



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

APRIL
2015

“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

The Trial of the Catonsville Nine : Peace Assembly 2015 To be held May 2015

Due to our current political climate in which Congress is lobbying for the appropriations to invade Syria, and to further increase military presence in the Middle East, it is probable that many Humboldt area youth will make the life changing decision to join military service. It is timely to create the opportunity for discernment in Humboldt County. We must ask ourselves do we continue to assemble our youth for war or do we encourage the assembly of our youth for peace?

We at Theater of the Dedicated, a DreamMaker project of the Ink People Center for Performing Arts, believe that people are transformed to live open, peaceful and compassionate lives through participation in transformative theater which facilitates people making life affirming choices.

To that end we are dedicating time and energy for a Peace Assembly this May which will include the staged reading of a play, testimonials from Veterans (past and recent), a children's chorus (from Redwood Coast Montessori) singing peace songs and a forum for discussion with the cast and veterans. Veterans for Peace Chapter 56 has endorsed this event, and will contribute through participation in the play and adding voice in testimony. Date and location TBA.

The play, *The Trial of the Catonsville Nine*, by Daniel Berrigan, taken from actual courtroom transcripts, shows the drama of Daniel and Phil Berrigan and 7 other peace activists who were convicted and sentenced to several years in federal prison in 1968 for their participation in the burning of hundreds of draft files in a parking lot outside the draft board in Catonsville, Maryland.

“Veterans are the light at the tip of the candle illuminating the way for the whole nation. If veterans can achieve awareness, transformation, understanding and peace, they can share with the rest of society the realities of war. And they can teach us how to make peace with ourselves and each other, so we never have to use violence to resolve conflicts again.” Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk gave this analysis as a tribute and reminder to us the critical role of veterans, and their counterparts, the countless innocent dead and refugees, to share their experiences so that we might transform as a people to living open, peaceful and compassionate lives.

It takes a remarkable courage to be in battle. It takes a similar if not a more difficult bravery to bring peace into one's life and into the world we live in today. Theater has always been an avenue for pause, reflection, and inspiration. The forum of theater where authentic testimony is made transforms all those who gather around the contemplative and stirring fires of the stage. Who if not veterans who “are the light at the tip of the candle” can instruct us toward the path of difficult bravery to expand the possibilities of peace in our world? How do we teach our children and our youth to make the choices in their lives as they become leaders in their communities made with awareness, transformation, understanding and peace aiding us in making peace with ourselves and each other navigating the many conflicts that arise in complex society?

People of conscience, peacemakers such as veteran peacemakers show us that a new way is possible. The Catonsville 9 like the Milwaukee 14, the Baltimore 4, the Camden 28 and many others who became intermediaries in the dismantling of the instruments of war join hands with youth, veterans and the many other victims of war to build a new world that is inspired by peaceful awareness and action.

For those interested in getting involved in Peace Assembly 2015 this May, or for additional information, contact: Giancarlo Campagna. Phone # 273-2974 and email: sgcampagna@hotmail.com



'Honor' the Vietnam Veteran, Forget the War

Christian Appy and Nick Turse, February 09, 2015

Suddenly he appeared, riding in the back of a truck, his arms thrust to the heavens, his fists clenched tight. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was Ho Chi Minh, modern Vietnam's founding father... and he was holding dumbbells.

It was 2010, the eve of the 35th anniversary of the fall of Saigon – though it was known in Vietnam as Liberation Day – and the city was readying itself for a major celebration: a massive parade, fireworks, the whole shebang. That float, adorned with Olympic rings, was apparently designed to exhort Vietnamese onlookers to embrace physical fitness, though no reputable fitness trainer in the world would teach the form of standing shoulder presses being performed on that truck by that papier-mâché “Uncle Ho.”

Nations sometimes commemorate their war victories in strange ways. Not that I have first-hand experience. I grew up in the wake of the Vietnam War, so – like all Americans since the end of World War II – I never saw the celebration of a major victory. Perhaps somewhere, someone commemorated the triumphs over the tiny island of Grenada and the minimalist forces of Panama. There were, apparently, celebrations of the Gulf War before it was clear that meddling in Iraq would turn into a decades-long American debacle, though they didn't make an impression on me.

