.'*

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are probably ten or a hundred people in Iraq with PTSD; for every veteran suicide—let's see the suicide numbers of people living in Baghdad during the occupation. War creates these horrible outcomes—and the veterans are not alone in suffering from them. We have affected whole societies through our actions. Rather than the focus being solely on our own veterans, we would like to see a focus on the people we have damaged in foreign countries who did not ask to be damaged. All of us in the British Army, whether we were encouraged, cajoled, had our arm twisted to join the military through whatever means—we all still volunteered. We volunteered. No one in Iraq or Afghanistan volunteered to be invaded by us—we should remember that.

"Soldiers who have been involved in this; involved in the military, in occupying other peo-

question as if they were a civilian in a war, or think about what it might be like to have their country invaded. Our children are definitely thinking about warfare in terms of what it would be like to be in the military. One of the purposes of our workshops is to get children to think about what it might be like to be on the other end of British military power, or American military power, to take them out of that zone where they're thinking purely in terms of our own military and think about what it must be like to be on the other end of that. And that's what we are trying to achieve—to get people to think outside of nationalistic terms and think more in a global sense."

A series of spoof adverts selling "battlefield casualty" "Action Men" is also in the works.

"Normal Action Man has always got his clean uniform on, and all of his limbs, and is ready

with weapons, people who had witnessed Bloody Sunday, people who had witnessed the Ballymurphy Massacre, were stressed and anxious because for them this kind of thing could kick off anytime. Now we were patrolling at that exact same moment thinking, 'This is boring.' It's something I've only come to realize afterwards—the impact that we would have had. ... It's through understanding each other's stories that we can find peaceful resolutions."

One of the stories the delegation heard again and again from their former enemies was that the British policy of internment—the indefinite detention of "suspected terrorists" without charge—had led to their radicalization.

"Everyone had a trigger as to why they became involved in the struggle against the British military," says Griffin. "Whether it was a friend or a brother being shot, someone being put in prison, themselves being put in prison as innocent civilians. Everyone had a trigger. And you could understand their reasons. You could put yourself in that situation and say—I can understand that, I can understand the anger or the sense of confusion, or the fear, and wanting to try to make the situation better for your community and your family."

## ISIS

The parallels between this and the rise of ISIS—which, as *The Guardian* recently revealed, was spawned in the U.S. detention centers in Iraq—are immediately obvious.

It's a situation for which Griffin, a former member of the Special Forces snatch-squad tasked with capturing suspected insurgents in Baghdad and handing them over to the Americans, feels at least partly responsible.

"I've often thought since I got back from Iraq about the effect that we had on the people we came into contact with," he says. "And not just the men that we dragged off to prison, but the younger boys who would have stood there watching us, who would have been watching their family members being brutalized and dragged out—and maybe never saw them again, or didn't see them for months or years."

According to one of his contacts, a former interrogator who served in the American military, "only five to ten percent of the people who were picked up in Iraq had anything to do with the insurgency," but they were detained nonetheless and, according to Griffin's past testimony, many of them were tortured.

*continued on next page ...*

# Women Walk for Peace on the Korean Peninsula

## *From North Korea Through the DMZ to South Korea*

By Ann Wright

This May, 30 women from around the world will walk for peace in Korea. We are hoping to meet with women from North and South Korea to learn about their hopes and aspirations for a reunited Korea free from war. As if that weren't

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*If the barbed wire fences lining the DMZ were erected by men over 60 years ago, men and women have the power to bring them down.*

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challenging enough, we hope to cross the De-Militarized Zone (DMZ) that divides them and millions of families.

As you can imagine, it is quite the epic journey that requires traveling through Beijing, obtaining visas, coordinating travel from a dozen different countries, and everything else that comes with such a major overseas trip. Most of our delegation of dedicated women peacemakers are paying their own way, but the reality is that it is a costly event. But the impact could be “game changing,” as *The Nation* journalist Tim Shorrock tweeted last week.

We got our first glimpse of how game changing our women's walk for peace could be after our March press conference at the United Nations, where Gloria Steinem, Christine Ahn, Suzuyo Takazato, Abigail Disney, Hyun-Kyung Chung, Suzy Kim, Kim Keum-ok of South Korea, and I announced our walk. Every major international media outlet covered our event, including *The New York Times*, the Associated Press, *The Guardian*, Agence France Press, and dozens more. Their coverage launched our women's peace walk into the stratosphere. As a result, people from all walks of life, from Switzerland to South Korea,



*U.S. troops in Korea during the war*

have contacted us to ask how they can get involved to make our walk happen. It has caught the imagination of the world that the DMZ, the most militarized border in the world, can and must be crossed to help heal the divided peninsula.

