



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

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“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

Trying to Undo - America's Veterans of Conscience Living in Viet Nam

By Nadya Williams

“I hope we shall . . . crush in its birth the aristocracy of our moneyed corporations, which dare already to challenge our government to a trial of strength and to bid defiance to the laws of our country.”

~ Thomas Jefferson, letter to George Logan, November 12, 1816

Suel Jones can be found most every morning around 8:30 in his favorite café on Nha Tho Street, in the quiet part of Ha Noi's Old Quarter, just west of Hoan Kiem Lake. He's one of dozens and dozens of US veterans who live in-country full or part-time to work at undoing some of the war's devastation . . . in Viet Nam,* and in them selves. For the last 10 years the former Marine from East Texas has lived in Viet Nam's capital and aided, both with his own money and with countless volunteer hours, the tragic young victims of America's chemical weapon – the infamous defoliant Agent Orange. Suel's friendly, straight-forward manner and his charming Southern drawl make him a favorite interviewee of the likes of BBC World News and Agence France Press, though few Americans will have heard of him and his fellow vets who live and volunteer in the land of 'the enemy.'

Chuck Searcy, a vet from Georgia, is the consummate Southern Gentleman. Tall and soft-spoken, he receives many international delegations in his Project Renew office in Ha Noi, a de-land mining program funded by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (the organization that built The Wall in Washington, DC). Many years of perseverance, along with a dedicated Viet Nameese staff, has spread the project's meager budget to two districts of Quang Tri Province, along the 17th parallel's DMZ (De-Militarized Zone). The province's eight remaining districts are also in desperate need of clearance of both landmines and unexploded ordinance in this most heavily bombed area of this most heavily bombed country. The explosive power of 450 Hiroshimas was dropped on tiny Viet Nam in the form of conventional bombs. A hell of a lot of ordinance to clear!

Lewis Puller, who lost both legs and most of both hands to a land mine, founded the Vietnam Children's Fund - a non-profit that has so far built more than 50 schools since its founding in 1995. "In the year before his death," reads the Fund's brochure, "Lew Puller returned to Vietnam seeking ideas for the living memorial he and several friends had decided to build to honor the Vietnamese men, women and children who died in that country's long war." The Children's Fund's goal is to have 58,000 Viet Nameese kids in new schools, one child for every American killed whose name is on The Wall. Sam Russell now heads up the in-country program of the Fund and works pro bono. His small, sunny office overlooking Ha Noi's lovely West Lake is mostly supported by modest donations from state-side vets, their families and friends. It neither solicits nor accepts funding from any government.

Tom Leckinger was one of the first veterans to return to Viet Nam and Cambodia in the early 1980s, where he was appalled by the devastation and human misery he witnessed, and deeply troubled by the fact that the US embargo was the primary cause. Some political analysts are even of the opinion that the 20-year American embargo against Viet Nam (from the end of the war in 1975 until the Clinton administration's lifting in 1995) was as destructive as the war! Certainly tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands continued to die as a result. On Tom's second mission back to bring medical supplies, he learned that the death at birth of his first son in 1976 was likely related to his exposure to Agent Orange during his time in the infantry, as the symptoms being seen by Viet Nameese doctors were identical to those suffered by his infant son. He became a relentless and outspoken advocate for reconciliation, a very unpopular stance in those early days. He is now the president of the non-profit organization, Vietnam Veterans in Vietnam, many of whose members are also starting the first overseas chapter of Veterans for Peace.

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Veteran Ken Herrmann lives part-time in central Viet Nam, in the city of Da Nang, and works with the Quang Nam Fund. A SUNY (State University of New York) College at Brockport professor, he helps direct aid to local families with disabled children. Since a blood test to determine possible Agent Orange (AO) poisoning costs \$1,000, it's difficult to know with certainty which of the disabled children have been specifically harmed by America's chemical warfare – either from the damaged DNA of their parents, or even grandparents, or from simply living in an area that was literally saturated with dioxin (AO's deadliest compound). What is indisputable is that Da Nang, with its huge deserted American base, is perhaps the most heavily dioxin-contaminated of the many "hot spots" all over central and southern Viet Nam today. Used to kill surrounding jungle cover, the AO herbicide contained dioxin – the most toxic substance known to science.

