



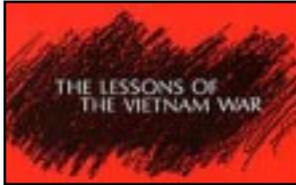
Bridges

Lessons of Vietnam



Taking Time to Remember

By Ashley Bell



The Vietnam War was confronted by numerous conflicting opinions. We still cannot forget the war, the deaths, the pain, and our past. Each semester LOV students interview family members, friends and teachers regarding the lessons

of the Vietnam War. This experience takes the war out of the textbooks and brings it "up close and personal." Through these interviews, students are more eager to learn and question. By reading the following responses, we hope that our readers will also reflect upon this important period of our history.

What is your most vivid memory of the war?

*"A Time Magazine picture of a little girl running because her clothes were burned by two bombs...Tears running down her cheeks."— MHS Teacher

What was your attitude during the war?

*" It changed. At first I didn't have an opinion, and then I turned bitter when friends were drafted and they didn't come back."

— MHS Teacher

*"I wanted my child to do what he had to do, but I certainly did not want him to go to war." —MHS Grandmother

What lesson has the Vietnam War taught us?

*"That armed conflict should be the absolute last resort, because you never know what is going to happen or what you are going to end up with...If armed conflict is inevitable, then deploy all of your resources to win."— MHS Dad

*"That if you chose to protest, then you should protest the war, not the soldiers."— MHS Mom

What should we teach our kids?

*"To protect and respect life."— MHS Dad

*"That freedom is not free." — LOV Class Friend



Similar Beginnings, Different Endings

By Eva Fauser

Do you know where the following quote is from? "...All men are created equal...they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Most people would say: "The U.S. Declaration of Independence." Surprisingly, this famous quote is also in Vietnam's 1945 Declaration of Independence.

So why, then, is Congress considering capping non-humanitarian aid to Vietnam and debating whether Vietnam is a "country of particular concern?" Why are more than fifteen student and youth group organizations waging a two-month nationwide campaign to bring attention to Vietnam? Why is Congress debating trade restrictions?

Did you know that the Vietnamese government only recognizes six religions; and, within those religions, it insists on organizing the leadership of each one? A recent government crackdown on the Buddhist population has caused worldwide concern. Security Police are surrounding pagodas, cutting off phone lines, and terrorizing Buddhist Monks and their followers. "All organizations that are established by unauthorized parties are against the law in Vietnam," said Le Dung, spokesman for the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All faiths are under constant threat from corrupt officials and security forces. The faithful are left alone without any priests or monks to lead them. "Without effective, independent leadership, individual believers are less of a threat to a communist system that is fearful of opposition

and the mystery of religious belief," said Dr. James Reckner, Director of the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University. Last year in Dak Lak province alone, 354 of 512 churches were disbanded with force, and about fifty pastors or elders "disappeared."



Painting by Lauren Johnson

Controls and safeguards are being placed on the Internet. Currently, the Vietnamese government is blocking access to 2000 websites. Satellite TV is prohibited—except to high ranking communist government officials and tourists. *Reporters Without Borders* published their second *World Press Freedom* ranking; and, like last year, Vietnam was located in the bottom ten.

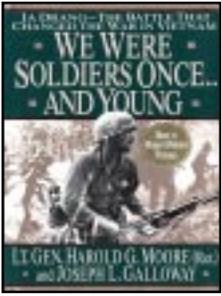
Local security can detain citizens without a court order for up to two years. The So Ho Khau (Residential Book) controls life in Vietnam. Every time a person moves, he requires a new Residential Book, and that is a long and corrupt process. Every night the police must know where everyone is. Hotels are even required to report the name of each tourist staying with them, along with their passport numbers.

I believe the questions are now up to America: *Are we going to get involved? Can we afford to get involved in Vietnam's human rights issues, with Iraq and Afghanistan already on our agenda? If we choose to get involved, what will our plan be?* With all of these questions, actions must follow—actions that our nation must be willing to execute in order to protect other subjugated nations, while guarding our own interests as well.