### **Boost from South Korean Media**

The peace walk was covered in every major South Korean media outlet; it was just the thing we needed to tip the balance in our favor, because the South Korean government had not yet responded to our request that they approve our crossing the DMZ from North Korea to South Korea. But soon after the press conference, the South Korean Mission to the United Nations contacted us to let us know that Seoul is now considering our proposal.

We also heard from a journalist based in Seoul, “I am hearing that Seoul is likely to OK the border crossing ... a gov-

ernment spokesman here said South Korea generally has ‘a positive position’ on DMZ crossings by foreigners. And its related agencies will review your case. Sounds very positive.”

On Christmas Eve, we received word from the U.N. Command that it would be prepared to facilitate our crossing pending approval from South Korea, which we are still waiting for. Although North Korea had given a tentative yes last year, it came with a stern caveat: if the conditions were right. Given the tense circumstances now with the joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises under way, we weren't sure if they were. But March 23 we received an urgent message from the DPRK Mission to the United Nations saying that the visa for our key organizer Christine Ahn would be soon ready and that she should go right away to Pyongyang to sort out the logistics.

Although things can change on a day-

to-day basis, it is looking like we have managed the impossible: getting permission from both governments, as well as the U.N. Command, to cross the DMZ.

You might wonder, what will this peace walk do? For one, it has already conveyed several important messages: 1) The Korean War must end with a peace treaty; 2) women can and must be involved at all levels of peacemaking; and 3) we must act now to reunite millions of families tragically divided by a man-made division. If the barbed wire fences lining the DMZ were erected by men over 60 years ago, men and women have the power to bring them down.

Visit [womencrossdmz.org](http://womencrossdmz.org) for more information.

*Col. Ann Wright (ret.) was a career diplomat in the Army. She resigned her State Department post in the run-up to war in Iraq. She is co author with Susan Dixon of Dissent: Voices of Conscience.*

## VFP UK

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“I have no doubt in my mind that non-combatants I personally detained were handed over to the Americans and subsequently tortured,” he said in 2008, citing an incident involving “a cattle prod” and “partial drowning.” “The information I have released is but the tip of the Iceberg,” he claimed. Within 24 hours, the

Ministry of Defense served him with a permanent injunction, banning him from revealing the horrible truths that are only now beginning to emerge.

“I’ve often wondered how many of the people we traumatized went on to join ISIS,” he muses. And now we know—according to a recent report 17 of the top 25 ISIS commanders emerged from U.S. detention centers.

“It’s something that happens again and again. You invade a coun-

try; you bomb a country—that’s not the end of it. Every time that we interfere, invade, occupy, attack these countries there is going to be what the CIA calls ‘blowback.’ There’s going to be repercussions. They might not be immediate and they might not be obvious but there will be repercussions.”

That violence begets violence is hardly an unacknowledged truth—but, especially since ISIS, it feels like a nosedive that, with each moment that passes, becomes

ever more impossible to escape.

“Think of it like climate change,” says Griffin. “If we stopped burning petrol tomorrow the world would still heat up a bit for 20 or 30 years. But, just because it might take a few decades, that’s no reason not to do it. I think we need to look at militarism and war in the same way. If we stop interfering in the Middle East, there is still going to be a time period—maybe it’s 20 years, maybe it’s 50—where

we are going to experience the repercussions of the actions that we’ve already taken, and ISIS is one of these. It will take time, but eventually the effects of the pollution we’ve released will disappear.”

*Reprinted with permission from The Independent and Charlie Gilmour.*

*Charlie Gilmour is a London-based journalist and campaigner for penal reform. Follow the author @charliegilmour.*

# FULL DISCLOSURE

## AN HONEST COMMEMORATION OF THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM

# The War on Truth

*13-Year Pentagon Campaign to Whitewash an Ugly History*

By Jan Barry

In a case of historical overkill, the U.S. government is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War—not just this month, but for 13 years.

Fifty years ago, in March 1965, the big news across America was that the Marines had landed in Vietnam. For many in the news media, the landing of two Marine battalions at Da Nang was the beginning of the U.S. war in Vietnam. A better way to put it is that in 1965 Uncle Sam's secret war in Southeast Asia emerged out of the shadows.

In an attempt to provide some historical perspective, the Obama Administration began commemorating the 50th anniversary of the war in Vietnam on Memorial Day 2012. This means that the Pentagon's official history now says that the war started in 1962.

Having arrived in Vietnam in December 1962 to report to an Army aviation unit that flew Special Forces teams on secret missions, I'm curious to know exactly when the war started. In any case, by the time I arrived, the U.S. government had implemented a memo circulated at the Pentagon in January 1962 that proposed developing a "suitable cover story" for our escalating military operations in Vietnam, in the words of Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric.

