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CHAPTER ONE
Early Influences

In The Beginning: Early Childhood and Social Class:

My story begins on my grandparents’ couch, July 4th, 1946 in Enderlin, North Dakota. There I was born to Dorothy and Perlin Johnson. As mundane as the event must have been to the rest of world, never having experienced the physical world before, being born was obviously life changing for me. This event did not go unnoticed by our pastor who just coincidentally showed up the same day, praying over me and wishing my parents well. That our minister just happened to show up that day, thinking back on what normally is taken as a gesture of good will, I would later find out was his job. Unbeknown to me at that time, my indoctrination into Christianity had begun that very day --- and as this book will reveal, this indoctrination was by design.

My grandparents on my mother’s side were the only real grandparents I knew because of a family entanglement on Dad’s side that has never been fully resolved. It seems Dad never actually knew who his parents were and I know so little more now that I hardly feel qualified to address the issue. Anyone who might know who Dad’s actual parents were have been unwilling to talk to this day. Rumors, of course, hold many theories but all I know for sure is my lineage stops at my father. Dad’s birth certificate, dated September 19th, 1922, claims he was born in Lisbon, North Dakota. No parents, unlike Mother’s birth certificate, were listed. I also have a certificate of Holy Baptism dated December 21, 1922 which claims Dad’s mother was Martha Erickson. Why she should have a different last name than Dad is unknown. The door to speculation opens wider.

My best guess is Dad’s so called half-sister, born a good decade and a half before him, ended up carrying a child out of wedlock. Prior to the current trend where having a child out of wedlock is fashionable and even viewed as a source of income; any child born out of wedlock at that time was a bastard, not a designation most children or single mothers relished. Back in the twenties, child support was none existent and the care for a young contested child usually fell on the immediate family members of the single mother. Being young, unmarried, and pregnant was seen as disgraceful to the family. As such young pregnant ladies were often briskly shipped off to an out of sight location to deliver their child. The child was then either given away for adoption, stuck in an orphanage, or returned to the family, assuming the family had the resources to care for the child. The child was then raised by grandparents and called the grandparent’s son or daughter. The grandparents would claim the child was a late sparkle in Dad’s (being the child’s
grandfather) eye. This most likely was Dad’s case. That however is pure conjecture.

Dad’s history is mentioned for the social and economic implications his childhood had upon my family. Dad, having no father that claimed responsibility for him, was not inline for any inheritance nor was his father around to support either Dad or Dad’s mother economically. As such Dad was forced to quit school in the eighth grade to join the labor pool, working numerous low paying odd jobs like gardening, mowing lawns, raking, rock picking, haying, or whatever else he could find in his early teens. In time, he would graduate to an unlicensed plumber, well digger, painter, electrician, carpenter, and butcher. He, as an old cliché has it, became a jack of all trades and a master of none. While he lacked any certificate to qualify himself for any of these tasks, he remained in demand right up to his death largely because he could do the same job as any professional but only received a dime on the dollar. Often his reward was no more than a six pack of beer.

Later in life, Dad ended up as a laborer on the railroad, working in the roundhouse maintaining and repairing steam engines. Even that, being one of the best paying jobs anywhere around for an unskilled laborer, did not provide the income required to feed his family. Hence when Dad was not working on the railroad, he was subsidizing his railroad income with the handy work already mentioned. At the railroad Dad worked evenings so when I was home after school, he was at work. Even if I was at home while Dad was off, Dad was doing something else. I cannot remember a single event that Dad attended on my behalf in my school years, swimming events, baseball, football, or school programs. As such, I grew up lacking a coach, a cheerleader, and most importantly a
father with any influence in the community like a businessman or professional. The title of a child’s father carried in small town North Dakota often exerted a disproportionate amount of influence on what activities any child got to participate in during his school years. Who got to play first string did not always depend on a child’s talents.

In any event, Dad and I can be seen in front of what was our house that over the years Dad and Grandpa remodeled a number of times. The two times I remember the most were when the new addition was added to the front, replacing the porch pictured behind us. As it could be afforded, that tar siding on the older portion of the house was removed and replace with wooden siding that made the house appear nearly new. The other project was the garage which Dad built from 2X8 interlocking boards torn out of boxcars at the rail yard. For a couple of dollars, the Soo-Line would sell their employees outdated or wrecked boxcars for the wood. The buyer would have to remove the wood himself. The steel remained railroad property. 2X8 interlocking planks for siding and roofing material, to say the least, made a very sturdy garage.

