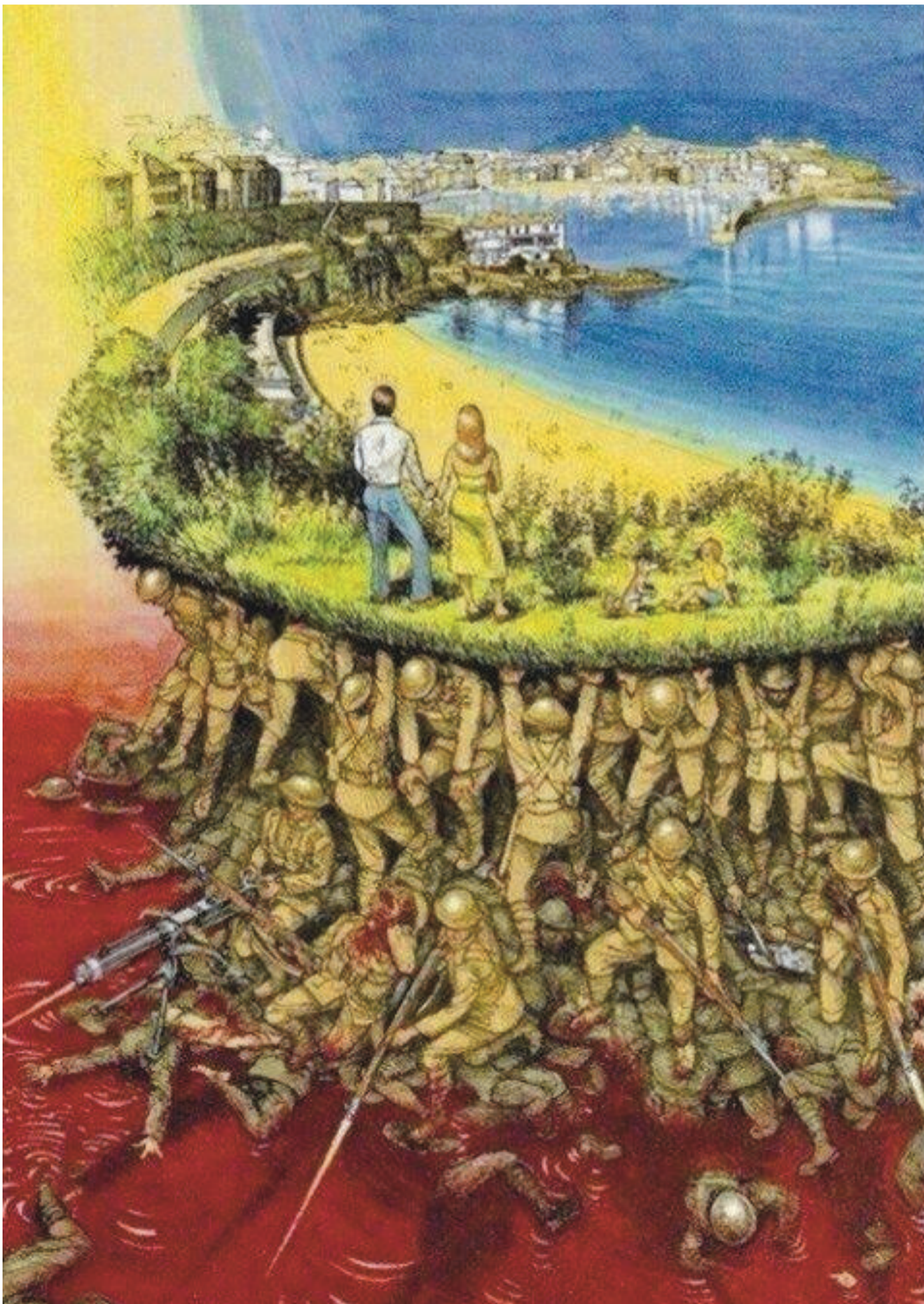


Vietnam War

The Cost of War



Authors

Xia Her

Marilyn Lee

Michael Buford

Martin Soriano

Pages

Cost of War: Cover page (Page 1)

History of Vietnam: (Page 2)

Protests during Vietnam War: (Page 4)

After the War: (Page 4)

Comparison to other wars: (Page 5)

Interview with Vietnam Veteran: (Page 5)

War is a costly thing and it has cost millions of lives of loved ones. They go into battle hoping they would survive and returned home to their loved ones that has been waiting for them. Yet, some are not as lucky as others and they get wounded, injured, and killed. Many soldiers died for their country and they are proud to serve their motherland. But some of these soldiers are not even being recognized and supported for their services. Millions of soldiers died for their country and hoped that the war they fought would be that last one. They died hoping that their children wouldn't have to fight in a war. However, it just seems like when a war ended a new war just starts again. Through history and from history what have we learned? There are some wars that have no reasons behind why we are even sending our troops to battles.

