



Bridges

Lessons of Vietnam



Blessed Are the Few

By Dylan Campbell

War can be a terrifying experience—one of the most deadly challenges in which the warrior risks life and limb. While such risk attaches immediately upon entering the battlefield, our Nation's highest award for valor—the Medal of Honor—is reserved for those who go above and beyond the call of duty to save the life of another.

On October 25, 2007, an eight-man paratrooper squad that included Army Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta was patrolling the Gatigal Spur in Korengal Valley, one of the most dangerous outposts in Afghanistan. The team was ambushed by a dozen Taliban fighters in a well executed attack. The paratroopers scrambled for cover, taking enemy fire. Sgt. Giunta saw Squad Leader Sgt. Gallardo knocked down, as he himself was hit in the chest. He rose and quickly dragged Sgt. Gallardo to cover. Separated during the struggle and attempting to reunite his squad, Sgt. Giunta and two other paratroopers ran forward to help seriously wounded Spc. Franklin Eckrode. Sgt. Giunta continued forward over a hill and saw Sgt. Brennan being carried away by two Taliban. Sgt. Giunta fired, killing one and forcing the other to drop Brennan and run. He then called for a medic. Sgt. Gallardo and Sgt. Giunta attempted to stop the bleeding and administered aid until help arrived.

In his book, *War*, Sebastian Junger recounted that Sgt. Giunta reported, "Everything slowed down and I did everything I thought I could do, nothing more and nothing less. I did what I did because that's what I was trained to do." Although Sgt. Brennan did not survive his injuries, Sgt. Giunta's actions did save the platoon.

General David Petraeus, the current commander of the International Security Assistance Force, wrote, "Specialist Giunta's selfless disregard for his own safety, while defeating a determined enemy ambush and rescuing his comrades was of the quality and nature of previous Medal of Honor recipients. His demonstrated valor was in keeping with the finest traditions of military heroism."

Medal of Honor recipients are recognized for their willingness to sacrifice their own lives. Of the eight Medals awarded since the Vietnam

War, Sgt. Giunta is the only one who survived to receive his.

One Medal of Honor awardee who did not survive was Sgt. Robert Miller. On October 6, 2010, President Obama presented the Medal to his family. Sgt. Miller had been operating in the same deadly area as Sgt. Giunta. While firing and calling out enemy positions during an engagement, Miller realized they were outnumbered. Ordering his men to fall back, he charged forward to draw fire away from his team. Sgt. Miller was fatally wounded, but he kept firing and calling in positions to protect his men.



Artwork by Adam Nye

During the Vietnam era, there were 246 Medal of Honor recipients. Many people have asked why only eight have been awarded in recent wars. Certainly men are no less courageous now as demonstrated by these two outstanding soldiers. During World War II and Vietnam, approximately three out of every 100,000 men serving received the Medal of Honor. In the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the ratio is a mere one in a million. Perhaps a reason for this is due to a significant change in how we fight. During the Vietnam War, much of the technology we use today—such as satellites and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that provide surveillance and early warning missions—did not exist.

Increasingly, innovative technologies allow us to make better informed decisions, thus neutralizing enemy capabilities. UAVs have taken over several of the missions normally performed on the ground by humans. Three years ago, the military used less than 100 UAVs as their "eyes in the sky." Currently, more than 1,200 perform a surveillance and/or offensive mission—the latter including the capability to stealthily strike out at insurgents with its Hellfire laser guided missile cargo, with the enemy oftentimes never knowing what hit them.

Technology has changed the face of war. But no matter how sophisticated it becomes, we will always depend on the courage of the soldier in uniform willing to risk all to save his fellow man—men like Sergeants Miller and Giunta.

While few receive the Medal of Honor, America is truly blessed to have such heroes.



