



Bridges

Lessons of Vietnam



What Should We Teach Our Children About Vietnam?

By Megan Knox and Jessica Highsmith

Although the Vietnam War ended over thirty-two years ago, many people still vividly remember the effects this war had on their lives. In trying to determine what we should teach our children, *Lessons of Vietnam* students interviewed parents, grandparents, friends, teachers, and veterans. Now those students have a better understanding of the lessons that can be learned from such a compelling event in history. Following are some meaningful responses to this important question:

• “We should teach our children to always believe in democracy, and that America is a republic. Always believe in freedom and be willing to fight for it and defend our rights and way of life.”
~ **MHS Father**

• “We should always try to stay informed about what is going on around us. The public shouldn’t just accept everything the media tells us as the truth.” ~ **MHS Grandmother**

• “Teach kids how to learn from history. Sometimes there are times we need to be involved and fight for what is right.”
~ **MHS Grandfather**

• “I actually haven’t talked to my girls about Vietnam, but what I will tell them is that freedom is costly. Freedom has to be protected.” ~ **MHS Co-worker**

• “To love and care about each other, and not to forget our country even though we lost the war. Remember who we are.”
~ **MHS SouthVietnamese Veteran /Father**



25 Years Later: What Does The Wall Mean to our Veteran Links?

By Eric Book

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, dedicated on Veterans Day weekend 1982, is the most visited memorial in Washington. Often referred to as “The Wall,” it currently has 58,256 names of men and women who gave their lives or remain missing. For the fourth time in 25 years, the reading of the names will take place at The Wall starting on November 7, 2007. As this special anniversary approaches, several *LOV* class Veteran links were asked to reflect on what the memorial means to each of them.



Photo by Barclay Poling

For most, The Wall is a place to reflect and remember all the soldiers who did not survive the war. Many commented on the tremendous cost associated with this war. Red Cross Donut Dolly Larry Hines stated that The Wall is a “stark, huge, tangible reminder of all the lives that were lost in an undeclared war...one that robbed my generation of 58,000 of our best and brightest.” Vietnam Veteran Larry Weatherall commented, “I’m glad it’s there for the world to see as a symbol of the cost of the Vietnam War and the price that some of us paid.”

For others, this memorial is seen as hope that lessons learned will not be forgotten. It also evokes a strong feeling of patriotism. According to Veteran Steve Seblink, “[The Vietnam Veterans Memorial] is a reminder of what it means to be an American, what it means to be a citizen and a symbol of hope in that we learn from our experiences and are better prepared to address the challenges of the future.” “The Wall serves as a

warning to leaders who would make the same mistakes and send another generation’s children into the cauldron of war,” commented Veteran David Rabadan.

This memorial is also a place of comfort. Veteran Stephen Sossaman reflected, “Perhaps the primary value of this memorial for veterans and their families is that it is a physical space that allows everyone affected or interested to be in the same place. Hawks and doves, military veterans and peace movement activists, jingoists and pacifists . . . We stand next to each other, not always knowing who is who, or who thinks what, and are quiet.” Vietnam Veteran Bob Gray said, “I can go and find solace and peace in recalling the friends that I lost.”

I am beginning to understand why this memorial is so important to so many veterans. The Wall is a place of hope, reflection, comfort, and healing. It is different from most other memorials as its “focus is on the names of the dead, all ranks and services treated equally, so what we are told to remember is the sacrifice of actual human beings,” submitted Mr. Sossaman. The main reason that The Wall is so meaningful to these veterans is because they were there. Veteran Dan Sheehan said, “Some of the names engraved in granite were my friends. I was there and the memorial speaks to me personally.” Dr. Ric Vandett has left us with some very poignant words, “No more pain. No more tears. No more agony...just a deep feeling of pride. Pride in the men and women with whom I will be forever united: the Vietnam Veterans.”





The First Online War

By Hillary Stewart

The War in Iraq has been a part of American history since March 19th, 2003. Like some wars in the past, it has been publicized through newspapers and television. But it is the first to be viewed through what today is considered a common household resource, the Internet. The Internet has empowered millions of Americans to voice their opinions on the war and debate others around the country. Since it is easily accessible, many Americans go online effortlessly to search videos, news reports, and new information on the war. Numerous websites have become available for people of any age, race, etc, to post comments and interact with others on the Internet as well. Such websites are now known as "blogs." The Internet today finally gives the "silent majority" of old a voice to share their own views.