History of Vietnam War

The French rule in Vietnam came to an end when they were defeated by the Viet Minh in May 1954 at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. The final Geneva Accords established the 17th parallel (latitude 17° N) which was a temporary line the sepa-



rated the French and the Viet Minh forces. In short of three hundred days, a demilitarized zone was created which helped citizens get across either sides without problems.

Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam had full support of the United States and was helped to keep his economy alive with the aid of the U.S. In 1955, Diem had taken full control of South Vietnam by riding the sect forces and arresting communist operatives. Diem had claimed himself president of the Republic of Vietnam. The American government increased the number of troops in South Vietnam and trained Diem's soldiers.

In 1957 the communist group known as the Viet Cong had begun attacking the Southern Vietnamese Army. The VC had organized with village guerillas, who had took part in many violent activities to intimidate or persuade neighbors into supporting the NLF, or National Liberation Front. The VC strength increased in the South and a new war began.

The conflicts between communist North Vietnam/its allies in South Vietnam, the Viet Cong and South Vietnam/ its allies the United States led to the Vietnam War. North Vietnam had defeated the French colonialism in Vietnam in 1954, which inspired them to take control of all of Vietnam under a communist regime. South Vietnam, on the other hand, wanted to preserve the ways of the United States in Vietnam.



U.S. Marines in Operation Allen Brook (Vietnam War) 001

Many Vietnamese had seen the United States involvement in their country as colonialism because of their long history of being ruled by foreign powers. China exerted powers in Northern Vietnam from 111 B.C. until 1885. North Vietnam held a larger population than South Vietnam who had mainly few clusters of citizens along the coast. The North and South sides of Vietnam failed to have trust in each other. France became involved in Vietnam in 1847 when they sent warships to originally protect Christians in Vietnam. Only until the 20th century had the Vietnamese began battling with the French.

France had trouble protecting its colony from Japan in the Second World War. The French were defeated by the Viet Minh in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu, which led to the Geneva Agreements ending the war on July 21, 1954. Cambodia and Laos also gained their independence from France after their defeat. Vietnam was split at the 17th parallel and Ho Chi Minh led the north with a communist government and President Ngo Dinh Diem leading the south. Saigon became the capital of South Vietnam and Hanoi became the capital of North Vietnam.

An election was to be held in 1956 to determine Vietnam's future but Diem rejected the election. In 1959, the leaders of North Vietnam passed an ordinance of revolution in South Vietnam. The Viet Minh conducted guerilla warfare in South Vietnam in an attempt to take down President Diem's government. The civil war in the South was reinforced by the communist leadership in Hanoi. The Viet Cong or Viet Communists were supported by North Vietnamese Army.

The U.S. had backed Diem in order to limit the area of communist control. After Mao Zedong's Communist Party won China, the U.S. feared the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. The "Domino Theory" became the fear of the U.S. that if one country fell to communism, then its neighbors would do so as well. Financial aid and military training were granted to South Vietnam's military forces under President Eisenhower's administration.

Ho Chi Minh was educated in Paris which made people question whether he was primarily communist or nationalist. Minh attempted to contact Eisenhower to speak about Vietnam but never received a reply from Eisenhower. Some people questioned if maybe an accord could have been reached or if Minh was trying to limit American involvement in Vietnam if they were able to meet.

The American involvement escalated when President Kennedy sent two helicopters to Saigon in 1961 to relocate peasants in the South to strategic hamlets. Diem was murdered by a coup led by General Duong Van Minh which caused a series of changes in stability of government leadership.

The USS Maddox was gathering communication intelligence in the Gulf of Tonkin when they were engaged by two North Vietnamese torpedos on August 2, 1964. These claims were never proven right but started a somewhat regretful attack on North Vietnam.

The Vietnam War began because of tensions between communist North Vietnam and democratic South Vietnam. The South had an political organization and army called the Viet Cong that fought North Vietnam, while the North was Viet Minh. The communism of North Vietnam was seeking to expand in Vietnam and the U.S. had a policy to containment, to hold what they had without expanding. So the U.S. sided with the South to stop communism from spreading, while China, a communist nation, sided along with the North.