Kathleen Huff and her veteran husband left Alabama to raise their young children in Viet Nam. Now married young adults, the Huff children speak fluent Viet Nameese and help their parents to manage the family business in Da Nang, Pizza Plus Restaurant and Bread of Life Bakery, whose staff are exclusively young deaf Viet Nameese. Profits are used to provide job skills education, a staff dormitory, and other deaf training activities.

Veteran George Mizo died of AO/dioxin exposure in 2002, but not before he started the Friendship Village project, an internationally-funded residential care and employment center outside Ha Noi for more than 100 AO victims – aging Viet Nameese war veterans and their young afflicted children and grandchildren. A unique collaboration of US vets with Viet Nameese vets, Mizo actually worked closely with the general who commanded an attack on his battalion during the war. It is in the Friendship Village where Suel Jones, and many other American veterans, volunteered for so many years.

John Berlow never fought in the war, but was kicked out of Harvard in 1969 for resisting it. He too has decided to devote his energies to undo. Gathering donations from his former classmates (he would have been in the class of 1971) and using his own savings, he's started a tree-planting enterprise called Green Vietnam. Fast-growing fruit and timber trees, for reforestation and income for the local people, are going into the soil on the hillsides of a remote village 5 hours outside of Ha Noi. John's goal is to plant one tree for every Viet Nameese killed in the war – that's 4 to 5 million trees, by most estimates.

Of the many US vets who live in-country today, working to undo, most live emotionally healthy, productive lives, but each grapples still with his own demons from the war. The men are highly competent and functional, motivated to give back precisely because of their deep humanity and painful war traumas, but some keep hidden scars which surface in bouts of drinking, failed relationships and lonely dedication to the Viet Nameese people.

"There is no such thing as a good war, nor a bad peace," said Benjamin Franklin. And many of the 3 million men and women from our country who served during Viet Nam quickly found that this war was not at all like World War II (the "Good War") of their fathers and uncles. A 1995 Viet Nameese estimate of 5 million dead (1 million military and 4 million civilians – 10% of the war-time population) is a hell of a lot of anguish for veterans of conscience to bear. Add to this the hundreds of thousands of other South East Asians (Cambodians and Laotians) who died from US bombing, then all the death and suffering since the end of the war in 1975 from the embargo, the devastation, landmines/unexploded ordinance, AO/dioxin, starvation, disease and destabilization. Finally add the nearly 60,000 American dead (average age 21), plus the tens of thousands of US vets who have died from service-related causes since the war – then the burden of sorrow carried by these veterans is truly staggering!

Some vets have found that the land of "the enemy" is the only place where they feel comfortable and 'at home.' For many their feelings about America were and still are too conflicted: they could not reintegrate into 'normal' society, they were often not listened to or worse shunned, many had to fight all over again to get care for their physical and emotional problems, and still others just withdrew into anger and depression. "Only" an estimated 16% served in actual combat, and the repercussions from their service vary greatly. But for some, plotting targets safely behind the battle lines for the carpet bombing of civilians can be as deeply guilt-inducing as face to face killing. Some vets who have returned have happily married local women and have raised families. Of course there are other US war vets who live in Southeast Asia only for the beautiful women, low prices and cheap beer. However these men do not engender the people's trust and respect shown to the veterans of conscience.