Artwork by Chris Pilley

site has received posts from thousands of people all over the world, including some from soldiers currently serving in Iraq.

Another vehicle available for people to express their creativity is "YouTube." This is a website that makes accessible billions of videos ranging from homemade movies to news castings. If one searches "war in Iraq" on "YouTube," roughly 132,000 videos have been posted. When sorted by play count to determine the video viewed most often, surprisingly a video that has only been posted for a month has received the highest number of hits--8,514,264.

The Internet has made it easier for people to keep up with the war and obtain a broader range of views than one gets by reading the newspaper or watching television. The war in Iraq may not exist in some American's lives, but it is

While searching for blogs online, I came across a website entitled, "My War: Killing Time in Iraq." This is a blog that has been updated regularly since June 2004. The creator of this website has written a book with the same title. While the author has posted on this site, he also allows others with opinions to post as well. His

very prominent in the lives of others. Although the Internet has been available to the public for about 18 years, this is the first time it has generated heated and controversial discussions online. Now everyone with access to the Internet has a voice.



Point of View: A Big Promise, Unfulfilled

By Dawn Nwaebube

With the War on Terror going on for six years now, the main focus seems to be on Iraq. But, what about Afghanistan? The news does not talk about how American soldiers are still sacrificing in that country or how the people in Afghanistan feel about the American presence. Since the war began, in 2001, American intelligence agencies had reported that the Taliban was so decimated that it no longer posed a threat.

The Bush administration announced widespread big goals in April of 2002, and President Bush promised a "Marshall Plan" for Afghanistan; but an article written by David Rhode and David E. Sanger suggests that the plan has not taken place. On April 17, 2002, President Bush traveled to the Virginia Military Institute and gave a speech saying, "We're tough, we're determined, we're relentless. We will stay until the mission is done." The speech fueled positive expectations in Afghanistan; yet despite President Bush's assurance, during the months that followed his April speech, no detailed reconstruction plan emerged.

The Pentagon was considering withdrawing up to 3,000 troops from Afghanistan, roughly 20% of total American forces, in September of 2005. In the end, the planned troop reduction was abandoned; but three months after this announcement, the White House Office of Management and Budget cut Afghanistan's aid by one-third.

General James L. Jones, a retired American officer and a former NATO supreme commander stated, "If we don't suc-

ceed in Afghanistan, we are sending a very clear message to the terrorist organizations that the U.S., the U.N., and the 37 countries with troops on the ground can be defeated." CNN reported that the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, said that he would be willing to meet personally with Taliban leader Mullah Omar and give militants a position in government in exchange for peace. Unfortunately, Taliban spokesman, Qari Yousef Ahmadi, insisted that there would be no negotiations until the U.S. and NATO troops withdrew from Afghanistan.

If we are not able to help one country reconstruct itself, then how are we able to keep the promises that we make to other countries? It would be commendable if the same effort being put in Iraq was put towards Afghanistan in order to see the mission in that country succeed. If greater focus were put on Afghanistan, perhaps the Taliban threat in Afghanistan would diminish.



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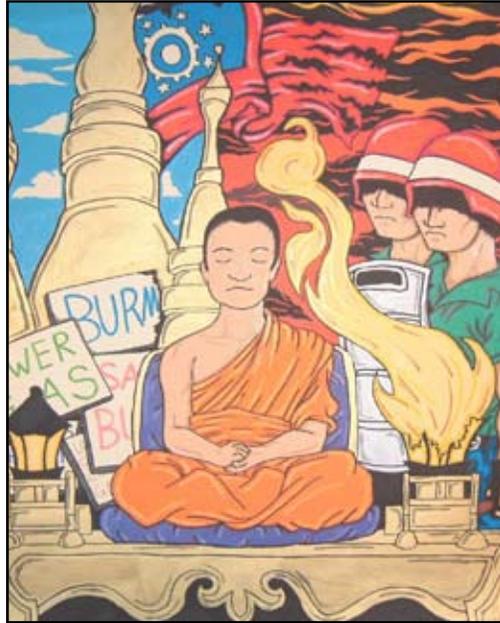
A Saffron Revolution?