Also called the American War, it was the longest war in U.S. history until the Afghanistan War of 2002. After Ho Chi



Map of Vietnam

Minh rose to power, the war started in 1954. Ho Chi Minh was a Vietnamese communist leader who was prime minis-



Ngo Dinh Diem

ter before becoming president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. He was the key figure of Vietnam and led the Viet Minh independence movement from 1941 onward, defeating the French Union at the battle of Dien Bien Phu, in 1954.

ing that if Vietnam was to fall into communism then Asia itself will fall into communism as well.



Ho Chi Minh

Approximately half of the Vietnamese civilians were killed. More than three million people total, including fifty eight thousand Americans were uselessly slaughtered. Some major incidents were the Tet Offensive in 1968 and Easter Offensive in 1972. The Tet Offensive, Hanoi failed in its most ambitious goal of producing a general uprising in the South. It suffered more than forty five thousand deaths but gained a propaganda. The Easter Offensive, about fifty thousand to seventy five thousand North Vietnamese groups were killed plus their loss of over 250-700 tanks and APCs (Armoured personnel carrier). The attack was mostly broken up by the U.S. air power. It is said that the Tet Offensive was the best known action to the Viet Cong, with a massive assault on more than a hundred South Vietnamese urban centers in 1968. Including an attack on the U.S. official resident in Saigon.

When the U.S. was at the peak of the involvement in 1969, more than five hundred thousand U.S. soldiers were involved in the conflict. The U.S. got involved in the war because they feared of the domino effect theory, simply mean-

In 1973, President Richard Nixon ordered the withdrawal of the U.S. forces. The withdrawal continued and more responsibility was passed to the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam), which continued to prove ineffective in