That cover story, maintained for years, was that U.S. military units were not engaged in combat but were "advisors" to the South Vietnamese military.

These official twists of semantics are still being used in Iraq and Afghanistan as cover stories for secretive combat missions by U.S. forces. Indeed, much of what the U.S. government did after getting militarily involved in Southeast Asia

in the 1940s is still taking place as secretive, official policies.

Despite the fancy proclamation signed by President Obama in 2012, the cover-up of the falsehoods of the Vietnam War and disastrous aftermath continues.

Obama's proclamation of the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War states that "In recognition of a chapter in our Nation's history that must never be forgotten, let us renew our sacred commitment to those who answered our country's call in Vietnam ..." by staging "a 13-year program to honor and give thanks to a generation of proud Americans who saw our country through one of the most challenging missions we have ever faced."

For a great many Vietnam veterans, their treatment at home by government agencies was worse than what they en-

*Indeed, much of what the U.S. government did after getting militarily involved in Southeast Asia in the 1940s is still taking place as secretive, official policies.*

dured in the war zones. But that is not what the Obama Administration is calling attention to in this 13-year-long public relations campaign to tidy up the horrendous history of the Vietnam War.

Across the country, veterans (military and civilian) of the Vietnam peace movement are organizing teach-ins and other educational actions to challenge the Pen-



tagon's multi-million dollar propaganda campaign, which Obama inexplicably endorsed. Apparently, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate president never read what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said about the disasters of the Vietnam War being visited upon Americans at home.

"The time has come for America to hear the truth about this tragic war," King said in a widely quoted sermon in April 1967. "Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hope of the poor at home. It was sending their sons, and their brothers, and their husbands to fight and die in extraordinarily high proportion relative

to the rest of the population.

"We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem," King continued. "So we have been repeatedly faced with a cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same school room."

Perhaps by the time this Vietnam War-camouflage campaign winds up in 2025, the next president or two will have learned something about how to truly honor real work for peace and justice in Vietnam, at home and around the world.

*This article originally appeared at earthairwater.blogspot.com.*

Jan Barry is a poet, journalist, and author and editor of several books, including *A Citizen's Guide to Grassroots Campaigns*, *Earth Songs: New and Selected Poems*, and *Winning Hearts and Minds: War Poems by Vietnam Veterans*. More at [janbarry.net](http://janbarry.net).

## Singing Out

How big would the war  
Memorial wall be  
If it listed all the names  
Of soldiers who died of suicide—  
Adam, Baker, Charlie ...  
Jacob David George  
Three tours in Afghanistan  
Jeffrey Lucey  
Marine vet of Iraq invasion  
Theodore S. Westhusing  
Col., U.S. Army  
Who wrote in Iraq  
"Death before being dishonored"

I couldn't write about  
The first Vietnam vet I knew  
Who killed himself—  
I couldn't write about him  
I couldn't write his obit  
Because newspaper policy prohibited  
Reporting suicides

I didn't know what to do  
With that—that—that—muzzling

The second vet I knew  
Who killed himself  
Was found with a copy  
Of one of my writings  
In his wallet—  
We cannot protect our buddies  
We cannot protect our friends  
With words alone

We need to change  
Our apocalyptic, hellacious  
Hell-bent, death-dealing culture—  
Our flag flapping, sword saluting  
Sworn to secrecy  
Stiff upper lip, suck it up  
He-man, iron man military mindset

We need to transform  
The "death before dishonor"  
Code seeded in our souls—  
To singing out for life,  
For a lifetime  
Singing out  
To challenge, to change  
Our dancing with death

—Jan Barry

## Let Your Voice Be Heard

Write down your deepest memory of the American War in Vietnam.  
Tell it to the men and women whose names are on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Send it to us in the VFP Full Disclosure Program.

We will deliver your words to The Wall this Memorial Day, May 25.

Send your letter by May 1, 2015, via email to [vncom50@gmail.com](mailto:vncom50@gmail.com) or by mail to Full Disclosure, Veterans for Peace, 409 Ferguson Rd., Chapel Hill, NC 27516.

**Do it now.**

**Do it for the sake of history.**

**Do it for our children and grandchildren.**

**Do it for yourself.**

# Agent Orange and the Continuing Vietnam War

By Bill Fletcher Jr.

In a 2009 visit to Vietnam I asked a retired colonel in the Vietnam People's Army about the notorious toxin Agent Orange. The colonel, who was also a former leader in a Vietnamese advocacy group for Agent Orange's victims, spoke fluent English and was a veteran of the war with the United States. I asked him when the Vietnamese had realized the long-term dangers associated with the Agent Orange herbicide used by the United States. His answer was as simple as it was heart-wrenching: "When the children were born," was his response.