Movie Review: *We Were Soldiers*

By Sara Burns



It is hard to imagine yourself as a soldier, fighting thousands of miles from home for your survival, for your comrades, and for your country. It is also hard to imagine being a member of a soldier's family, living with constant anxiety and cautious hope. However, the movie *We Were Soldiers* allows you to do just that. It brings you face to face with the men and women who loyally fought in the Vietnam

War. It lets you see first hand the courage and determination born on a battlefield, as well as the innocence and sacrifices left behind. This movie also lets you look into the eyes of an enemy soldier and see that he, too, left behind a life and family and was fighting for the survival of his country. *We Were Soldiers* brings you into the heart of a soldier's wife; and thus, the viewer can experience her patience and grief while her husband is at war.

One of the most impressive things about this movie is its authenticity, from the taxi drivers and helicopters, to the soldiers and their wives. The realistic props and genuine people portrayed in the movie show that the director truly did his research. *We Were Soldiers* takes you back in time thirty-eight years to 1965. It was a both a time of unease and comfort, of dissent and unity.

It was a time in which people of this country, both home and abroad, lived up to the values and principles of the United States and did what they felt was right. *We Were Soldiers* does more than recount the fighting and death toll during the battle of the Ia Drang Valley. It revives the courage, determination, and selflessness of the soldiers. It also shows the sacrifices soldiers are willing to make for each other. When they are on the battlefield, politics do not matter anymore; all that matters to them is each other. They fight for each other.

This movie follows closely two characters, Lt. Colonel Hal Moore, an experienced military leader, and Joe Galloway, a news reporter. Moore's leadership, example, and direction helped orchestrate the "victory." He was the first one to step off the helicopter in the beginning, and the last to step on after the battle ended. Galloway intended to capture the war with a camera, but ended up fighting in it with a gun. He displayed valor and guts that were uncommon for a reporter, and that earned him tremendous respect.

We Were Soldiers is a tribute not only to the soldiers who fought in the Ia Drang Valley, but it is also a dedication to the spirit of *all* soldiers and those close to them on the home front. It is a movie well worth seeing, and it truly shows *who* and *what* these soldiers were really fighting for.



Long After the Vietnam War, LBJ is Still on the Hot Seat

By Oderah Nwaeze

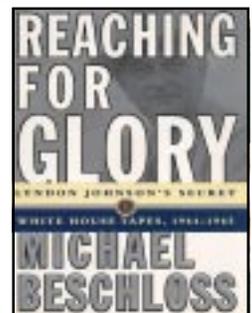
Perhaps it was John F. Kennedy's aggressive policies against communism, or President Eisenhower's repeated brushes with the Soviet government that led the United States into the Vietnam War. Yet, I believe President Lyndon B. Johnson's actions during this period bear him the brunt of the disgrace associated with America's first defeat in war. Historian Michael Beschloss' book, *Reaching for Glory*, released the transcripts of secret tapes made by President Johnson in 1964 and 1965. These tapes further expose the extent of Johnson's lack of confidence during the Vietnam War years.

When I first read an excerpt from Mr. Beschloss' book, I was completely outraged that President Johnson ordered our troops to fight a war that he viewed as 'impossible to win.' In my opinion, it would have taken strong decision-making and leadership skills to pull the U.S. out of the War, but President Johnson apparently lacked both traits.

After reading the related *Newsweek* article, "I Don't See Any Way of Winning," many *LOV* students seem to share this sentiment. One classmate commented that if LBJ felt he was not "temperamentally equipped to be commander in chief," then he should have resigned. Others insist that Johnson should have been more public with his thoughts in order to allow the American people to decide whether or not to throw their support be-

hind the war effort. *LOV* student, Kelly Young, stated, "He failed to be honest with the people; that is what a democracy is all about." However one chooses to look at it, it is difficult to admire a man who perhaps caused this great country to lose its first war and 58,000 American lives. What is also worrisome is that every move he made during this period was contrary to his own beliefs. In fact, President Johnson is quoted as saying, "...And we're losing more everyday...We're getting in worse...We've got no choice, but it scares the death out of me." In another statement, he commented, "My answer is 'yes' [regarding escalating the war]...But my judgment is 'no.'" To me, this is a clear example of President Johnson's lack of a backbone. He knows what is right and what his heart tells him to do, but he goes against his better judgment in order to appease his hawkish critics and closest advisors.