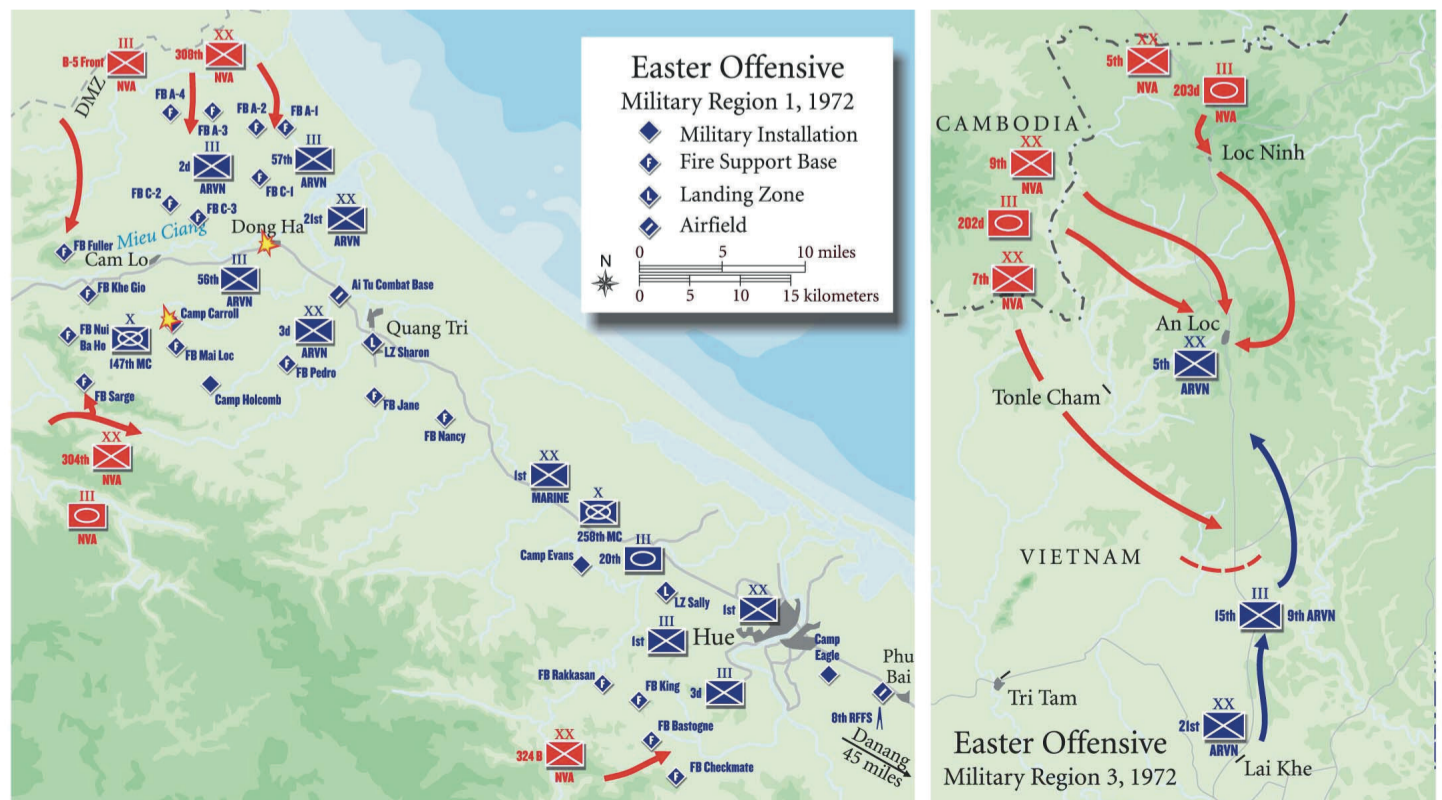


Some communist targets during the Tet Offensive

combat, often relying on American support to stave off defeat. On January 27, 1974, a peace accord was signed in Paris ending the conflict. By March of that year, American combat troops had left the country.

stormed by North Vietnamese soldiers and tanks, which made the U.S. leaving everything behind and returning home. As North Vietnam claimed Saigon, the South Vietnamese government fell. It took about 4 and half years to work out a settlement for the U.S. to withdraw. The country was then united as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

By the year of 1975, the communist forces seized control of Saigon, putting an end to the Vietnam War. Saigon was



Map of the Easter Offensive

Protests during Vietnam War

The Vietnam War in 1960s and 1970s grew into the most extensive anti-war in the American History. In the early 1960s, the public protest against the war slowly began with a handful of demonstrations in large cities and also on college campuses as it grew rapidly after 1964. As it grew rapidly after 1964, the American military increased their presence in Vietnam, over five hundred thousand American combat troops. The Vietnam War protests attracted several hundred thousand civilians throughout the nation, by the late 1960s.

Several hundred protesters were brought out on May 6, 1970, because a call for a general strike to support the anti-war at the University of Oklahoma. One of them made a Viet Cong flag and was arrested under the Oklahoma state law, because of the forbidden display of the pro communist flag. This led a clash between the students and the police and thirty five Oklahoma Highway Patrol officers. Only three were arrested, while several protesters were injured. With the arrested of the flag bearing student, and five hundred demonstrators occupied campus buildings demanded changes from the university administrators. Protests at the university were limited to the students who carried picket signs outside of the campus buildings and a few young men who burned their draft cards to protest the war, by the following week. During the demonstrators, the University of Oklahoma later disciplined seven of the students for the things they did.



Protestor



come from America but since America is in a disagreement many soldiers returned home to cold welcomes. The only warm welcomes they get were from their families and love ones. They came home to protests of people hating on them. They weren't appreciated for their services in the war. There were many protests that were against the war. Some

soldiers were hated because they were in the war and that also affected many soldiers. Many soldiers were effected by war from their experiences in Vietnam and now their own country hating on them. This made it difficult for soldiers. Almost every single soldiers suffered psychological after-effects. They have to live with imagines of deaths bodies and constant thoughts of people getting killed. They go to bed having nightmares of the war every nights. They'll have to live with horrible memories and things they saw for the rest of their lives. They're haunted by memories of innocent people getting killed and mureded.

Families of prisoners of war (POWs) and missing in action (MIA) soldiers shared a common agony and emotional pain. They don't know what has become of their loved ones. Whether their loved ones are alive or dead? They have no clues about their loved ones at all. They don't if they're alive and okay or alive and injured or whether they're dead. The pain of not knowing will never end for these families especially towards the families of the MIA soldiers. The POWs families still have the chance that maybe one day their loved ones will returned safely home. While the MIA's families will never know what happens to their loved ones. Soldiers that are POW still have a chance to escape from their capturer and return home to their families. Some had returned home and books have been written by and about them, telling the tragic that they went through and the tortures they endured. While the POWs suffered in their captivity their families also suffered as well. All the families with loved ones in the war suffered greatly at one point or another. They're all in fears of losing their loved ones. They prayed days and nights to keep their loved ones safe. For the families that lost a loved one during the war they will also remember them and those that came back they will always remember their journey and everything they went through.