By Jessica Highsmith

Recent protests in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, have prompted its ruling junta to take excessively violent action. In mid-September, hundreds of enraged Buddhist monks, dressed in saffron robes, assembled around the sacred Shwedagon pagoda, in Yangon. Crowds of protestors could be seen loudly chanting and marching throughout the streets of the city. The purpose of these demonstrations was to peacefully protest elevated gasoline prices in August that have been weakening an already impoverished country.

While the Burmese police have authoritative rule, the Buddhist monks hold the key to ultimate moral authority. While the junta lacks legitimacy, it has ruled with an iron fist through its use of intimidation and military strength. Interestingly, as an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, there are nearly as many monks as soldiers. The Buddhist monks have an irrefutable impact on the country due to their spiritual status. These two established groups are both 400,000 strong, making the protest a challenge between mammoths.

After an increase in fuel prices raised the cost of transportation and other necessities, the protests began. The massive street demonstrations went into effect as a result of the junta's



Artwork by Zach Smithson

attempt to repress the protestors. The official death toll is ten; however, there are several reports that hundreds were killed during the bloody demonstrations led by the Buddhist monks. The military forces unfairly arrested, beat, shot and disgraced the monks. In one video smuggled out of the tightly controlled country, a man is seen with his hands raised above his head as Myanmar security personnel beat him with sticks. The soldiers even prevented the monks from carrying out their daily religious practices by surrounding their monasteries. In an even more striking act of selflessness, the monks refused to accept the alms, which buy their food, from the military rulers. This refusal effectively isolated the junta from a religion that is a foundation of Burmese culture.

Although the volatile demonstrations have ended for the most part, the impact of the Buddhist monks' dismissal of the Junta's cruel repressive tactics will continue to influence the citizens of Myanmar. If something is not done to halt the unpopular regime's cruel display of power, it is likely the streets of Myanmar will once again be filled with mobs of saffron-colored robes.



A Presidential "First?"

By Annie Wheeler



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Who doesn't think about rising to the top of their profession? If that profession is politics, while some might long to occupy the White House, others might not, as America faces difficult challenges and a controversial war. But the 2008 Presidential election offers a number of "firsts" that no previous election has. We have the opportunity to elect our first female President, our first African-American President, our first Hispanic President, our first Mormon President, or our first Vietnam Veteran President. With so many unique prospects, one would be hard pressed not to have input into next year's election. Experts do expect to see the number of voters increase for this election.

A field of 27 eager men and women have filed with the Federal Election Commission to run for the U.S. Presidency. Many have already grabbed the media's attention! We hear a lot about Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Senator Clinton, who is seeking to become our first female President, proposed a bill called the Iraq Troop Protection and Reduction Act of 2007 to

bring an end to the war before the next President takes office. She also supports a plan to provide greater care to all veterans. Senator Obama, who could become our first black President, proposes a plan to halt escalations of the war and begin phasing our troops out. New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, who hopes to become our first Hispanic President, wants to pull our troops out immediately.

Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney has the chance to be the first Mormon in office. He believes withdrawal from Iraq would be a mistake, and Americans should show a surge of support for the troops and war. Senator John McCain, whom if elected would be the first Vietnam war veteran to serve as President, is campaigning again after losing the Republican nomination to George W. Bush in 2000. Senator McCain's focus is on stabilizing and securing Iraq, as he believes the failure to do so endangers future generations.

So, for whom will you cast your vote? For a "first" in American history? For someone who wishes to change President Bush's strategy in Iraq or someone who wishes to continue it?—There are many important issues to analyze. Hopefully, for whomever they vote, American citizens will make well informed decisions in the 2008 Presidential election.





Not on Our Watch

By Lisa Huynh



Ashley and Alex fill food packets for Million Meals for Children.