In my early years, we never had modern conveniences such as indoor plumbing. I remember Dad pulling me sitting in a wagon or shed, depending on the season, to the railroad round house about a half mile away. There Dad would fill five gallon containers with hot water and pull them and me back home so his family could enjoy a warm bath. A bath, being one bath, best describes it too. The whole family shared
the same bathwater. As for the bathtub, pictured below is Mom giving my sister Missy a bath with me, the foreman, looking on. Nice bathtub wouldn’t you say?

With no running water, we relied on an outdoor toilet not to mention the outdoor clothes drier, both of which are pictured behind Mom and the tub. Unlike television, having an outdoor John was something of a un-status symbol. The fewer outdoor Johns in the neighborhood, the higher on the social ladder your neighborhood was perceived as being. Our lift to the bottom rung of the working middle class, which included an indoor bathroom, came somewhere in the late-fifties.

So what did my family history and economic status have to do with Vietnam? Vietnam was very much a class war. If a child was raised living within the class level I describe in my early childhood, that child was far more likely to end up cannon fodder in Vietnam than anyone coming from an upper level social class. One dividing point between those who found themselves cannon fodder in Vietnam and those who did not was college. If those better off could afford to send their children to college, those children could often land a college deferment and avoid the military altogether. If not, those children going from college to the military were able to enter the military with a bargaining chip, a chip they could play when military occupations and rank were handed out. Many former college students ended up in officer’s training or performing the task in which they were educated which often took them out of harm’s way. The child who came from America’s elite class of course could get away with just about anything --- including being AWOL for months. At the very least, the elite were shoe-ins for military academies, graduating as line officers or pilots. Nepotism is common amongst the elite. Rarely were any of these options available to any of a lower social class.

I must admit however this class barrier was not beyond breaching. Two children from my neighborhood did exactly that. One was a Fritz, Bud if I remember correctly and the other was Marshal Larson, an early childhood friend. Both went from high school to military academies and neither had, that I can recall, any higher social class status than I. What they did have that I did not was the will to do their very best academically at a young age, a value driven into them by a watchful parent. I am therefore unable to blame all the problems and failings that I have occurred for myself over the years on class status alone. Some responsibility for that failing ends right here.
Early Religion: Confirmed Lutheran, early Beliefs, early Questions:

My religious upbringing was largely European Protestant which is to say, at the time, I saw the world through Christian lenses provided me by my Caucasian European ancestors. Public school often began class with a prayer, praising god for all we had (or hadn’t depending on an individual’s perspective) and no one gave the matter a second thought --- at least in our closed environment. We, in grade school, recited, never questioning, the Pledge of Allegiance’s words “under god” as we were not aware, nor did it matter to any eight year old at the time, that “under god” was inserted in the Pledge in 1954. To eight year old Christians knowing little more, the words were seen as always having been there. My parents never took the effort to point out when those words were not included for it probably never mattered to them one way or the other. Even if any child had the thoughtfulness to notice this seemingly inconsequential change, what would the words “under god” matter anyway given our belief that all people were under god anyway? Well, that was the way it all seemed then anyway.

But as I come to understand in my later years, those words did matter. Unbeknown to me, rightwing capitalists, using “under god” as a bulwark against atheism and ungodly Communists, felt inserting “under god” into the pledge was important enough to change this bit of historic prose to wording less inclusive. Atheists, often equated with Communists, were not welcome by our capitalistic Christian dominated government for reasons which will become obvious later in this writing. For now I will only say, I had no idea nor did I care at the age of eight what those rightwing capitalists may have had to gain by inserting “under god” in the Pledge. But that was then. Now at sixty five, having read the Bible three times cover to cover and by focusing on those verses repeatedly quoted by the religious right, I believe I figured it out. What capitalists and industrialist have to gain by adopting the Bible will in fact become the central theme of this writing.

Not having come to this enlightened point in life by the age of eight, however, I attended Sunday school every Sunday at the First Lutheran Church. I also attended Bible School at our public school every summer after the school year
let out. I was not only baptized Lutheran but confirmed a Lutheran, an oath that later in life I would renege on. I did not give the matter any thought then as Christian Confirmation was just something every kid I knew attended. Not everyone attended my Lutheran Bible School but they attended one or another Bible school just the same. As far as I was concerned Bible school was for learning the Bible. “What did it matter if Methodists, for example, had their own Bible school? Didn’t everyone attending Bible School read the same book? Didn’t we end up all Christians” I reasoned --- unless of course, they were Catholic. If they were Catholic, I had no idea what that meant, save what Mom told me which was very little. All I really knew was under no circumstance was I supposed to marry one.