After the War

The Vietnam War had a profound effect on the United States. It was one of the most tragic war in history and the effects it had on American people were tremendous. Many Americans have unforgettable memories of the war and many suffered from the aftershocks of the war that left the nation divided and estranged from its ideals. Hundreds of thousands of loved one were killed in the Vietnam War. Those that survived had to live with painful memories. Even though those memories are eased over time it will never be healed. The war of 22 years had left

many effects on various groups of people.

America were divided into two. Half of America agreed that the war was a good thing and it was worth it while the other half disagreed. Over the years they saw that the war had no points. The government just kept on drafting young men into the war and there was no result beside more and more soldiers getting killed and the government drafting new men to the war. Many soldiers thought they would come home to a warm wel-



Comparison to Other Wars

There had been many wars since United States became a nation. Those wars that were fought in past were say to be the last but today there are still wars going. Some of these wars are even similar to each other. In fact the Korean War was similar to the Vietnam War. Both of these war had their roots in the Domino Theory and Truman Doctrine. Both the countries were divided into pro-communism and anti-communism. The only difference in these two wars are the methods of fighting. The Korean War was bursts of fighting whereas in the Vietnam it was long and drawn out fighting. The amount of casualties also made a huge differences between these two wars. In the Korean War 54,000 soldiers died within 3 years and in the Vietnam War 58,220 soldiers died over a course of 20 years. The result behind why these two war occurred was because of the Domino Theory and Truman Doctrine. The United States got involved since the United States didn't want communism to spread. Another war that has similarity to the Vietnam War is the Iraq War. Both these wars were wars of choice. President Bush send troops to Iraq because he believed that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and he part of al Qaeda. A terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001(9/11) also set the President Bush to attack Iraq. One reason the United States got involved in the Vietnam War was because of the incidents that occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin. In August 2, 1964 the U.S.S Maddox was reported to be fired at by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. Two days later on August 4, 1964 the U.S.S Maddox was on high alert of being attack again. After these two incidents President Johnson gave order to wage a war against North Vietnam. Some of these wars have many similarities. Troops are sent into countries that they don't know about to fight a war that could last 10 years and nothing changes. Even though 10 years has passed by the result of the war could still be the same as when they first got into the war.

Have you ever thought about how life is like for a war survivor? Those who volunteered to go to war experienced so many things that they can't even explain about. They saw people get killed, murder, innocent little children running for their life. How do you explain that to people? Many soldiers suffered depression and hardships after serving a war. They don't see life the same as they did before. Images of innocent children running for their life and people getting killed are constantly on their mind. These soldiers have nightmares every nights about things they saw. Some soldiers are not even themselves anymore. Many soldiers are interviewed about how life was like for them in Vietnam and even though they explained people still can't understand their feelings. People will say it's sad and horrible but they don't feel how sad and horrible it is unlike the soldiers that witnessed. Being a soldier is hard and it takes a brave person to be willing to die for their country even if they're considered the bad guys. During the Vietnam War half of the United States were against the war. Soldiers didn't even get the support they wanted. Many soldiers returned home and received hatred. There are millions of interviews of Vietnam Veteran but the following is an interview of Kenneth Eugene Leland. In the interview Leland talked about his experiences before Vietnam, in Vietnam, in combat, and after Vietnam. A little background history about Leland is that he served in the Marines for 4 years and Leland was dis-



Interview with a Vietnam Veteran

charged at the rank of Corporal in 1964. Nine months after his discharge he received a letter from the Secretary of the Navy asking him to volunteer for the Vietnam War. Leland then re-enlisted himself for two years and he was sent to Camp Pendleton, California for training in the guerilla warfare. Leland was promoted as sergeant and assigned as leader of a sixteen-man infantry squad, First Battalion, 26th Marines. He arrived in Vietnam in early August 1966. In the interview Leland talked about his thoughts and feelings about the war, the people in Vietnam and people back at home. A little background of his life after coming home from the war was that Leland experienced some difficulties looking for jobs. One event was when the city of Tampa was in need of firefighter men and Leland wanted to be a fireman so he went to the City Council to apply for the job but was denied because of his height. Leland appeared before the City Council and he asked about the height restriction and also stated "when I volunteered for Vietnam, the mayor of my hometown, the governor of my state, and the president of the United States did not ask me how tall I was." After the meeting he was told he'll be contact about it but after 32 years Leland still haven't received any contacts. Kenneth Eugene Leland retired and now he's a guest speaker. He goes to schools and give speeches about his experiences in Vietnam War.

Before Vietnam

Were you drafted or did you volunteer for military service?

I first volunteered for the Marines at nineteen (1961), served four years and was discharged (1964).