Worldwide rallies occurring in as many as thirty different countries have joined forces for one crucial cause: to save Darfur. Four devastating years have passed during which Darfurians have endured continuous violence, murder, rape, and torture. The Sudanese government-approved militia has killed

thousands of civilians. Thousands more remain refugees. In the fall of 2004, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell officially used the term “genocide” to describe the ongoing massacre in Darfur.

Through the years, awareness of the current genocide has steadily spread to more and more individuals, and as awareness increases, so does the effort to put an end to it. This effort is shared globally; protesters in Rome wore T-shirts bearing a bloodstained hand and carried peace torches, marchers in London carried signs reading “Rape, torture, murder. How much longer for Darfur?” China is preparing a 300-strong team to be sent for deployment in Darfur to build roads, bridges, and wells. Some countries choose to display their opinions symbolically in order to be heard. For example, demonstrators from Ottawa and Accra, Ghana donned blindfolds to advise world leaders

not to look away from the continuing brutality. Here at home, people are taking a political stand, finding it a priority for the next president of the United States of America to be willing to take action on the situation in Sudan. “Ask the Candidates” is an online petition calling on each presidential candidate to partition his/her personal investments and divest from companies that are complicit in the genocide. Even students here at Millbrook High School formed a Darfur Awareness Club in 2005 dedicated to informing students about these atrocities. On October 20th, club members packaged meals for refugees at the Cary Towne Center Mall through a program called Operation Sharehouse.

Everyday, increased action is taking place, but there is more needed nevertheless. There are still people unaware of the genocide, still those who are apathetic. Those are the individuals that can be the difference between a simple relief, to international aid. Join in the cause, and chant alongside others, “Not on our watch!”



MHS Darfur Awareness Club members display their community service certificates from Operation Sharehouse.

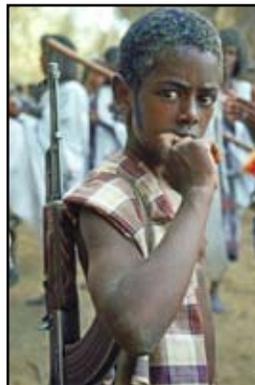


Like Toy Soldiers

By Catherine Leake

The number of child soldiers between the ages of 15 and 18 in various countries of Africa has increased by over 100,000 since 2003. Young men are often recruited to serve in rebel militias while females as young as eight are recruited for sexual purposes or forced marriages. These children are often abducted from their villages at night and taken away to serve. Many children are driven to join the armed forces due to poverty, discrimination, and alienation. Governments in countries, such as Namibia, Somalia, and The Republic of the Congo, claiming a shortage of adults, depend on children to do the fighting. Children are chosen as they are easy to mold into fearless killers due to their unwavering obedience. In return, they are rewarded with drugs and alcohol. Some child soldiers fight on the frontline; others serve as spies, messengers, sex slaves, and servants. A lot of them suffer physical abuse, and in some cases, attempt suicide or turn on one another as they cannot bear their own mistreatment.

Organizations such as *Lord's Resistance Army*, *United Front for Democratic Change*, *Union of Democratic Forces for Unity*, and *Forces Nationales pour la Liberation* are among the groups with child soldiers. In Somalia, the Islamic Courts



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Union engaged an estimated 20,000 children in the fight against Ethiopian and Somali forces—resulting in the deaths of over 5,000 teenage fighters. In Sudan, an estimated 7,500+ children serve in the Sudan Liberation Army. In Zimbabwe, child soldiers have displayed the worst acts of violence against their own. A local Zimbabwean group, known both as The National Service Group and the “Green Bombers,” provides child soldiers with weapons and narcotics, using them for protective acts of violence.

Africa is not the only continent with child soldiers. In Southeast Asia, countries such as The Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar have more than 10,000 children under arms. The use of children is common among insurgent groups. Young suicide bombers from the Middle East have made headlines all over the world. Iran and Afghanistan have about 300,000 child soldiers combined.

Some former child soldiers are now coming forward to tell their stories. The United Nations and *The Voices of Youth* newsletter on unicef.org are featuring former child soldiers sharing the horrors about having to fight for their countries at such an early age—often being discarded like toy soldiers—and the innocence they have lost in the process.