In an effort to defeat the National Liberation Front and North Vietnamese Army (the Vietnam People's Army), the United States concocted the idea that if it destroyed the forests and jungles that there would be nowhere for the guerrillas to hide. They, thus, unleashed a massive defoliation campaign, the results of which exist with us to this day. Approximately 19 million gallons of herbicides were used during the war, affecting between 2 million and 4.8 million Vietnamese, along with thousands of U.S. military personnel. Additionally, Laos and Cambodia were exposed to Agent Orange by the United States in the larger Indochina War.

Despite the original public relations aimed at making Agent Orange use appear safe and humane, it was chemical warfare, and it is not an exaggeration to suggest that it was genocidal. The cancers promoted by Agent Orange (affecting the Vietnamese colonel I interviewed, as a matter of fact) along with the catastrophic rise in birth defects, have not only haunted the people of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, but also the United States. Those in the U.S. military involved in the dispersal of Agent Orange and those who were simply exposed to it brought the curse home.

The U.S. government has refused to take responsibility for the war of aggression it waged against the Vietnamese. This includes a failure to acknowledge the extent of the devastation wrought by Agent Orange. Ironically, it has also failed to assume responsibility for the totality of the horror as it affected U.S. veterans, thus too often leaving the veterans and their families to fight this demon alone.

Congresswoman Barbara Lee recently introduced House Resolution 2519 to "direct the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide assistance for individuals affected by exposure to Agent Orange, and for other purposes." In many respects, this bill is

about settling some of the accounts associated with the war against Vietnam. The United States reneged on reparations that it promised to Vietnam and to this day there remain those in the media and government who wish to whitewash this horrendous war of aggression as if it were some sort of misconstrued moral crusade.

HR 2519 takes us one step toward accepting responsibility for a war crime that was perpetrated against the Vietnamese and that, literally and figuratively, blew back in our faces as our government desperately tried to crush an opponent it should never have first been fight-

ing. For that reason, we need Congress to pass and fund HR 2519. HR 2519 should be understood as a down payment on a much larger bill owed to the peoples of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and to the U.S. veterans sent into hell.

For more information on HR 2519 and the issue of Agent Orange, contact the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign" at [vn-agentorange.org](http://vn-agentorange.org).

*Bill Fletcher Jr. is a senior scholar with the Institute for Policy Studies, the immediate past president of TransAfrica Forum, and national board member of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign. Follow him on Facebook and at [billfletcherjr.com](http://billfletcherjr.com).*



**U.S. planes spraying Agent Orange in Vietnam**

## Looking Back at My Lai

By S. Brian Willson

The photo below was taken March 16, 1968, at My Lai. I arrived in country a year later on March 8, 1969, but of course had no idea of My Lai or any of the other massacres and atrocities occurring. Soon after arrival, however, from the air, from 300 feet or less, I would witness the aftermath of massacres that wiped out totally undefended fishing and farming villages, burning many of the villagers to a crisp with napalm. Sometimes I feel as if I am

still in shock, unable to share any expression that is able to convey the utter diabolical nature of it all, of history from our very beginnings. And yet I knew and was exposed to so little, just a taste.

One can easily imagine that the scene below could have been one of thousands of similarly documented examples (if there had been cameras) of bestial behavior committed with impunity by U.S.-Europeans starting in the 1600s, then continuing into the 1700s and 1800s against native inhabitants stealing their land and

lives. Of course, this genocide was followed by a second one of kidnapping Africans from their ancient communities to steal the labor (of those who survived). An entire nation of Eurocentrics built on subsidies of free land and labor, calling ourselves "exceptional," we are in fact exceptionally evil.

Then the Manifest Destiny continued across the oceans as well as into Latin America, plundering villages in more than 100 nations around the world. These

of our DNA through epigenetic changes in the psyches and visceral/DNA bodies of more than 20 generations of U.S. Americans who have never been held to account for our crimes against humanity and nature. We have become monsters as we drown ourselves in fantasy preserved by denial psychosis.

However, Karma has its ways, sooner or later, of bringing the consequences of this behavior home with a vengeance, like a searing toxic boomerang returning to its

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*An entire nation of Eurocentrics  
built on subsidies of free land and labor,  
calling ourselves 'exceptional,'  
we are in fact exceptionally evil.*

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**U.S. soldiers at My Lai**

communities were existing peacefully but had the misfortune of being in the path of U.S. imperial plunder, stealing resources and labor to assure the comfortable materialist lives of the Eurocentrics as a few white men became rich. They continue this pattern to this day as they strive with great earnestness and deceit to preserve their patriarchal privileges. Since our Christian nation has committed these serial massacres for over 400 years with virtual total impunity, blessed by God ("God bless America"), it has become part

sender. Let us be thankful for Karma as the universe's correction mechanism for our species' cancer on the planet. Perhaps we might come to our senses as we are about to be struck by the lethal boomerang, but I am not counting on it. Meanwhile we must tell the truth as we see it and know it.