How old were you?

I volunteered for Vietnam, at age twenty-two (1965), nine months after I was first discharged. I was inducted in Jacksonville, Florida. After training, I was sent to Vietnam. I was considered an "old man" by the young Marines around me, and I could not believe how young they were.

What did you feel like when you decid-



Kenneth Eugene Leland

ed to volunteer?

I was in the best shape of my life. I had served four years, got out, and was asked by the secretary of the navy to volunteer for Vietnam. At that time, I felt it was an honor to serve my country two more years.

What do you recall was going on in Vietnam and in this country then?

In 1966, the air war entered a new phase. Hanoi and Haiphong were raided for the first time. Cries of escalation and dissent really roared out through the U.S. and around the world. By the end of 1966, fighting had reached major proportions. Over 55,000 communists, 9,500 South Vietnamese, and 6,053 U.S. soldiers were killed in action.

Demonstrations against the war were taking place at most universities and in the streets. Draft cards were being burned. In the United States, the popularity of President Johnson was at an all-time low.

By the end of 1966, fighting reached major proportions. The United States had nearly 400,000 men engaged. Infiltration from the north had risen to 8,000 men a month. Enemy strength in South Vietnam rose from 230,000 to about 287,000 in spite of the claimed 50,000 communists killed.

How did your family and friends react to your going into military service?

They were against it. They knew I would be sent to Vietnam.

Describe your Basic Training. Where, what happened, your feelings and observations. Did it change you in any way? How? Did it prepare you for Vietnam?

I received basic training at Paris Island, S.C., in 1961. We were told a Marine was expected to commit suicide in cadence without a flinch, whether advancing into rifle fire or hurling himself upon bayonets. To bring him to a state of mindlessness where he was ready to do this, he was drilled physically and bullied mentally and spiritually until he was convinced not only that he was the lowest scum on the earth but also that his only hope of salvation, his ticket through the pearly gates, was to climax a lifetime of service by an act of self-sacrifice.

What did you think and feel about the Vietnamese war, the Vietnamese people, and Vietnam at the time when you came on active duty?

At the time I volunteered, I felt the war in Vietnam was no different from any other. My grandfather fought in World

War I, my dad and uncles in World War II, and several uncles fought in Korea. I wanted to do my part, just like my relatives before me. I knew the Vietnamese were poor, hard-working people. Vietnam, both North and South, has known little peace since history began. China has always been a presence, followed by the Mongols, the French, and others, all brought down by the indestructibility of the native Vietnamese.

What were you told about the reasons for the war and by whom?

On August 2, 1964, the American destroyer Maddox was attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. Congress passed the so-called Southeast Asian Resolution, the nearest approach to a legal declaration of war in Vietnam, making it clear that our government would take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in Southeast Asia. South Vietnam requested assistance of the United States. This was the reason given to us by our instructors while training at Camp Pendleton, California, before going to Vietnam.

Describe your feelings upon receiving your orders for Vietnam. What about the trip to Vietnam?

I volunteered for Vietnam, so it was not a big surprise. My unit went to Vietnam aboard the carrier *Iwo Jima*. While en route, we stopped just off the island of Iwo Jima for a ceremony honoring those who fought and died there. The ship then proceeded to the Gulf of Tonkin. We were to be part of a special landing force.

In Vietnam**What were your first impressions of Vietnam?**

The weather was wet and hot, mud everywhere, averaging approximately 128



Ken "In Vietnam"

inches of rain annually, temperatures often exceeding 100 degrees at midday.

What unit were you assigned to? Where were you stationed and what was the area like?

I was assigned to the First Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment, Fifth Marine Division, for six months; wounded and transferred to Second Battalion, Third Marines, for seven months. Most of our operations were along the DMZ, which was a muddy, bloody hell for those who fought there. The Marines were called the finest instrument ever devised for the killing of young Americans.

What were your jobs in Vietnam?

Infantry ("grunts") squad leader, battalion scout, tunnel rat, demolitions, machine gun section leader

Describe some of the conditions: food, weather, etc. What was hardest for you? What were your days like? What are some of your main memories?

Our main food was C-rations in a box which contained, for instance, canned ham and lima beans, a small canned bread, a canned fruit of sorts, and cigarettes. The weather was terrible. It seemed to rain all the time. I can remember going on an ambush in waist deep water and staying wet for days. I had what we called immersion foot on two occasions. This is caused by your feet being wet for long periods of time. They had to cut your boots off your feet, and generally, your skin came off with them. Anything you touched brought blood. It is about the equivalent of putting your feet into a fire for a few minutes.