What I remember, instead, was a different kind of celebration, a long, meandering moment famously labeled “it's morning again in America” in a TV ad for Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign. A nation hobbled by the real Uncle Ho, deindustrialization, and a raft of poorly conceived policies that had come home to roost was being gilded back to greatness by a spinmeister-in-chief in the Oval Office – and Hollywood and the toy companies loved it. For me, it meant rousing times watching Rambo and “G.I. Joe” and Red Dawn. Rocky took on a towering Soviet superman, the Evil Empire's boxing champ, and chopped him down to size. The president flipped the script after the phrase “Star Wars,” taken from George Lucas's trilogy, was slapped on his fantastical “high frontier” defense boondoggle by critics. “If you will pardon my stealing a film line,” he said, “the Force is with us.” And if Mr. Gorbachev wouldn't tear down that wall – you know, the one in Berlin – well, Mr. Reagan might just blow it to smithereens with an MX missile. It was a celebratory time, but remind me now, what exactly were we celebrating?

It took me years to wrap my head around what I had lived through, to understand how my entire world had been deformed by the American war in Vietnam and the reaction to our devastating defeat there. I only began to figure this out, mind you, after I pro-

cessed the fact that these distortions didn't end with my Reagan-era childhood. But what did it all mean?

Fortunately, Christian Appy helped open my eyes with Patriots, his superb oral history of the Vietnam War from all sides. In his new tour de force history, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and Our National Identity*, he goes even further, drawing on a staggering range of sources, from Pentagon documents and Bruce Springsteen songs to a forgotten bestseller and Tom Cruise's *Top Gun* flyboy fantasy. In the process, he grapples with the ways the Vietnam War came home, how it transformed American culture and shaped our society from the 1950s to just last week. How did an idealistic crusade to save poor Asians from godless communism end in a made-in-America bloodbath? And how did we respond? In *American Reckoning*, drawing on long-ignored sources and his unique way of analyzing things, Appy explodes the myth of American exceptionalism in a genuinely original way.

Today, he takes the lessons of Vietnam further still, examining how a willful societal amnesia about what we did in Vietnam paved the way for an era of endless war. While predicting the future is dicey indeed, here's a forecast I feel confident about given Washington's continued misreading of the Vietnam War: in your lifetime, you won't see a float of George H.W. Bush doing sumo squats on the anniversary of the end of the Gulf War, nor one of his son doing bicep curls to commemorate the start of the surge in the Iraq War that followed. Distressingly enough, our third go-round in Iraq shares many of the hallmarks of our 1950s efforts in Vietnam, so hold off on the Obama-doing-chin-ups float, too.

Until the United States comes to grips with the grim reality of the Vietnam War, it's hard to imagine Washington moving much beyond its usual diet of foreign policy failures and military fiascos. Picking up a copy of *American Reckoning* would be a great first step in the other direction. ~ Nick Turse

Burying Vietnam, Launching Perpetual War
How Thanking the Veteran Meant Ignoring What Happened
By Christian Appy

The 1960s – that extraordinary decade – is celebrating its 50th birthday one year at a time. Happy birthday, 1965! How, though, do you commemorate the Vietnam War, the era's signature catastrophe? After all, our government prosecuted its brutal and indiscriminate war under false pretenses, long after most citizens objected, and failed to achieve any of its stated objectives. More than 58,000 Americans were killed along with more than four million Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians.

So what exactly do we write on the jubilee party invitation? You probably know the answer. We've been rehearsing it for decades. You leave out every troubling memory of the war and simply say: “Let's honor all our military veterans for their service and sacrifice.”



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For a little perspective on the 50th anniversary, consider this: we're now as distant from the 1960s as the young Bob Dylan was from Teddy Roosevelt. For today's typical college students, the Age of Aquarius is ancient history. Most of their parents weren't even alive in 1965 when President Lyndon Johnson launched a massive escalation of the Vietnam War, initiating the daily bombing of the entire country, North and South, and an enormous buildup of more than half a million troops.