*S. Brian Willson is a Vietnam veteran, lawyer, long time peace activist, and member of Veterans For Peace. He is author of Blood On the Tracks, a memoir.*

# Hartsough: A Life Well Lived

Review of *Waging Peace: Global Adventures of a Lifelong Activist*

By S. Brian Willson

We are fortunate to finally have David Hartsough's *Waging Peace*, an extraordinary description of his amazing 60-year journey as an activist spanning the entire Cold War and continuing to the present. As one of today's authentic elders, Hart-

sough offers us a body of experiential knowledge presented in dramatic detail sometimes easily forgotten in today's digital era of short memories. Hartsough excitedly shares wisdom garnered from a broad range of experiences: direct, nonviolent confrontation of Cold War policies during his travels in Europe as well as in the United States; active participation in the civil rights movement (he met

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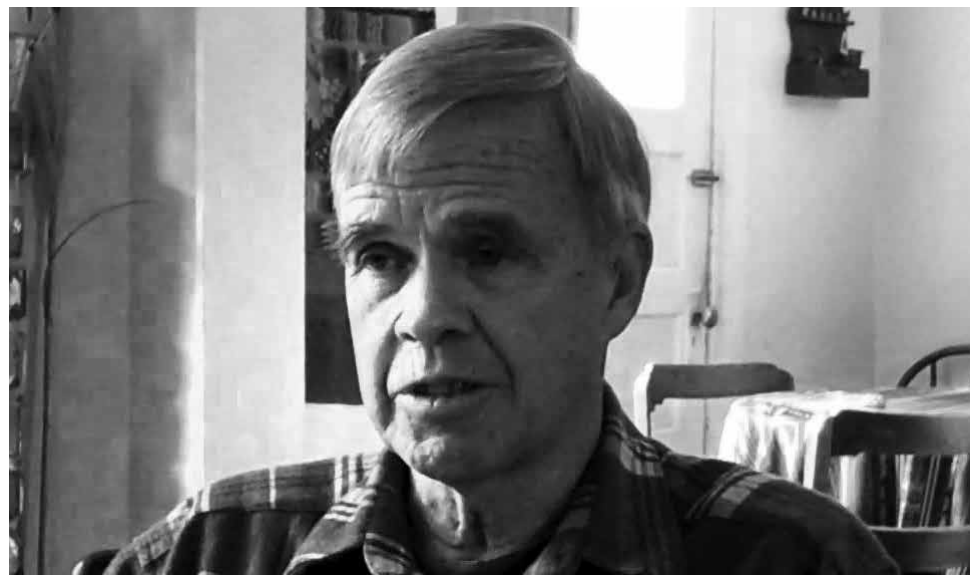
*Reagan claimed that these impoverished people in Central America were creating a Soviet-inspired Communist beachhead 'just two days driving time from Harlingen, Texas.'*

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campesinos facing historically repressive military threats in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Palestine; facing death squads in the Philippines and Chiapas, Mexico; visiting Russia during the Cold War and again in 1991, when he joined many Russians in efforts to avert a coup ousting the reformer Mikhail Gorbachev; leading delegations to Iran creating citizen-to-citizen diplomacy; traveling over the years to the



David Hartsough.

region of ex-Yugoslavia in efforts to participate in strategic nonviolent alternatives to the violence unleashed when Yugoslavia was broken up significantly due to U.S. policies; recently protesting drone warfare with increasing numbers of others by obstructing entrances to drone bases in efforts to confront the most insidious and diabolical of all terror policies; among many, many examples of citizen power.

In the chapter, "Assault on the Tracks: Facing Violence With Love and Courage," Hartsough describes his first-person,

eyewitness account of the horrendous assault—attempted murder—that occurred at the Concord, California Naval Weapons Station on September 1, 1987—the first such account to be published, as far as I know. He was one of many protesters, organized under the name Nuremberg Actions, who had been holding vigils all summer, directly confronting the transport of munitions by train and truck from the Pentagon's largest West Coast arsenal. Hundreds had already been arrested and jailed

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# The Mundane Realities of War

Review of *Quang Tri Cadence: Memoir of a Rifle Platoon Leader in the Mountains of Vietnam*

By Doug Rawlings

Recently, I picked up Dr. Jon Oplinger's *Quang Tri Cadence: Memoir of a Rifle Platoon Leader in the Mountains of Vietnam*. It didn't take long to get caught up in Oplinger's narrative, first because of his sardonic, wry voice, which rings so true for a Vietnam War veteran, but, more important, for its unrelenting allegiance to detail. But make no mistake—behind the irony is the author's empathetic and deeply compassionate nature, never far from the page. Culling from radio logs and from his own memories, Oplinger applies his skill set as a trained anthropologist to make his own personal experiences a very readable journey for both his fellow Vietnam War veterans and for those new students of the war who are interested in cutting to the chase—what was it like "in the bush"?