I also was struck by lightning. I took my squad out on an ambush about three miles out from our command post. It had been raining for days, and we were in knee-deep water. We had been trying to catch the Vietcong that had been mining the road to our command post and blowing up our vehicles. I set up the ambush in a cemetery; in Vietnam, the graves are generally mounds of dirt. By the time we set up, we were in waist-deep water. I had my squad facing the road. I was in the center of the squad with a radio on my back, leaning against a grave. We were told to stay there until about forty-five minutes before daybreak. Approximately 5:30 in the morning, it was still raining, and I was in the process of calling our command post to tell them we were heading back.

That is all I remember for the next five or ten seconds. I woke up approximately fifteen feet from the grave. I could see every color of the rainbow. My radio was gone. I looked behind me. The radio was

about ten or twelve feet away with the antenna sticking out of the water. I began to yell, "Did anybody get a fix?" (A fix was a flash from a mortar or rocket or whatever.) I could not hear myself yell. After about another twenty seconds or so, I began to hear the men in my squad yell, "I've been hit, Sgt. Leland. I've been hit."

I felt the right side of my face burning and found blisters. The right sleeve of my shirt was torn. I began to smell an odor that I had smelled as a young man in Florida many times during lightning storms. I knew what had happened. We had been struck by lightning. I remember just looking up at the sky and saying, "God, not you too!" As we got our senses together and checked each other out, we began to realize we had got off easy. We had burns, blisters, torn clothes, and we were numb in certain parts of our bodies. The radio would not work. It took us about two and a half hours to get back to our command post.

Leeches attached themselves to every part of our bodies. It became a ritual every morning to burn the leeches off with cigarettes. Big scorpions were everywhere. You always turned your boots upside down and checked your gear and clothes.

We were always on the lookout for two-steps, which is a small viper, and cobras. The two-step is called that because if it bites you, after two steps, you are dead. Lice were so thick in our hair that we could not run our fingers through it. You could not use insect repellent or slap mosquitoes. If you slapped, it could be heard by the enemy. Imagine two or three hundred men with insect repellent. The enemy could smell them a mile away.

How much did you depend on mail while in Vietnam?

Mail was our only contact with the outside world. It was like fuel for the fire. It kept us going.

What were your impressions of and experiences with the Vietnamese?

I found them to be a gentle, extremely hard-working and loving people. The experiences I had with most Vietnamese with the exception of those from the North were very pleasant.

What were your observations about the guys you served in combat with? Did you lose any good buddies? How did you handle their deaths?

They were the finest young men I have ever had the privilege of knowing. They not only fought but also they fought knowing that their efforts were not ap-

preciated by many back home. I lost many good buddies.

(How did you handle their deaths?) I haven't.

In Combat



Ken "In Combat"

What kind of combat operations did you participate in? What were the operations like? Could you describe one?

Full-scale search and destroy missions, reconnaissance, and ambushes. Late in the evening, on September 19, 1966, my squad was ambushed trying to reach another squad, cut off from our main unit. As we ran down a path and around a curve toward the village, the NVA ambushed us, wounding the boy in front of me. We hit the ground and returned fire. I tried to yell out orders, but there was so much firing going on, I could not even hear myself yelling. As I looked back, our company corpsman ran toward us and was shot, got up, was shot again, and killed. I yelled to the kid behind me to help me get the wounded boy in front of me off the path, when he was shot in the head and died instantly.

We were being completely surrounded. I looked behind me, and my platoon was not there. I threw a red smoke grenade as far in front of me as I could, marking the enemy target for our gunships and mortars, picked up the boy, threw him over my shoulder. I turned around, trying to find a spot out of the line of fire, when a bullet went through his back, into mine, knocking me to the ground. He died next to me. I passed the word to the rest of the squad to lie still, because we were exposed. We lay there for what seemed like hours. Ants were crawling all over us, but we could not move. Several more were wounded. As it got dark, we began to crawl back, helping each other and finally reached our company, which had to pull back because they also were being surrounded by the larger

force, which I found out later was the 324 NVA Division.

How many times did you participate in combat? Did you see people killed? Injured? Do you feel like sharing that? What kinds of weapons did you see used? What kinds of weapons did you use?