Being Christian in the fifties, at least around Enderlin, lacked much of what many Christians today claim being a Christian requires. I did not require being “Born Again” or “Slain in the Spirit” to be considered a Christian. I never had to believe that Biblical stories such as Adam and Eve or Jonah and the Whale were actual history. Either I missed something or the church which I attended was far more liberal in their interpretations of the Bible than more fundamental and Evangelical sects are today. Even if these fables were mostly taught in Sunday and Bible School as history, most the higher ups in my church held the opinion that these tales were worth more for their moral value than actual history. But what or whose moral values? Even as a child it did not take too long to conclude that the moral of any of these stories was dependent on who was asked. My minister, my mother, my Sunday school teacher, and Bible school teacher all seemed to have different versions of what these so called Morals were teaching. I did pick up on that very early and as such my attention during Sunday school was often times more on other distractions, like girls, rather than Bible studies.

Whether or not I believed these fables was largely unimportant however for I fairly well bought into everything else Christian --- and I am only beginning to find out exactly what that means. For example: I believed our leaders could be trusted to do the right thing. I believed in a just god, that the Mounties always got their man, and Perry Mason (the legal system) always protected the innocent. The bad guys always got what was coming to them. In those days, my thoughts were, lawyers cared more about guilt and innocents than money as half the time legal services on TV were offered free – or at least money was never discussed. How times have changed.

I believed in an unseen hand that guided the world. I believed one should love his neighbor as himself. I believed that it was more blessed to give than receive. I believed that the world was how the world was because god wanted it that way. God’s Will shall be done even if the world often seemed to go against god’s will, at least god’s will as I understood it. I believed the world and its
resources were created for man’s use and enjoyment. I believed hard work would be rewarded and the cream always rose to the top. I believed our leaders were ordained by god and in power because of their god given intelligence. I believed our leaders would do the right thing; whatever that was. But if I was unsure what the right thing was, how could I judge whether they did the right thing or not? It all somehow made sense even if no sense could be made from it. Even if obvious contradictions were pointed in the Bible, I had the perfect response. I figured if god could create the world and universe, he could certainly write a book I could not understand. Of course, it never occurred to me then that if I could not understand it that probably no one else could either. Over the years I have come to learn that people are much closer in intelligence than most the elite would like us to believe. They like to think of themselves as superior somehow and most people, like I did, swallowed it. But as I shall point out, this is taught probably more indirectly than directly. After all for anyone to stand before us and state that “I’m better than you” would repulse most people so these things are never said outright. They are fed to us piece by piece which when linked together can only result in one conclusion, that conclusion which the hand that feeds us wants us to believe.

But problems did exist for me with religion even at an early age. For example, how could perfect god create such an imperfect world? I wrestled with that. Perhaps the world was perfect and these imperfect eyes could not see it. But, if the world was good in god’s eye as god claimed in Genesis, why were all these ministers, god’s voice here on earth, screaming about all the evil in the world? Why would a loving god allow suffering? When I’d ask these questions the answer I usually received was always something like “Such was the mystery of god.”

“Oh,” was my usual perplexed response. The mystery of god, for then, remained safe.

And I had another problem. Science was seriously calling into question many religious views and stories from the Bible. Not only was science challenging religious theories of what many people deemed as largely unimportant, for example earth’s position in the universe or if the human race evolved from other forms of life, science, people deemed as important such as medical science, was turning people away from long held traditional religious views. For example: consider the supernatural origin and cure of disease. Advances in medicine were being accepted more and more by a public who witnessed the miracles of modern medicine, vaccines warding off diseases such as small pox, rabies, and polio; antibiotics curing what before were deadly plagues, iron lungs keeping polio victims alive, and surgeries that saved people from abnormalities that not too long ago were fatal such as appendicitis or a broken femur. Until modern medicine was proven effective to the general population, many religious institutions and theologians regarded diseases as “God’s punishment for sin.” Vaccines were at one
time denounced as "flying in the face of Providence," and "endeavoring to baffle a Divine judgment." Disease after all was,

“a judgment of God on the sins of the people," and that "to avert it is but to provoke him more"; that inoculation is "an encroachment on the prerogatives of Jehovah, whose right it is to wound and smite."