Unknown to most Americans, more than 300,000 South Koreans fought in Viet Nam as essentially colonial troops for the US. They too have suffered the consequences, but have also established non-profit projects there, along with development programs and businesses. Australia and New Zealand sent a few thousand men to the war effort, as part of an earlier version of "the coalition of the willing." Citizens, veterans and even the governments of these past war-time US allies feel their share of responsibility to Viet Nam for "the American War." The US government does not. The lifting of the punishing 20-year embargo against Viet Nam in 1995 was conditioned specifically on Viet Nam's waiving of any demand for war reparations. Likewise, the US chemical corporations who made the dioxin-laden Agent Orange refuse all responsibility and are fighting a class-action lawsuit brought against them in 2004 by their victims: Viet Nameese, Viet Nameese-Americans and US veterans. There are an estimated 3 to 4 million AO victims now living in Viet Nam; many of them are children.

Even foreign veterans who were involved in combat before the US stepped into Southeast Asia in the mid-1950s are committed to helping Viet Nam rebuild. The Frenchmen who were enlisted right after WW II to recapture their Indochina colonies from Japanese

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occupation are also active in supporting the work of their fellow vets to undo in Viet Nam. Since all colonial wars are unjustifiable, even some French veterans of the Algerian War (of the late '50s and early '60s) live in-country to direct relief funds. Some of these French veterans were to be seen at the March, 2008 10th anniversary celebration of the Friendship Village. There also seems to be a strange, but then again not so strange, brotherhood of nations who were victims of war. It's well known that the former Soviet Union was a critical ally of the Viet Nameese in their war of independence from foreign domination, aiding them during attacks from Cambodia and China after 1975 and literally preventing mass starvation during the US embargo. The vanquished of WW II, Germany and Japan, are today major funders of Viet Nam's rebuilding. Both these defeated countries benefited greatly from the American Marshall Plan to rebuild them after 1945. Not so the "victorious" Viet Nameese.

Suel Jones says he's "one of the lucky ones," because he fought only against other combatants: the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and the VC (Viet Cong of the south). He has not known the particular kind of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) suffered by other GIs who had to destroy villages and kill women and children. He 'only' saw his buddies die, like a blond, downy-cheeked, sweet-faced young man – "just a kid" - blown to pieces from a landmine, the second he stepped to catch a cigarette Suel had tossed to him. Called "The Old Man" by his Marine buddies (he was 24, much older than the others), Suel's luck struck a second time, laying him up with malaria when many of his squad were killed on a jungle patrol.

Suel has just finished writing a book, "Meeting the Enemy," about his year in combat, his return home (hiding his military service and never joining anti-war protests), his personal rage and struggles, and his return to Viet Nam to volunteer at George Mizo's Friendship Village. "Gooks" become "Vietnamese" in his autobiographical tale of fighting, dying and transformation – Suel meeting his own internal "enemies" along the way. He frequently cites his strong traditional East Texas family as a source of his mental and emotional survival. Proud, working-class Southern Baptists, his parents gave him a rock-solid foundation, even though they later could not comprehend nor support his dissent.

One story in Suel's book stands out. On a trip to Hue in central VN, he ran into a group of American veterans – "you can spot 'em a mile away" - on their first trip back. Since Suel spoke the language and was an old hand, he showed them around. During the night one of the men suffered a heart attack and died in his hotel bed. His friends were distraught, so Suel helped out, particularly because he also knew that the hotel staff would not want to return until a Buddhist priest came to perform a ceremony for the departed soul. This Asian religious ceremony had a profoundly calming effect on the group of American war veterans - they then took their friend back home. The vet who died had often spoken of his survivor's guilt, and of his buddies who were killed as he fought along side them there in Hue against the 1968 Tet Offensive. Perhaps he found peace in coming back to 'rejoin' them decades later at their battle site. Who can say.

A similar story comes from the Viet Nameese veterans Suel got to know in Ha Noi. Because nearly half of the residents at the Friendship Village are AO-sickened former NVA and VC, Suel was able to participate in many exchanges and workshops with them. They told him that sometimes before a major battle or campaign their commander would show them the coffins that were prepared to take casualties. This was extremely reassuring to these soldiers – knowing that if they were killed in battle, their bodies and souls would be properly cared for in the Buddhist tradition. Suel was astonished to learn this, and to see, at the end of one writing workshop, the Viet Nameese veterans perform songs and read poetry that they'd composed for the farewell meeting.