Listen to Oplinger's voice as he takes us

- from the "beginning"—"In the fall of 1965 I flunked out of college. This did not go unnoticed by my draft board."

- through his pre-field stateside experience as the officer leading "funeral details"—"In a cold, rain-darkened stand of trees, I watched a softly mewling man crawl on his hands and knees into his son's muddy grave."

- to the triple-canopy jungles of the

Central Highlands of Vietnam—"In the mountains, beneath the canopy, being uncertain of your position, or 'temporarily disoriented,' or 'fucking lost,' was routine." "It was very hot and several point men were exhausted as the column hacked and shoved through tangled, bug-ridden vegetation. 'Wait-a-bit' vines, nature's answer to the number 12 fishhook, ripped our clothing, leaving legs bare and deeply scratched." "It was one of those humid, windless nights when the air seems to carry sound like water. ... No one slept. Another hour passed. Another. It was near dawn."

- to the moment he was wounded—"Bunker! There was an isolated shot and red dust spouted from the entrance just in front of me. My rifle and helmet simply disappeared, by what mechanism I didn't know, and my right hand stung viciously. It was easy to see why; the fingers were hanging at odd angles and much of the meat had been blown off the palm. I managed a couple of steps to my right, fell on my face, and rolled over onto my back. ... I was carried back and forth. ... There was a Huey overhead and I was conscious of a lot of activity around me. Then a tug and I was upright with a slowly revolving green world falling away beneath me. ... In places the deck of the chopper seemed sticky; in others slippery. Blood."

- to months moving through military

hospitals: "It took me a while to realize it but night after night the medic sat in a windowed room overlooking rows of dismembered, wracked young men. In a week, ten days, three weeks, there would be another group just like them. He had to think in terms of knees, eyes, legs, colostomies, and amputations. He had no choice. And what about the supply sergeant who worked in the bottom of the *Repose* (a medical ship)? If he ever let up on his joking, if he ever stopped jabbering away, then he'd be staring across the passageway at a refrigerator full of 19-year-old stiff's."

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*'If he ever let up on his joking, ... then he'd be staring across the passageway at a refrigerator full of 19-year-old stiff's.'*

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- and finally home, where he pursued his doctorate at, of all places, Kent State University, and of all times May 1970: "Thin clouds of tear gas were drifting around by the time I had walked to the commons and I watched as two groups that shared a common desire to avoid participating in a war, tossed tear gas canisters back and forth. ... The town of Kent sprouted American flags every 50 feet

and its citizens basked in a soul-warming vindication. 'Those M-1s sure do hurt.' They loved it and would hold up four fingers (four dead and 20,000 to go)."

Jon Oplinger did not make the mistake of editing out the barbaric and often mundane realities of war to make his memoir more marketable 25 years after he lived through them. The book is laced with the harsh language of men at war—"fuck this and fuck that," "gooks"—and a good smattering of the black, dark humor that prevailed, no matter where you were. As a member of the 7/15th artillery surviving on landing zones and firebases in the very Central Highlands that Oplinger humped through, I had to chuckle at the author's reference to guys like me as "... having it easy." We'll have to talk about that.

Finally, I think the ultimate compliment I can bestow on this memoir is the sincere wish that it be translated into Vietnamese and shared with the ex-NVA troops who patrolled the same jungles that Oplinger wrestled through. And then to have Jon Oplinger and a few of his old "enemies" be escorted into a room of present-day college students to open up an honest dialogue about the incredible waste of war. That would be the ultimate "full disclosure."

Doug Rawlings is a Vietnam War veteran who co-founded Veterans For Peace. He taught alongside Jon Oplinger at the University of Maine at Farmington. His two books of poems, *Orion Rising* and *A G.I. in America, attempt to capture the life of a veteran for peace in America today. He currently lives in central Maine.*

# Nation Unhinged

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disorder among Vietnam veterans, he happened upon the records of the Vietnam War Crimes Working Group. This was “a secret Pentagon task force that had,” he writes, “been assembled after the My Lai massacre to ensure that the army would never again be caught off-guard by a major war crimes scandal.” The papers “documented a nightmare war that is essentially missing from our understanding of the Vietnam conflict.”