Such interpretations of the Bible were supported by verses like “Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.” To battle these diseases therefore was to battle the Lord’s Will.

I feel safe in saying that given the success of many medical advances, the churches of the late 19th Century were forced to make a few controversial and embarrassing choices. Either go with and accept many modern medical advances and change their rhetoric about science, medical science for sure, or lose much of their congregations. God’s word needed redefined to be become more compatible with the science of public health care. Many churches were sent scrambling 180 degrees, therefore, to make modern advances in medicine seem more in line with god’s Will. In short order, medicine went from “flying in the face of providence” to evidence of god’s tender mercy and love. Had religion not taken this route, religion, along with god, would have likely died a century before the present. Religion, although still clinging on, was on the brink of falling into an abyss.

And science was not religion’s only challenge. Philosophers such as Carl Marx could be heard shouting in the wilderness, growing stronger with every listener. Something was radically wrong with the idea that a few people should live the lives of nobility while those who labored had to endure squalor and homelessness, often reduced to begging for meals.

**THE WHITE SLAVE**

By Joe Hill

One little girl, fair as a pearl,
Worked every day in a laundry;
All that she made, for food she paid,
So she slept on a park bench so soundly

Something was wrong when the majority of the people had to suffer for the comfort of a small elite few. Workers were dying daily due to poor and unsafe working conditions. Is this what god wanted for his people? Already weakened and
staggered by science, religion had to rise to those questions also if it was to endure. And so it did. Fundamentalism, conservatives unwilling to change, was falling by the wayside while more mainstream churches were creating what became known as the “Social Gospel”. The Social Gospel, as shall be shown, was an interpretation of the Bible that enraged the political right to the point that they often referred to the Social Gospel as communism. The idea of the Social Gospel was to create what some refer to as heaven on earth, to rid children of disease, to redistribute wealth thereby creating better living conditions for the majority rather than just a few social elite. My church, the First Lutheran, was one in the forefront of this thinking, preaching a Social Gospel, a “We are all in this world together” mentality. Be careful how we treat others for someday the power may be on the other foot. “Remember,” we were reminded that “the first now will later be last (Matthew 20:16).”

I was raised to believe in social equality and I still cling to these beliefs today --- although I have lost faith in god. One does not need a god to feel empathy for his fellow human beings. No one, I believe, should have to live without health care. A safety net is needed to catch those falling into poverty and a system needs to be in place to pull those in poverty out. Why wait for heaven to be fed asked Joe Hill in his song “The Preacher and the Slave?” Why not be comfortable and healthy now? My church supported labor unions as many of its membership were union men, many old railroad men who remembered the days when brakemen injured on the job were simply thrown from the train.

Race: Racist? Who me?

My parents were 100% unapologetic racists. To them – Blacks were all “NIGGERS” and should be sent back to Africa. Blacks were not simply lazy and low achievers; Blacks were a drain on society as a whole. Blacks were a threat to the American Dream, to be exact --- a real danger, the enemy. To my parents the American Dream was only meant for Whites. One Black in town would threaten everyone’s property value. For my parents, race was an “Us or Them” issue. White America had two choices. Either White America had to keep Blacks in their place (on the bottom) or risk having Blacks in their faces giving orders and replacing White’s at what my parents believed were white’s traditional jobs. “Everyone knew” my dad would say that “Blacks everywhere would like my (Dad’s) job as my (Dad’s) job pays far more than anything Niggers were accustomed to. Niggers would not know how to deal with all that money.” I remember one time Dad came home with the rumor that some Black was being transferred to the roundhouse as Dad’s supervisor. After half a life’s work, Dad was ready to quit that day. Dad would say that he would stand in an unemployment line before taking orders from
“some damn Nigger.” While to state this race hatred of my parents tends to contradict my statement that I was raised to believe in equality, my parents were not the only influence in my life.

As a child, I was not sure how my parent’s paranoid (paranoid best describes it) racist sentiments never rubbed off on me. That’s not to say I did not have a number of prejudices to deal with but unlike my folks, I never recall thinking of race in terms of “Them” or “Me.” I never could understand my parents’ stance on race – then at least - but that was before reading the book “On the Laps of Gods” and viewing the movie “Birth of a Nation” by D. W. Griffith that “On the Laps of Gods” kept referring to. Viewing those two things was like opening my eyes for the first time. Now I believe I understand.