Suel Jones' kind but direct personality extends to all he meets, as when he confronted Viet Nameese vets who initially told him, "We cannot forget, but we can forgive American soldiers. We are not angry with you." "Bullshit," Suel replied. "We raped your wives, killed your babies, made your sisters into whores and destroyed your country." "Yes, you are right," conceded one vet, "it was like being occupied by Nazi Germany." Suel plans, after publication of "Meeting the Enemy," a second book - about his friendships with these men and women. Perhaps he'll call it "Voices of the Enemy."

Chuck Searcy has many, many stories to tell as well, not so much about combat, but about his return home to Georgia. He remembers attending a party with his high school friends, and speaking to a young woman there. "I just got a new car," she said, "hey, where have you been for so long?" "In the war in Vietnam," he answered. "Oh," she said. "Did I tell you about my new car and how much I love it?" After his 'turning against the war,' Chuck's own father told him he feared he was being "duped by the Communists."

Since Chuck's de-land mining program is funded by the Washington, DC-based Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, he has many contacts in our nation's capital. Living in Chuck's Ha Noi neighborhood was the man who pulled Senator John McCain out of a Ha Noi lake in 1967, saving McCain's life, first from drowning and secondly from a mob intent on killing the stricken US bomber pilot. Mr. Mai Van On was able to meet McCain in 1995 thanks to arrangements made by Chuck, but as he tells it, "Mr. On was never contacted again by McCain on the senator's many return trips back to Ha Noi. Neither was a letter of condolence ever sent to his family when Mr. On died in 2006."

Chuck Searcy is waging a valiant fight to deactivate just a fraction of the deadly explosives that hide in Viet Nameese soil. With only \$200,000 a year, Project Renew is up against more bombs than were dropped in the First and Second World Wars combined (including the explosive power of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Education of farmers and their families is key to preventing more deaths and injuries. Providing artificial limbs and some modest

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clinics for amputees are all part of Chuck Searcy's dedication.

Sam Russell of the Vietnam Children's Fund is not a veteran, but was touched deeply by the war, as were many following generations of Americans. Likewise, the organization's brochure does not soften any truths: "300,000 Vietnamese children suffered from war accidents or were orphaned," it reads, "1,000,000 were disabled and 50,000 still live on the streets." But the most damning statistic of all from the Children's Fund is perhaps this one: "300,000 children are still MIA (Missing In Action)." With the number of US soldiers missing no higher than 3,000, can anyone ever look at that American "MIA/POW" flag in the same way again after reading this??

After many visits over the decades, veteran Tom Leckinger finally made it back to South East Asia full time, spending two years running a prosthetics clinic for landmine victims in Cambodia, and then to Viet Nam in 2006, when he was selected to head up the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation's efforts to assist some of the hundreds of thousands of disabled - many with illnesses with direct linkages to Agent Orange contamination - with a series of medical and social programs. AO was sprayed from 1961 to 1971, but dioxin has a half life of 10 years - only when exposed to the sun. No one knows how long it will remain buried deep in the soil, water, and fatty tissue of humans and animals.

"It will 'sear your soul' to see those Agent Orange kids," said Tom, over lunch in Ha Noi. A veritable encyclopedia of history about the war and a hub for contacts in Viet Nam, Tom is the 'go to' person for anyone wanting to learn about the country, the war's legacy and present rebuilding programs. Indeed, with his referral, one can contact other American vets like Ken Herrmann to visit their projects.