In the post-Vietnam decades, our culture has buried so much of the history once considered essential to any debate about that most controversial of all American wars that little of substance remains. Still, oddly enough, most of the 180 students who take my Vietnam War class each year arrive deeply curious. They seem to sense that the subject is like a dark family secret that might finally be exposed. All that most of them know is that the Sixties, the war years, were a "time of turmoil." As for Vietnam, they have few cultural markers or landmarks, which shouldn't be surprising. Even Hollywood – that powerful shaper of historical memory – stopped making Vietnam movies long ago. Some of my students have stumbled across old films like *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*, but it's rare for even one of them to have seen either of the most searing documentaries made during that war, *In the Year of the Pig* and *Hearts and Minds*. Such relics of profound antiwar fervor simply disappeared from popular memory along with the antiwar movement itself.

On the other hand, there is an advantage to the fact that students make it to that first class without strong convictions about the war. It means they can be surprised, even shocked, when they learn about the war's wrenching realities and that's when real education can begin. For example, many students are stunned to discover that the U.S. government, forever proclaiming its desire to spread democracy, actually blocked Vietnam's internationally sanctioned reunification election in 1956 because of the near certainty that Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh would be the overwhelming winner.

They're even more astonished to discover the kind of "free-fire zone" bloodshed and mayhem the U.S. military unleashed on the South Vietnamese countryside. Nothing shocks them more, though, than the details of the My Lai massacre in which American ground troops killed, at close range, more than 500 unarmed, unresisting, South Vietnamese civilians – most of them women, children, and old men – over a four-hour stretch on March 16, 1968. In high school, many students tell me, My Lai is not discussed.

An American Tragedy

Don't think that young students are the only products of a whitewashed history of the Vietnam War. Many older Americans have also been affected by decades of distortion and revision designed to sanitize an impossibly soiled record. The first

step in the cleansing process was to scrub out as much memory as possible and it began even before the U.S.-backed regime in South Vietnam collapsed in 1975. A week before the fall of Saigon, President Gerald Ford was already encouraging citizens to put aside a war that was "finished as far as America is concerned." A kind of willful amnesia was needed, he suggested, to "regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam."

At that moment, forgetting made all the sense in the world since it seemed unimaginable, even to the president, that Americans would ever find a positive way to remember the war – and little wonder. Except for a few unapologetic former policymakers like Walt Rostow and Henry Kissinger, virtually everyone, whatever their politics, believed that it had been an unmitigated disaster. In 1971, for example, a remarkable 58% of the public told pollsters that they thought the conflict was "immoral," a word that most Americans had never applied to their country's wars.

How quickly times change. Jump ahead a decade and Americans had already found an appealing formula for commemorating the war. It turned out to be surprisingly simple: focus on us, not them, and agree that the war was primarily an American tragedy. Stop worrying about the damage Americans had inflicted on Vietnam and focus on what we had done to ourselves. Soon enough, President Ronald Reagan and his followers were claiming that the war had been disastrous mainly because it had weakened an American sense of pride and patriotism, while inhibiting the nation's desire to project power globally. Under Reagan, "Vietnam" became a rallying cry for both a revived nationalism and militarism.

Though liberals and moderates didn't buy Reagan's view that Vietnam had been a "noble" and winnable war, they did generally support a growing belief that would, in the end, successfully sup-

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Next VFP56 meeting will be held
on Thursday, April 2nd at
7:00 PM.
Meeting will be held at 24 Uni-
tarian Fellowship Way, Bayside,
Jacoby Creek Road. Veterans and
non-veterans are more than wel-
come to come and help us dialogue
about what we together can do to
bring about peace in this complex
world.



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plant lingering antiwar perspectives and focus instead on a process of national “healing.” At the heart of that new creed was the idea that our own veterans were the greatest victims of the war and that their wounds were largely a consequence of their shabby treatment by antiwar protestors upon returning from the battle zone to an unwelcoming home front. Indeed, it became an article of faith that the most shameful aspect of the Vietnam War was the nation’s failure to embrace and honor its returning soldiers.