It is the President's duty to do what is in the best interests of the American people. Unfortunately, in the hearts of many American citizens, Johnson failed to do so. As *LOV* student Peter Eck commented, "LBJ was a coward." In a country where our some of our greatest heroes are men who overcome immense obstacles, we have no place for cowards.



A Look at Our World

By Robyn Murphy

Ms. Poling's *Lessons of Vietnam/Recent International Relations* classes finished off their fall term with projects relating to recent international issues. Students were asked to choose a topic currently affecting our world and discuss *who/what* is involved, related *values*, and possible *solutions* to the problem. Topics ranged from SARS to Global Terrorism. These projects proved to be not only informative, but interesting, as well.

Katie Greer and Roni-Leigh Burritt did an excellent job teaching us about North Korea, a country many Americans should know more about. The leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-Il, is a communist dictator who broke a 1994 agreement to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This presence of weapons of mass destruction, which includes biological and chemical weapons, is a major concern for America. That was the topic addressed in an superb power point presentation by Elliot Walker, Jordan Hill, and Terry Weber.

Another important international issue is Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Tyler Kelting and Ben Efirm selected this topic, because even though AIDS has been a serious problem throughout the world for many years, there is still no cure. 920,000 people in North America have HIV/AIDS. Tyler and Ben informed their classmates that there are many misconceptions about

AIDS. For example, 75% of people afflicted by this disease are *heterosexual*. They concluded that the best solution to this problem is more education—worldwide.

Adrienne Hollowell gave fellow *LOV* students something to think about with her presentation on World Hunger. To illustrate the magnitude of this crisis, she made a sobering poster depicting 29,000 flowers representing the number of children that die of hunger everyday.

Students enjoyed having the opportunity to teach their classmates about topics of their own special interest and concern. These presentations have helped to spark an interest and awareness about global issues that are extremely crucial to all of us.



Sara gives her presentation on Global Terrorism.



Still Faceless

By Adrienne Hollowell

How easy it is to accept a number without a face. It seems that television tries to aggregate the world's hungry into an invisible suffering minority. Poverty is not what you see on television; it is not just a problem that some government has in a deteriorating country half a world away. It is a problem that exists in our neighborhoods, our country, and our world. We have a responsibility as human beings to at the very least acknowledge that poverty is an issue that is in dire need of resolution. 29,000 children starved throughout the world yesterday. This means that every single time we took a breath, a child somewhere took its last one. This is inexcusable, as there is enough food in this country alone to feed the entire world's growing population three times over with plenty to spare? So why does this surplus fail to alleviate the scarcity.

The problem lies in the distribution of wealth in the hunger "hot spots" of the world. When 5% of a society owns 95% of the wealth, it is difficult to balance the scale. Similarly, a free market system alone is useless to the hungry. Without proper financial incentives and land reforms, the poor have very little buying power, and the free market system fails. Although

it seems that idleness breeds starvation, there are many movements among the international poor which aim to raise a voice. These are currently most prominent with the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico and the Farmers' Movement of India. Such attempts do nothing to provide economic stimulus due to the poor credit most of these countries have with the World Bank. It seems natural that stable countries, such as the United States, should help fight hunger with our wallets as we have in the past. Our own economy suffers as well, because labor is cheapest among the desperate, causing our goods to be imported rather than exported.

While our proverbial hands may be tied, our feet are yet unbound. Funds can be spent on relief workers to ensure that aid reaches the needy—rather than simply signing a check for the government. However, it is most important that Americans stop turning a deaf ear to the hunger problems of the Third World. Sterilizing what we allow ourselves to hear only succeeds in further suppressing the oppressed. We have, quite literally, found ourselves with more on our plates than we can chew. Why not share the wealth?