The devil is truly in the details. There were, for instance, the military units placed in kill-count competition so that, one soldier recalled, “as you passed through the chow line you were able to look up at a chart and see that we had killed so many.” How to decide if a corpse was Viet Cong, and thus merited a chow line check mark? As the saying went, “If it’s dead and it’s Vietnamese, it’s VC.” (This expansive sense of the enemy was a Western tradition: when the French fought the Viet Minh, a French lieutenant once asked, “What is a Viet Minh? A Viet Minh? He is a dead Vietnamese.” Turse writes, “The purest expression of the effect of the rules of engagement I ever found was on the death certificate of Nguyen Mai, an unarmed Vietnamese man who died ‘from a penetrating wound’ to the face.” The certificate listed the “external caus[e]” of death as “Running from U.S. forces.” As Ron Ridenhour, the soldier who gathered the details of the My Lai massacre, said 25 years later, My Lai “was an operation, not an aberration.”

There were also the Zippo squads—the men who set thatched houses on fire with

cigarette lighters when the military ordered the peasant population to move out because there were Viet Cong in the neighborhood. If this doesn’t strike you as the most brilliant way to win the Vietnamese “hearts and minds” our government told us it was striving for, you’re not alone. Turse cites a 1970 refugee study in one province where 80 percent blamed their homelessness on U.S. and allied South Vietnamese government forces, 18 percent attributed the damage to actual battles between the two sides, and only 2 percent blamed the NLF alone.

Another of Turse’s interesting finds is an official army investigation of the “Torture of Prisoners of War by U.S. Officers,” which concluded that such torture was “standard practice” among U.S. troops. And the study Defense Secretary William McNamara commissioned in 1969 that found more “than 96 percent of Marine Corps second lieutenants ... surveyed ... indicated that they would resort to torture to obtain information.”

Turse concludes: “For the Vietnamese, the American War was an endless gauntlet of potential calamities. Killed for the sake of a bounty or shot in a garbage dump, forced into prostitution or gang-raped by GIs, run down for sport on a roadway or locked away in jail to be tortured without the benefit of a trial—the range of disasters was nearly endless.”

When the My Lai story surfaced in late 1969, Nixon’s White House advisors feared the case might “develop into a major trial almost of the Nuremberg scope and could have a major effect on public opinion.” In 1971, retired Army Gen. Telford Taylor, chief prosecution counsel at the Nuremberg trials, raised the precedent of Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita, who



**U.S. GI burning a village in Vietnam**

was executed in 1946 after a U.S. military tribunal found him guilty of failing to prevent atrocities by his troops—even though he had lost contact with the troops at the time the crimes were committed. Taylor suggested that Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, might be in a similar situation given what had occurred on his watch.

Westmoreland once told a filmmaker: “The Oriental doesn’t put the same high price on life as does the Westerner. Life is plentiful. Life is cheap in the Orient. As the philosophy of the Orient expresses it, life is not important.” Damning as this opinion may sound now, it was well within mainstream discussion at the time. There were definitely Americans who thought

that the huge numbers of Vietnamese that forced us to kill them—by not surrendering—was evidence of a general Asian lack of respect for the value of human life.

But the administration managed to contain the fallout, with no convictions of anyone higher ranking than Lt. William Calley. In 1968, in terms of press coverage, even *Ramparts*, arguably the most radical mass-market publication in the nation, refused to run a war-crime story by a veteran who had witnessed the crime. But after My Lai became public knowledge, Turse asserts: “It was almost as if America’s leading media outlets had gone straight from ignoring atrocities to treating them as old news.” In 1972, *Newsweek*’s departing Saigon bureau chief filed a story about an operation called “Speedy Express,” in which he concluded that “thousands of unarmed, noncombatant civilians have been killed by American firepower. They were not killed by accident. The American way of fighting made their deaths inevitable.” His editors, however, argued that running the story would constitute a “gratuitous attack” upon the Nixon Administration, which had just taken such a hit over My Lai.

Henry Kissinger once told Richard Nixon, “Once we’ve broken the war, no one will care about war crimes.” And as the United States turned the bulk of the war over to its South Vietnamese government allies to lose, Kissinger proved right. In the tremendous research effort that produced this book, including many interviews of Vietnamese and U.S. soldiers, Turse finds, “The scale of the suffering becomes almost unimaginable,” but not as “unimaginable as the fact that somehow, in the United States it was more or less ignored as it happened, and then written out of history even more thoroughly in the decades since.”

*Tom Gallagher is a writer and activist living in San Francisco. He is the author of Sub: My Years Underground in America’s Schools. He is a past member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.*



**U.S. troops interrogating a suspected member of the Viet Cong in 1967**

*Just before the killing began at My Lai*

## A Nation Unhinged: The Grim Realities of the ‘Real American War’

By Tom Gallagher

We should make Nick Turse an honorary baby boomer for writing *Kill Anything That Moves*. A history of the Vietnam War that finds the My Lai massacre more the rule than the exception, this book is almost guaranteed to reveal something that will drop your jaw—at least once. For me, it was the number of U.S. military helicopter sorties flown during the Vietnam War: over 36 million. Filled with such shocking details, *Kill Anything That Moves* will shake you with a deeper understanding of the serial atrocity that was the U.S. war effort in Vietnam.