Ken Herrmann's SUNY Brockport link offers American students from any academic major the chance to spend several months in Da Nang volunteering with the Danang/Quang Nam Fund. VAVA, the Viet Nameese Association of Victims of Agent Orange, has two day-centers in Da Nang that provide care and educational activities to mentally and physically disabled children and teenagers who cannot attend school, thus giving their parents a chance to earn money to support their families. The American students go out once a week to visit families in the rural outskirts of Da Nang to give a modest amount of the Fund's money to help with special needs kids, and then spend most afternoons with the children in the urban centers. But nothing can prepare one to actually enter a home and sit next to children with severe birth defects from Agent Orange, whose twisted arms and legs do not allow them to even sit up, let alone stand - ever. The mother in one family says she has mental problems due to her situation. Small wonder when she will never be free to work outside the home to help her husband support the family, never see her children grow up to run and learn, never see them married, never have grandchildren, never have adult children to care for her when she grows old. Tom Leckinger's words "sear your soul" could not be more apt.



Much of American society remains conflicted to this day about this war and its veterans. Some refuse to condemn the war as a crime, or at the very least a mistake, and still vilify those who served for "losing." (The first Persian Gulf War was supposed to have dispelled "The Vietnam Syndrome" for any Americans who felt we'd been defeated in the '70s.) Others feel some compassion for the past, but do not oppose new American military invasions and occupations. But for still others, the Viet Nam War deeply horrified and radicalized them for life. For the men and women who participated directly, only they know their reality. And for those who have decided to "give back" and "help" their former enemies/victims, each would say that it is they who have received so much more in return.

Nadya Williams visited Viet Nam for three months in early 2008. She is a former Southeast Asia study-tour coordinator for Global Exchange, a San Francisco-based human rights and peace non-profit. She is an active associate member of Veterans for Peace, San Francisco chapter, and an associate member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. She is on the national board of the New York-based Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign. Her first demonstration against the Viet Nam war was in 1963 at the University of California at Berkeley.

Veterans for Peace, Humboldt Bay Chapter 56 is in the process of trying to negotiate with Suel Jones to come to Humboldt County for a book signing tour. Our Coordinating Committee has already allocated a sum of funds, to ultimately be decided by the plenary to sponsor the event.

Tentative dates and events for Suel Jones' visit are being planned by the FEM Committee.

There will be more discussion on this issue at the April 8th meeting and a decision will be made as to the feasibility of the visit, dates, place and will be available in the May issue of the Foghorn

Women Vets Traumatized by Enemies Among Their Peers

By Mashaw McGuinness

Well Secretary of Defense Gates has been trying to show everyone what a feminist he is. He told Congress he plans to lift the ban on women serving aboard submarines. What a compassionate, open-minded guy he is. An article on the Veterans Today website quotes Census Bureau statistics and sure makes it sound great. It mentions the large percentage of female heads of households and the growing number of families with both parents serving in the military, so it points out how practical it is for women to be allowed to serve aboard subs. One important fact that the article leaves out however, is that military rape is on the rise, and enlisted women

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are even being sexually assaulted by their own superiors. So I'm trying to imagine having a daughter in the navy on a sub for months at a time, knowing about the likelihood of rape.

Apparently there were more reports last year of sexual assaults in the military, but to me a red flag is that a significant percentage wouldn't give crucial details to perform an investigation. This comes from a recent Huffington Post article which states that the Pentagon received 2,923 reports of sexual assault across the military in a 12 month period. What is even more surprising is that the Pentagon admits these reports only represent about 10 to 20 percent of sexual assaults among active duty personnel. I wonder if Gates has heard those statistics.

Not only are reports of rape becoming more common for enlisted women, many are being threatened with court martial if they go forward and want to press charges. That's exactly what happened to Marti Ribeiro while serving in the Air Force reserves in Afghanistan. She put down her weapon long enough to go smoke a cigarette and was dragged behind some power generators and raped. Doing what we always tell women to do, she immediately reported it, but what a surprise! The authorities blamed her because she had put down her weapon in the first place. Gee you think when you're at war, the enemy is on the other side, right? You think the person you're serving with is supposed to watch your back and you don't expect you'll have to arm yourself against your fellow American serviceman. Of course if she had, that would have gotten her court martialled too.