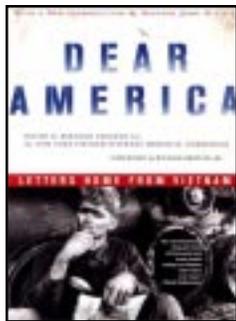


Painting by Michelle Konar



Movie Review: *Dear America*

By Njaimah Jobe



The film *Dear America—Letters Home from Vietnam* is the best documentary I have seen! This film was great, because the stories were being told from those who were living them at the time. The title really does say it all, because the film revolves around a reading of letters written from soldiers serving in Vietnam to their loved ones back home. One of the soldiers said in the beginning of the documentary that he was writing home not because he wanted to, but because he might go crazy if he didn't talk to someone in the outside world. The film showed the soldiers' happy and playful moments, as well as the sad and low points during their service. One of the things I really appreciated about the film is that it did not only concentrate on the war in Vietnam. It also showed other events that were taking place at the same time, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, President Johnson's decision not to run in 1968, and the Kent State tragedy.

The music was terrific! I always hear people saying, "What's a film without the music?" but I was not a firm believer until now. That is what captured my attention before the dialogue in every segment. The music perfectly accompanied each new segment of the film. Sometimes protest music, patriotic music, or Christmas music would be played, depending on the topic or time period.

The letters some of these soldiers wrote home were just heartbreaking. One soldier wrote to his parents asking if his girlfriend was being faithful to him. (He died a few weeks later). Another wrote to his parents saying that one thing that training camp did not prepare him for was how to tell your parents you are being sent away to Vietnam. I noticed that the soldiers would often talk about the death toll, and the fear that they might not make it home. I especially remember the following passage, "I would rather be fighting communism in South Vietnam than in Kansas." I think that this was true for many of the other soldiers, as well.

I highly recommend this film to my contemporaries, because it brought me closer not only to Vietnam, but to the brave souls who were there sacrificing their lives for my freedoms.



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Does Saddam's Capture Matter?

By Josh Whitmore

This past December, United States forces found a defeated Saddam Hussein, living in a "spider hole" near his hometown of Tikrit. Once the news reached U.S. citizens, none could deny feeling slightly relieved that the tyrannical dictator was finally captured. Almost instantaneously, President Bush's approval rating rose, and many people against the war in Iraq began to have a change of heart. Now that it has been nearly eight weeks after this monumental capture, we can ask ourselves: *Has the capture of Saddam made a difference?*

Since President Bush announced that major combat in Iraq was over last spring, more American troops have died than during the actual war. Is Saddam to blame for the continued fighting? In short, no. Saddam was not the "field commander," simply because he cared too much about his own well being. Saddam was too busy running to his many hideouts trying to evade capture by U.S. forces. However, the fact that Saddam was not calling all the shots does not mean he had no effect on the Iraqi mindset. Iraqi fence-straddlers may throw in the towel and join U.S. forces now that they don't have to worry about Saddam reclaiming power and executing any disloyal citizens. Nevertheless, many Iraqi diehards will fight the U.S. until they are killed or captured. The capture of Saddam by no means ended the fighting in Iraq, but it was definitely a big step the U.S. needed to take in order to get firmer control of Iraq.

When Saddam's capture was announced, many politicians immediately voiced their opinions. Former Democratic Presidential Candidate Howard Dean caused public uproar when he said, "The capture of Saddam has not made America safer." The apprehension of Saddam has made America safer by removing a rogue leader, who will finance terrorism, away from terrorist groups. Also, the purpose of the war in Iraq was not just to make America safer, but also to make Iraq and the rest of the world free from the evil power Saddam held. Furthermore, this war in Iraq could never be considered a total victory without the capture of Saddam Hussein. Even if all Iraqis eventually have absolute freedom with a democratic government, the United States would not see the war in Iraq as a complete success without having Saddam out of the picture. Although the fighting in Iraq continues, the capture of Saddam was an important milestone that finally and absolutely frees the world from his pernicious ways.



The Bridges Staff



Class of 2004