Turse’s book reminds us that the primary “tragedy of Vietnam” was not that America somehow “lost its way” in fighting an ill-advised war but rather that the war itself was a series of criminal acts perpetrated by the U.S. government on the Vietnamese people. My characterization may sound strident to many today. Most Americans at the time certainly would have disagreed with it. Yet as the war dragged on, the number who recognized the war’s criminality grew inexorably. If you don’t already know the reason, *Kill Anything That Moves* will show you. And if you already do, this book will remind you why we must never forget what our country did to Vietnam.

In 1947 the Nuremberg Nazi War Crimes Trials created something of a new world order—no longer would “just following orders” render you innocent of a war crime, nor would obeying the dogma of “my country, right or wrong.” Now, it seemed that it was a people’s right—per-

haps even its responsibility—to oppose its government if that government pursued an unjust war. Even silence could be criminal. When the U.S. government then tried to conduct the Vietnam War using draftees drawn from a generation that had grown up hearing these new rules, it encountered unprecedented difficulties.

Yet, so far as American public opinion on the Vietnam War went, the Nuremberg trials may ultimately have proven something of a double-edged sword in the sense that the enormity of the Nazi crimes confronted in those hearings may have desensitized us to the horrors that came in later years. Could anything really shock us after Auschwitz? Perhaps not, but *Kill Anything That Moves* overwhelmingly argues that outrage is still possible—and necessary.

To fully appreciate the Vietnam War, we must first clear up any misperception that it was some kind of fair fight between Vietnamese, with the United States helping one side and the Soviet Union and China helping the other. Turse’s book does so in many ways: There’s the fact that “our side”—U.S. and South Vietnamese government forces—used 128,400 tons of ammunition a month in 1970, while the “other side”—the National Liberation Front (NLF), or Viet Cong, and the North Vietnamese government—never fired more than 1,000 tons a month. Or that the United States dropped 32 tons of bombs per hour on North Vietnam from 1965 to 1968, causing some to predict it would become the most bombed country in world history.

This prediction proved wrong, Turse points out. It was South Vietnam, our ally,

that became the most bombed country in history as “U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft flew 3.4 million combat sorties in Southeast Asia,” during which they dropped “the equivalent of 640 Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs.” The “other side,” remember, never launched an aerial bombing run. “Our side” subjected 12 million acres to saturation bombing and dropped 18 million gallons of herbicide (notably Agent Orange). One of the war images that lives on is that of a naked nine-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phúc running down a road after having been napalmed by our South Vietnamese allies in 1972. (“Our side” dropped 400,000 tons of napalm in Southeast Asia.) Though Kim Phúc survived, a low-end es-

timate of the number of Vietnamese civilians who did not would be 250,000. By 1968, a U.S. Senate study had put the number of civilians killed or wounded in free-fire zones at 300,000. Free-fire zones, as Turse reports in an infantryman’s words, meant that “everyone, men, women, children, could be considered [a fair target]; you could not be held responsible for firing on innocent civilians since by definition there were none there.”

Indeed, a U.S. advisor reported in 1970: “[I] have medivaced enough elderly people and children to firmly believe that the percentage of Viet Cong killed by support assets is equal to the percentage of Viet Cong in the population. That is, if 8 percent of the population [of] an area is VC about 8 percent of the people we kill are VC.”

In 1995, the Vietnamese government put the number of war dead at 3 million, 2 million of them civilians; a 2008 Harvard Medical School/University of Washington research study produced even higher figures. (The population of South Vietnam was about 19 million.)

However, no one came away from the war unfamiliar with the killing of Vietnamese civilians, if only due to the public exposure of the March 16, 1968, My Lai massacre, when U.S. troops murdered an entire village of 300–500 unarmed South Vietnamese, in addition to raping civilians, killing their livestock, mutilating corpses, burning down houses, and fouling drinking water. In the official record, the Americans recorded killing 128 enemy troops and suffering no casualties. But whereas My Lai, Turse writes, “has entered the popular American consciousness as an exceptional, one-of-a-kind event,” his investigation caused him to see “the indiscriminate killing of South Vietnamese noncombatants” as “neither accidental nor unforeseeable.”

For Turse, the first glimmer of understanding came in 2001 when, as a graduate student researching post-traumatic stress

*continued on next page 19...*

*Bodies lie in a ditch at My Lai*