Marti was interviewed for a new book titled "The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women serving in Iraq", and told the author "I had dreams of becoming an officer one day, like my father and grandfather but unfortunately, because I'm female, those dreams will not come true." Author and journalist Helen Benedict interviewed 40 enlisted women and veterans about their experiences as women soldiers in Iraq. She examined female soldiers' professional lives and heard personal stories, from their time of enlistment

until they returned home. Readers learn from the interviewees themselves how they (female soldiers) are forced to face a kind of battle which no one talks about.

Marti's story is not unique, or even unusual. It is merely under reported. Rape is a very big deal. Just like war is a very big deal. Sadly, we have become accustomed to hearing about the men serving overseas returning with PTSD. But now it seems there is a whole new level of veterans' trauma. Young females who are encouraged to sign up and serve their country, believing they are helping "fight the enemy", find that once they enlist the enemy becomes their own comrades or commanding officers. Wouldn't it be nice if Gates and other decision makers in our government would publicly address these types of issues instead of making grand gestures to show how fair they are to women?

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Nadya Williams – Agent Orange,
Willie Hager - VetSpeak,
Jan Ruhman - Banished Vets,

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BEETLE BAILEY Mort Walker



Submitted by Nate Lomba



continued from previous page

Dr. Al Holtz - Depleted Uranium
Courage to Resist
Jeff Paterson

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Military Families Speak Out, Gold Star Families Speak Out,
Vietnam Veterans Against The War**

**Next VFP56 meeting will be
held on Thursday,
April 8th at 7:00 PM.
Meeting will be held in the
Commons Room at 550
Union Street in Arcata.**

CR Presents 'Don't Ask Don't Tell Documentary

College of the Redwoods will be screening the documentary film by Johnny Symons "Ask Not" on Thursday April 1, at 6:30 p.m. in room FM 100 on the Eureka main campus (7351 Tompkins Hill Rd.). The film is free and open to the public. There will be a discussion following the film.

"Ask Not" is a rare and compelling exploration of the effects of the US military's "don't ask don't tell" policy. A provocative portrait of bravery amidst exclusion, "Ask Not" reveals the personal stories of Americans willing to risk their lives for a country that criminalizes the act of coming out.

This event is sponsored by CR Political Science, Sociology, ASCR, and Multicultural and Diversity Committee and Humboldt Veterans for Peace.

For more information, contact CR professor Ryan Emenaker at 707-476-4306, or email him at ryan-emenaker@redwoods.edu.

If interested there will be a table for the VFP at the event and one spot on the discussion panel for a VFP member. Panel members will get a chance to make a short statement about themselves and their organization and their experiences with Don't Ask Don't Tell. Then the audience will be asking questions via cards.

PEACE POETRY

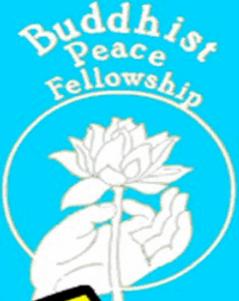
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Chapter 56

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LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to turtldncer@aol.com, in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.

VFP56 RETREAT

We are planning a VFP56 retreat/potluck on Saturday 24th at Bill & June Thompson's home, 3084 Jacoby Creek Road in Bayside. All members and friends are invited to attend. We will be interacting with friends and get to know each other on a more intimate basis. (Bring a potluck dish, drums, musical instruments, etc. so we can celebrate together).

We will also be discussing the future role of VFP56 and how we can best influence the peace process throughout the world. Bring your ideas to the retreat/potluck and share what's on your mind.

Last minute details will be discussed at the April 8th meeting. Please mark April 24th on your calendar as a special friendship day. Hope to see everyone there.

Veterans For Peace
Chapter 56
P.O. Box 532
Bayside, CA
95524