Of course, there was a truth to the vet-as-victim belief. Vietnam veterans had, in fact, been horribly ill-treated. Their chief abuser, however, was their own government, which first lied to them about the causes and nature of the war, then sent them off to fight for an unpopular, dictatorial regime in a land where they were widely regarded as foreign invaders. Finally, on their return, it failed to provide them with either adequate support or benefits.

And corporate America was also to blame. Employers were reluctant to hire or train them, in many cases scared off by crude 1970s media stereotypes about wacko, drug-addled, and violent vets. Nor did traditional veterans’ organizations like the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars provide a warm welcome to those coming home from a deeply contested and unpopular war filled with disillusioned soldiers.

The Antiwar Movement Dispatched to the Trash Bin of History

In the 1980s, however, the Americans most saddled with blame for abusing Vietnam veterans were the antiwar activists of the previous era. Forget that, in its later years, the antiwar movement was often led by and filled with antiwar vets. According to a pervasive postwar myth, veterans returning home from Vietnam were commonly accused of being “baby killers” and spat upon by protestors. The spat-upon story – wildly exaggerated, if not entirely invented – helped reinforce the rightward turn in American politics in the post-Vietnam era. It was a way of teaching Americans to “honor” victimized veterans, while dishonoring the millions of Americans who had fervently worked to bring them safely home from war. In this way, the most extraordinary antiwar movement in memory was discredited and dispatched to the trash bin of history.

In the process, something new happened. Americans began to treat those who served the country as heroic by definition, no matter what they had actually done. This phenomenon first appeared in another context entirely. In early 1981, when American diplomats and other personnel were finally released from 444 days of captivity in Iran, the former hostages were given a hero’s welcome for the ages. There was a White House party, ticker-tape parades, the bestowal of season tickets to professional sporting events, you name it. This proved to be where a new definition of “heroism” first took root. Americans had once believed that true heroes took great risks on behalf of noble ideals. Now, they conferred such status on an entire

group of people who had simply survived a horrible ordeal.

To do so next with Vietnam veterans, and indeed with every soldier or veteran who followed in their footsteps seemed like a no-brainer. It was such an easy formula to apply in a new, far more cynical age. You no longer had to believe that the missions American “heroes” fought were noble and just; you could simply agree that anyone who “served America” in whatever capacity automatically deserved acclaim.

By the time the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was opened on Washington’s Mall in 1982, a consensus had grown up around the idea that, whatever you thought about the Vietnam War, all Americans should honor the vets who fought in it, no matter what any of them had done. Memorial planners helped persuade the public that it was possible to “separate the warrior from the war.” As the black granite wall of the Memorial itself so vividly demonstrated, you could honor veterans without commenting on the war in which they had fought. In the years to come, that lesson would be repeated so often that it became a bedrock part of the culture. A classic example was an ad run in 1985 on the 10th anniversary of the war’s end by defense contractor United Technologies:

“Let others use this occasion to explain why we were there, what we accomplished, what went wrong, and who was right. We seek here only to draw attention to those who served... They fought not for territorial gain, or national glory, or personal wealth. They fought only because they were called to serve... whatever acrimony lingers in our consciousness... let us not forget the Vietnam veteran.”

Since the attacks of 9/11, ritualized support for troops and veterans, more symbolic than substantive, has grown ever more common, replete with yellow ribbons, airport greetings, welcome home ceremonies, memorial highways, honor flights, benefit concerts, and ballgame flyovers. Through it all, politicians, celebrities, and athletes constantly remind us that we’ve never done enough to demonstrate our support.

Perhaps some veterans do find meaning and sustenance in our endless thank-yous, but others find them hollow and demeaning. The noble vet is as reductive a stereotype as the crazy vet, and repeated empty gestures of gratitude foreclose the possibility of real dialogue and debate. “Thank you for your service” requires nothing of us, while “Please tell me about your service” might, though we could then be in for a disturbing few hours. As two-tour Afghan War veteran Rory Fanning has pointed out, “We use the term hero in part because it makes us feel good and in part because it shuts soldiers up... Thank yous to heroes discourage dissent, which is one reason military bureaucrats feed off the term.”