A Lesson from Vietnam to Iraq

By Maddie Privette

Captain Nic Pilley has come a long way since Ms. Poling's *Lessons of Vietnam* class. However, he has never forgotten the lessons taught while taking her course. Upon his graduation from Millbrook High School in 2003, Captain Pilley went on to attend North Carolina State University on an Army ROTC Scholarship and graduated with a double major in political science and history. After he graduated in 2007, he became an Army engineer, designing roads and bridges. He is currently serving his first tour of duty in Iraq.

Captain Pilley is a prime example of how one class can impact the decisions one makes later in life. When I asked him how *Lessons of Vietnam* affected his career in the military, he responded, "As far as the army goes, this interest that was sparked by *LOV* goes hand-in-hand with being an officer in our military. You have to be up-to-date on current world events and recent world history to be able to step foot into many of the situations that one finds yourself in when deployed to any theater abroad."

Ms. Poling's *LOV* classes had the pleasure of meeting and talking to Captain Pilley while he was on leave over the holidays. Not only did we get to hear about his experiences as a student at Millbrook High School, but we also learned about his daily life while serving as an army engineer in Iraq. As he explained his job and the challenges he has encountered, we all found a new appreciation for those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan today.



Captain Nic Pilley poses with his link, David Crump.

It just goes to show how one class—and the lessons learned in it—can impact you for the rest of your life!





Human Rights in Vietnam?

By Colette Baldelli

Over the past 35 years, Vietnam has earned a poor reputation regarding human rights. The Communist Party has denied its people political freedom, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, as well as imposing strict restrictions on the practice of some religions. In 2004, the U.S. Department of State issued a report on human rights practices in Vietnam as "poor," based on a continuing history of "serious abuses."

Over the past couple of years, while the number of imprisonments for exercising human rights in Vietnam has gone down, these citizens are being subjected to less obvious forms of harassment and intimidation. These include constant surveillance and severe controls on their freedom of movement or ability to work. The threat of imprisonment is still real for individuals who openly challenge the government's authority—even if it is peaceful. With the age of technology, websites and blogs expressing one's thoughts about government and religion are common place in America. But, in Vietnam, the government sees such freedom of speech as a risk to its absolute control. The government has begun to block websites and blogs and arrested many who use the internet. Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh was arrested and jailed for ten days for her anti-China sentiment on her blog. She was released after she promised to write she would not blog again, but she continued to be harassed. This has caused her to turn her blogging against her communist government. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam also oppresses other victims, such as ARVN Veterans, denying them prosthetics, work, and government help. Buddhist monks and other influential religious leaders are imprisoned or closely observed. Critics in academia are harassed as



Artwork by Zach Beasley

well. The people of the Central Highlands are ignored, and the press is severely limited in what they can publish.

Sixteen years ago, the U.S. Congress declared May 11 as *Vietnam Rights Day* to highlight U.S. support for protecting and promoting basic freedoms in Vietnam. Our country has taken a bigger interest in this conflict as our relations with Vietnam grow and strengthen. The United States has made great strides in relations with Vietnam in trade, and economic growth, but ties hit a wall when human rights issues surface. Our government, along with Human Rights Watch, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, and other groups, has been encouraging Vietnam not to punish people who speak out against their government harshly, as well as to avoid singling out particular groups just because the government thinks they pose a threat to its control. The above organizations have all asked for the immediate release of Vietnamese citizens imprisoned for their political activities. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has visited Vietnam at least two times in an effort to discuss relations and the issue of human rights—but no progress has been forthcoming regarding this issue.

As of now, the people of Vietnam have no power to change the government, but underground movements have started to open people's eyes to the possibility of a democracy. With the dedication and work of the people like Thích Quảng Độ (imprisoned for 25 years for his opposition to the government) and other well-known current and former political prisoners, including Pham Hong Son, Nguyen Khac Toan, Nguyen Van Ly, Phan Van Ban, Nguyen Chi Thien and Nguyen Van Dai, there may be an opportunity for change.



Lest We Forget...

By Pamela Kass

The National Mall in Washington D.C. is home to one of our Nation's most popular memorials, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, commonly called, "The Wall." Since its dedication in 1982, The Wall has been a commemorative symbol of the sacrifice more than 58,000 Americans made in Southeast Asia between 1959 and 1975. The creators of this architectural icon are now looking towards the future by tying it in to America's past.