Eighteen major operations, over fifty ambushes, many four-man and squad-sized reconnaissance patrols. Yes, I saw many killed and injured. It was an everyday occurrence. I saw rockets, mortars, fifty-caliber machine guns, AK-47's, thirty-caliber carbines, grenades, punji stakes, and booby traps. I used M-14, M-16, 45 automatic, shotgun, M-60 machine gun, mortars, grenades, and bayonets. Given the opportunity, our forces could have taken over North Vietnam in a matter of months. But, remember, war against North Vietnam was never declared. We were not allowed to go into North Vietnam.

Some people say that the US. held back and that we should have gone in full force? How did you feel about the strength of the American forces compared to the V.C. forces?

It is hard to fight someone in his own back yard, because he knows the area well, always has the element of surprise. But, with our superior weapons, with the support of the people back home, and with one of the greatest armies this world has known, we would have succeeded.

I know this is a hard question and I understand if you do not want to discuss it, but did you kill anyone? Can you talk about it?

(Did you kill anyone?) Yes.

(Can you talk about it?) No. It would solve nothing. I can only tell you that dying is not always the worst thing that can happen to you in combat.

Did you witness the use of napalm? What were the circumstances?

Yes, several times. During a thirteen day battle for Hill 861 and the twin peaks of Hill 881 surrounding Khe San, napalm was repeatedly used with little success. The North Vietnamese had laid up to eight layers of tree trunks over their bunkers and dug hundreds of them, so napalm was not effective. The only thing that could touch them was 2,000 pound bombs with delayed action fuses called blockbusters. The napalm however did rid the hills of foliage, so we could see the bunkers as we assaulted the hills.

Were you ever in an area sprayed or defoliated by Agent Orange? What did

you think? Did anyone around you experience any of the symptoms of being exposed to Agent Orange? How do you feel about the lawsuit by the veterans against the chemical companies?

Yes, I was in an area sprayed by Agent Orange. We were never warned of the effects of the herbicide. We slept, ate, and drank from the streams and areas sprayed with the gray-brown substance that destroyed everything green except our uniforms. No precaution to prevent exposure was taken, because at the time, we did not consider the herbicides to be dangerous. We actually thought they were spraying for mosquitoes.

After Vietnam

When you returned from Vietnam, how were you treated by people around you? Relatives? Strangers? Friends? What changes did you see in yourself and in this country?

I returned from Vietnam in October 1967. When I arrived at the Orlando, Florida airport, I was met by my mother and father. I could not believe I was home, that I made it, survived. On the way home, Mom told me about a friend of mine who lost both legs in Vietnam. I cried for him and for those left behind. It was a bright, sunny day. Several cars we passed were pulling boats. Some had brightly colored surfboards on top.

Didn't they know there was a war going on? People were dying? When we arrived home, there was no one there. We talked for hours. Later in the day, my brothers and sister stopped by to welcome me home. The next few days were pretty much a blank. I remember receiving several telephone calls from relatives, asking me why I had not stopped by.

What did you think about the My Lai Massacre (1968)? Were you aware of any atrocities committed by the Vietcong?

Lt. William Calley, Jr. should have spent the rest of his life in prison. He is responsible for the deaths of over five hundred old men, women, and children. The people of My Lai were on our side. They were the people whom we were supposed to protect. The people in the village kept us informed of where the Viet Cong planted their booby traps and of any other VC activities in their area. Because of what Calley did, after the massacre, they told the Viet Cong and the NVA where we left our booby traps and which way we were heading, which caused many Americans to die.

Yes, I was aware of atrocities committed by the Viet Cong.

What about the Laws of War? Were you

ever given any instructions about civilians, etc.? Were they taken seriously? Did you ever know of anyone in the war who refused to obey an order on moral grounds? What happened to that person?

We had no-fire zones and free-fire zones. If there were civilians in a free-fire zone, they were usually captured and questioned, then turned over to the South Vietnamese. Marines generally are very disciplined. If given an order, we generally carry it out to the fullest extent. I never knew anyone who refused to obey an order.

What lessons do you think this country learned from its involvement in Vietnam?

If we do not understand the meaning of the Vietnam experience, we are doomed to repeat it. We must always have a clear objective, and we must be allowed to win.

Have you ever been to the Vietnam Memorial in D.C.? What was that experience like for you?

No, I wanted to go to the dedication, but my two young sons wanted bicycles for Christmas, and we didn't have enough money for the bicycles and for me to go to Washington. I have visited the "Moving Wall" several times.

If you were asked to write the last sentence of a book about the involvement of the U.S. in Vietnam, what would it be?

Vietnam was a nightmare,

twenty-four hours a day,

and at any time,

that nightmare could turn

into reality.



Ken At the White House (October 2001)