13 Years’ Worth of Commemorating the Warriors

Although a majority of Americans came to reject the wars in

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both Afghanistan and Iraq in proportions roughly as high as in the Vietnam era, the present knee-jerk association between military service and “our freedom” inhibits thinking about Washington’s highly militarized policies in the world. And in 2012, with congressional approval and funding, the Pentagon began institutionalizing that Vietnam “thank you” as a multi-year, multi-million-dollar “50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War.” It’s a thank-you celebration that is slated to last 13 years until 2025, although the emphasis is on the period from Memorial Day 2015 to Veterans Day 2017.

You won’t be surprised to learn that the Pentagon’s number-one objective is “to thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War” in “partnership” with more than 10,000 corporations and local groups which are “to sponsor hometown events to honor Vietnam veterans, their families, and those who were prisoners of war and missing in action.” Additional goals include: “to pay tribute to the contributions made on the home front” (presumably not by peace activists) and “to highlight the advances in technology, science, and medicine related to military research conducted during the Vietnam War.” (It’s a little hard to imagine quite what that refers to though an even more effective Agent Orange defoliant or improved cluster bombs come to mind.)

Since the Pentagon realizes that, however hard you try, you can’t entirely “separate the warrior from the war,” it is also seeking “to provide the American public with historically accurate materials and interactive experiences that will help Americans better understand and appreciate the service of our Vietnam veterans and the history of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.” However, it turns out that “accuracy” and “appreciation” can both be served only if you carefully scrub that history clean of untoward incidents and exclude all the under-appreciators, including the thousands of American soldiers who became so disgusted with the war that they turned on their officers, avoided or refused combat missions, deserted in record numbers, and created the most vibrant antiwar GI and veterans movement in our history.

The most ambitious of the “educational resources” provided on the Vietnam War Commemoration website is an “interactive timeline.” As other historians have demonstrated, this historical cavalcade has proven to be a masterwork of disproportion, distortion, and omission. For example, it offers just three short sentences on the “killings” at My Lai (the word “massacre” does not appear) and says that the officer who led Charlie Company into the village, Lt. William Calley, was “sentenced to life in prison” without adding that he was paroled by President Richard Nixon after just three-and-a-half years under house arrest.

That desperately inadequate description avoids the most obviously embarrassing question: How could such a thing happen? It is conveniently dropped onto a page that includes lengthy official citations of seven American servicemen who received Medals of Honor. The fact that antiwar Senator Robert Kennedy entered the presidential race on the same day as the My Lai massacre isn’t even

mentioned, nor his assassination three months later, nor the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., just weeks after My Lai, an event that spurred bitter and bloody racial clashes on U.S. military bases throughout South Vietnam and the world.

It should not go unnoticed that the same government that is spending \$65 million commemorating the veterans of a once-reviled war has failed to provide sufficient medical care for them. In 2014, news surfaced that the Veterans Administration had left some 100,000 veterans waiting for medical attention and that some VA hospitals sought to cover up their egregious delays. Every day an estimated 22 veterans commit suicide, and among vets of Iraq and Afghanistan the suicide rate, according to one study, is 50% higher than that of their civilian peers.

The Pentagon’s anniversary commemoration has triggered some heated push-back from groups like Veterans for Peace and the Vietnam Peace Commemoration Committee (co-founded by Tom Hayden). Both are planning alternative commemorations designed to include antiwar perspectives once so common but now glaringly absent from popular memory. From such efforts might come the first full public critical reappraisal of the war to challenge four decades of cosmetic makeover.

Unfortunately, in our twenty-first-century American world of permanent war, rehashing Vietnam may strike many as irrelevant or redundant. If so, it’s likely that neither the Pentagon’s commemoration nor the antiwar counter-commemorations will get much notice. Perhaps the most damaging legacy of the post-Vietnam era lies in the way Americans have learned to live in a perpetual “wartime” without war being part of daily consciousness. While public support for Washington’s war policies is feeble at best, few share the Vietnam era faith that they can challenge a war-making machine that seems to have a life of its own.