In recent times, the idea of building an Education Center has been the center of attention for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF). During my interview with Mr. Jan Scruggs, the President and Founder of the VVMF, he described how the Education Center will be a "profound educational experience using high technology with photographs of casualties." Mr. Scruggs also explained how the Education Center and The Wall will work together to portray the overwhelming emotions of the Vietnam War. He strongly believes that while "The Wall commemorates,

the Education Center will educate."

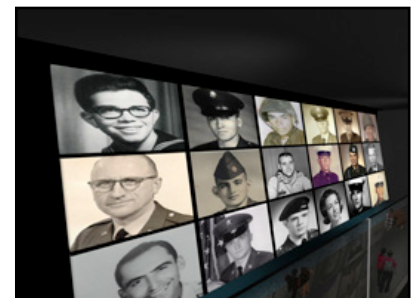
The purpose of this new addition to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is to inform future generations about the significance of The Wall, teaching the values demonstrated by the brave men and women who fought during the Vietnam era. These values of service, honor, duty, loyalty, courage, and sacrifice are reinforced by the World War II Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Washington Monument.

The goal of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is to collect photographs of all 58,267 names on The Wall to ensure those who died will never be forgotten and to display the personal artifacts that have been left at The Wall since its creation. The VVMF needs to raise \$60 million to undertake this project. It is hoped this will be accomplished in time to conduct a groundbreaking ceremony before the end of 2012.

It is indeed a deserving tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice—lest we forget.



Images courtesy of the VVMF



Opposing Viewpoints: The Midterm Election

By Austin Pruitt

No matter what side of the political spectrum you are on, an overwhelming majority of Americans would agree that the first two years of Barack Obama's presidential term was one of stunted economic recovery and congressional infighting. The American people watched as their assets' value flat-lined and unemployment grew. Although our economy is far from pre-recession strength, our President and the Congress passed questionable legislation, thumbing their nose too often at the American citizenry. The time for a dramatic power shift is due on Capitol Hill, one necessary to change the course of current American politics and policy.

Leading up to the election, congressional approval was at a low point. During President Obama's first two years in office, Congress



Artwork by Brigette Mourning

passed a number of stimulus packages, even though there is little evidence the first one was effective. The money involved in these bills was, for the most part, earmarked, often not being used for the intended purpose. Also, the spending was promised to go toward "shovel-ready jobs" to spark the economy. Sadly, too often, these "shovel-ready jobs" turned out to not exist. After this "stimulus" spending, we have not significantly enhanced our economic well-being, but rather have only racked up a monstrous, and increasing, debt of some \$14 trillion.

Even more controversial than our government spending was the new healthcare bill. Although perceived favorably by a liberal Capitol Hill and White House, the majority of Americans have refused to adopt the idea of "Obamacare." According to a *CNN* poll leading up to the bill's passage, 59% of Americans strongly disapproved of the new healthcare legislation. Most citizens worried about giving up choice regarding where and how they receive their care, plus many believe it is not the government's place to authorize and control its citizens' healthcare plans. Despite vocal opposition from America's majority, Congress passed the bill anyway! Perhaps not unexpectedly, the American people decided they had enough and, as midterm elections crept closer, only a reported 13% of likely voters viewed Congress as good or favorable (*Rasmussen Reports*).

On November 3, 2010, the American people spoke. The new balance of power in Congress is now 51 Democrats, 2 Independents, and 47 Republicans. Although the Senate was not won over by the GOP, Republican Senate representation increased dramatically. The balance of power in the House is now 189 Democrats and 239 Republicans. Of the 96 new members, all but 9 are Republicans. In the gubernatorial races, the Democrats claimed only 13 victories to 23 for the Republicans. It is clear Republicans can claim overall victory for the 2010 midterm election results and now turn their attention to the work at hand.