Last year, U.S. Special Operations forces conducted secret military missions in 133 countries and are on pace to beat that mark in 2015, yet these far-flung commitments go largely unnoticed by the major media and most citizens. We rely on 1% of Americans “to protect our freedoms” in roughly 70% of the world’s countries and at home, and all that is asked of us is that we offer an occasional “thank you for your service” to people we don’t know and whose wars we need not spend precious time thinking about.

From the Vietnam War, the Pentagon and its apologists learned fundamental lessons about how to burnish, bend, and bury the truth. The results have been devastating. The fashioning of a bogus American tragedy from a real Vietnamese one has paved the way for so many more such tragedies, from Afghanistan to Iraq, Pakistan to Yemen, and – if history is any guide – an unknown one still emerging, no doubt from another of those 133 countries.



GOLDEN RULE PROGRESS REPORT

To all:::::

We've got an official dead line, June 20th. 2015, the Rule is scheduled to slide into Humboldt Bay. At 1600 hours the tide will be right and baring unforeseen problems we will splash after almost four years of hard work. There is a great deal of work to be done between now and then but a lot of hours are going into the finale stages. Several volunteers have traveled hundreds of miles to stay and help out. Money is coming in which is really helping. Sails have been ordered, port holes and other deck hardware are being located. Don Mathes traveled down from Oregon and overhauled the anchor wind less and then went to work painting. Helen Jaccard drove in, set up camp and left a week later with paint between her fingers and in her hair. Jason Kraft (the tree house guy) has installed grab rails on top of and inside the main cabin. The usual crew continues to move forward; cabin interior has been framed and primed, Mizzen boom gallows are shaped and are being varnished along with hatch covers and the main mast is progressing. Daisy is assembling and repairing blocks and other pieces needed for the rigging. Needless to say a lot of us have been very busy.

Hopefully this week we'll get the exhaust system in along with other through hull fixtures for cooling water and waste from the galley and you know the rest. I'll not try to name all the folks involved today but interest in the project is increasing and more help is needed. No photos this month, too busy but Steve Ninehaus has been putting progress pics and short videos on the face book page, at least that's what I've been told. They can be accessed through our web site, VFP Golden Rule Project.

Sincerely submitted by Chuck DeWitt, Restoration Coordinator

Homeless Veterans appeal : An ex-soldier's mission to re-veal the true face of war

Ben Griffin uses his experience as an SAS trooper to show children that civilians are casualties too

Serving the crown is a concept familiar both to convicts and soldiers. The former, for their sins, serve time at Her Majesty's Pleasure; the latter put their lives on the line in the defence of others. For some former armed forces members, the future on civvy street can be as bleak, if not more so, than for those leaving prison. For former servicemen, especially those who have seen combat, the gunfire may have long since ceased but, out on the streets, their battle is only just beginning. According to a recent Forces Watch study, post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol misuse are three times as common among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans than in the general population, while other mental disorders – such as depression – are 90 per cent higher.

The question of how to respond to the horrors wrought by modern conflict is one that a former SAS trooper, Ben Griffin, has been grappling with ever since he left the military in 2005.

After a childhood defined by Commando comics and the Army Cadets, Griffin joined the Parachute Regiment, aged 19. "I went into the military as an ideological recruit," he recalls. "A true believer... I saw going to war and being a British soldier as the highest ideal one could achieve."

Throughout most of his career – he served in Northern Ireland, Macedonia and Afghanistan – he saw little to contradict this. It was only when he was deployed to Iraq, having survived the elite SAS's gruelling selection process, that his faith in the military began to be seriously challenged.

As part of a Special Forces snatch squad tasked with picking up suspected insurgents and handing them over to the Americans, he began to worry about the legality of the war and the missions he was sent on.

After eight years of exemplary service, Griffin hung up his boots. He risked court martial doing so but, as he revealed shortly before he was silenced on the subject by a High Court injunction, he could no longer bring himself to carry out missions which were making Britain complicit in acts of "brutal interrogation" and "torture".

Like many other veterans, Griffin – who is now more happily employed in the ambulance service – has suffered the afterburn of the battlefield. Although he doesn't find the term "post-traumatic stress disorder" useful, referring to its symptoms instead as a "natural human reaction" to the horrors of war, he has his demons. But rather than allow himself to be consumed by them, he has harnessed them.

With the help of Veterans for Peace UK, Griffin has been turn-

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ing his SAS-honed tactical skills to the task of educating the public about the true nature of war. With 142 veterans, whose experiences of conflict range from D-Day to Iraq and Afghanistan, standing alongside him, his organization's perspective crosses continents and spans decades. This unique insight has left Griffin with few doubts about some of the costs of military service.

“Just being in a system where you've got hierarchy, peer pressure and a set of values completely at odds with the rest of society – it's psychologically difficult both to enter and to leave. Just as it's psychologically difficult to enter and leave prison.

“Add the chaos, the irrationality and the immorality of warfare on top, and people are going to be affected by what's happened.

“You can do or witness terrible things in the military and they can almost be laughed off – they often are – but when a soldier leaves the military the hierarchy is instantly removed. And, over time, the peer pressure and the indoctrination start to drop away too. Then you start to look back on the things that you were involved in with different eyes.

“I've often thought since I got back from Iraq about the effect we had on the people we came into contact with. And not just the men that we dragged off to prison, but the younger boys who would have been 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.”

In 2008, he said: “I have no doubt that non-combatants I personally detained were handed over to the Americans and subsequently tortured. The information I have released is the tip of the iceberg.”

At the time, within 24 hours the Ministry of Defence served him with a permanent injunction, banning him from revealing any more. “I've often wondered how many of the people we traumatised went on to join Isis,” he muses.

This cycle of political and psychological violence, with its repercussions for both the British soldier and the communities he is deployed against, is one Griffin is determined to break. The nation's classrooms are a key battleground in this fight for peace.

“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 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 end of British 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 end of that.

Veterans Group in Response to President Obama's Plan to Confront ISIL Says They are Disappointed But Not Surprised.

Veterans For Peace has released a response to President Obama's strategy to confront ISIL calling on the president to use diplomacy and to follow his own advice that there is not a military solution to the problems in Iraq. The organization of veterans, spanning from WWII to the current string of U.S. wars, warns that the president's plan continues to make the U.S. the “greatest purveyor of violence” on earth and places service members in harm's way when there are other solutions. They call on the president to take six non-military actions to avoid the slippery slope of sending troops to Iraq as well as to stop sending weapons that fuel all sides of the conflict. The group calls for diplomacy to be the number one priority and to include Iran as a partner to help pressure the Iraqi government to be more inclusive of Sunni leaders. Veterans For Peace points out that there cannot be success in confronting ISIL in Iraq without Sunni help and that bombing these communities, who up to now are supporting ISIL because of bad relations with the central government in Baghdad, will not help mend fences.

Veterans For Peace President Patrick McCann commented, “We are disappointed because President Obama's so called plan is more of the same. Nothing really different than waging war like the U.S. has done for thirteen years. Never mind that according to a State Department report, global terrorism has increased by 43% in 2014.” He went on to say, “Who really benefits from these failed policies? Clearly not the American people who pay for it in money and blood.”

“We are not surprised by the president's military solution because for the past thirteen years our political leaders have not put forward any other kind of solution. It seems all they know is war and have no concept of how to work for peace,” states Michael McPhearson, Interim Executive Director. “Just as meeting violence with violence in our communities here at home does not solve economic and social problems, more violence in Syria and Iraq will not solve the conflicts or diminish the political challenges there.”

Veterans For Peace response to the president's plan states, in part: President Obama outlined a strategy no different from what the U.S. has done for the past thirteen years. It is not a plan for success, it is a gamble that war will work this time when it has spectacularly failed thus far. We at Veterans For Peace challenge the American people to ask whose interests does endless war serve? Who is paying for these wars, whose children are dying in these wars and who is getting paid to finance and provide weapons for these wars? We the people are being driven by manipulated fear to support policies that are not in our interest. Peace is harder than war, but it is cheaper in blood and treasure. After thirteen years it is time to take another path, the path of peace.





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Chapter 56**

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FEM: Mashaw McGuinnis
VEOP: Carl Stancil, Jon Reisdorf
VSC: Ernie Behm

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.



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