Paramount issues the new Congress wants to address are the repeal of "Obamacare" and decreasing government spending. One inherited issue the new Congress will handle is the need for a successful conclusion to the war in Afghanistan. In addition, the new congressional Republicans have promised to visit the idea of term limits in an effort to put a check on the government's power.

Many political advisors suggest that the key to the Republican victory was the Tea Party Movement. This grassroots organization believes in small, limited government—one guided by the Constitution. Although the Tea Party is nonpartisan, it is a conservative organization generally supporting right-wing candidates.

Following the largest party shift on Capitol Hill since 1994, the new Republican majority is offering a fresh 'Contract with America.' Its basic tenets are less government and less spending. The 2010 midterm elections appear to be a statement of disapproval for President Obama's policies. It seems the American people have awakened and rediscovered their conservative values. Should this trend continue, all signs point to a Republican presidential victory in 2012.

By Annalisa Kristoffersen

The Democrats reclaimed the Presidency in the 2008 election after eight long years. The new Democratic leaders inherited a terrible mess: our country was involved in two wars, saddled with a \$1.3 trillion budget deficit, rising unemployment, and a crisis in our banking and financial services industries. Many believe a large number of citizens around the country have benefitted from President Obama's recovery initiative. He has worked tirelessly to reduce unemployment, falling real estate values, and a crippled credit market.

While President Obama took a "shellacking" in the mid-term elections, President Obama's legislative accomplishments have put him near the top of recent presidents (*politico.com*). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is largely credited with preventing the U.S. economy from going into a free-fall. It has saved or created approximately 3.5 million jobs. Credit reform loosened up money so many Americans can once again buy new homes. Other progressive measures of the Democratically-controlled Congress include two sets of tax cuts, an overhaul of health care, repeal of the ban on gays serving openly in the military, and legislation protecting women's rights in the workplace.

The Republican Party has not offered creative solutions to our problems, or at least none that recognize the political landscape that exists. Their principal focus seems to be to 'get rid of Barack Obama,' without weighing the detrimental effects that might have on our country. One example of this is healthcare—a plan that some Republicans actually helped construct. Despite strong reservations about some aspects of the plan, a majority of Americans think the new plan is better than what we had previously. According to a poll by *Dailykos.com*, only 33% of the respondents favored repealing the healthcare plan in its entirety.

Without question, much work needs to be done to get our economy back on track and people working again. This will, however, require making bold moves with both parties working together. It is obvious that we need increased investments in energy and education, as well as the creation of jobs that will not be shipped overseas. President Obama has proposed a five-year domestic spending freeze, as well as a lower corporate tax rate, in addition to investing in clean-energy technology, biomedical research, and information technology in an effort to spur economic growth. After only two years of an Obama Administration, corporate profits are up, the dollar has strengthened, and the stock market has gone from "bear" to "bull," recently surpassing 12,000 points. While job creation still lags and long-term unemployment remains a concern, our country's economy is finally starting to see some growth with manufacturing up slightly and unemployment down to 9.0%. These are all good signs that our economic recovery is being sustained.

Many political pundits would agree that the key to the Republican victory was the Tea Party Movement. Some Americans believe that "TEA" stands for "Taxed Enough Already;" however, the Tea Party hardly seems to be a nonpartisan group. Their rhetoric and views are sometimes closely aligned with the conservative wing of the Republican Party.

The American public is interested in a healthy political debate on issues of importance to our country; we deserve better than negative campaigning and slogans that incite the fringes of both parties.

The latest Gallup Poll taken at this writing indicate that 49% of Americans approve of the job President Obama is doing versus a 42% disapproval rate. Interestingly, many conservatives idolized former President Ronald Reagan, yet his popularity declined to a low of 42% early in his presidency. This is a comparison worth making, since Ronald Reagan won re-election for a second term. I am confident that President Obama will also rebound from his declining popularity and be re-elected in 2012. I believe it will be increasingly clear that our country has benefited from the actions of the President and those members of Congress who lean left of center. We cannot solve today's problems using the mindset that created them.