You see, prior to my being born, Jesse Owens became the pride of America in 1936 at Summer Olympics in Berlin. Owens took home four gold medals, the 100 meter race, the 200 meter race, the 400 meter relay, and the long jump. During those Olympic Games, Owens went from just another Nigger to a national hero honored in New York by a ticker tape parade, an honor normally only reserved for elites like conquering generals. Back in America however after having served his purpose as American propaganda, Owens was still a “Nigger” forced to take a freight elevator to his own celebration at the Waldorf-Astoria.

While white America may have rather had a White American beat the German’s master race in the 1936 Olympics, that America took the gold was good enough for many. Beating Fascism’s master race must have been laughable to many Americas who viewed themselves as superior to Blacks --- but over time, slowly, it was the Blacks who had the last laugh, however small the snicker. To many more liberal Americas it began to appear that one could be an American and Black. Furthermore, Owens performance provided any white supremacist with a mental challenge “How could any substandard inferior take four gold medals against a superior white race?” Owens did not only beat Hitler’s master race that day. Owens, a Black, beat the world’s fastest Whites and in doing so chipped into the myth of White Superiority, a fact that did not go unnoticed by many of my baby boomer generation.

By the time I was well on my way to becoming a young man, Black names, slowly but surely but with ever increasing intensity, were becoming household names; Jackie Robinson, Hank Aaron, Louie Armstrong, Sammy Davis Jr. Many of my rock and roll heroes were Black, Chubby Checkers, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, Ray Charles, Little Richard, The Platters, Coasters, and Drifters. If this was “Nigger Music” as my father called it, I wanted more. Enough of those crooners (Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin), oompah-pah, Glen Miller big band, and Lawrence Welk’s accordion noise. “Let’s “Rock and Roll” and if it took Blacks to “Let the Little Girl Dance (A favorite song title of mine)” so be it.
The evening news was reporting on racial violence in the South nearly every day. I could not help feeling sympathy for children, no matter what color they were, being murdered in their own churches by bombs planted by hate groups such as the Ku Klux Khan. Watching from the sidelines (North Dakota) I could not help but feel empathy for groups of Blacks being blown down by water cannons, police and National Guard mobbing Black people for doing nothing more than wanting into a school or walking down the street. This was after all America, the melting pot. Whoever said that all that melted in America had to be White? I believed what was preached to me, that in this nation, all men were created equal.”

I did not linger on the original intent of the words “All Men” as at the time those words came into being; slavery existed --- when slaves were thought of as property (livestock if you will). Slavers were not included in the meaning of the word “Men.” Their title was “Boy.” I missed this during the sixties when Blacks would parade around with signs proclaiming “I’m a Man” not to mention their singing about being one, the significance of which escaped me never having lived in an environment where such simple terms defined a person’s social status.

My response was some enlightening phrase like “So! Why of course you’re a man! I mean how revolutionary was that?” Well --- what goes around comes around, What I thought before was a ridiculous statement makes me feel --- well --- ridiculous.

History class, unfortunately, always attempted to avoid controversy (and for that matter unfortunately still does). Never discussed was what the phrase “All men” actually meant to our founding fathers. However as such, the phrase “All men” was left to each student’s interpretation --- mine came from straight from Webster’s Dictionary. “All” meant everyone and “Men” included all humans regardless of race. An adult Black to me was always a man – not some boy or a piece of property. I believed “All men were created equal” and in my mind “All” was not followed by “Whites.” “All” was followed by the word “Men” which in my definition included adult Blacks.

I did wrestle with prejudice however. Small in comparison to my ancestry, I feel it safe to say that in terms of race, I was the product of the propaganda to which I was subjected. For example; consider the movie “Gone with the Wind.” I recall the language of Blacks on that film.

Prissy: Mammy, here's Miss Scarlet's vittles.
Scarlett: You can take it all back to the kitchen; I won't eat a bite.
Mammy: Yes'm you is, you's gonna eat every mouthful of this.
Scarlett: No... I'm... NOT
Prissy was played by Buttery McQueen, a fearful pathetic little Black woman that knew nothing about birthing when it mattered. Mammy, Hattie McDaniel, was overweight and dressed like Aunt Jemima from the Uncle Mose salt and pepper shakers. Blacks were always bastardizing the English language with slurs like “Yes’m.” Blacks were almost exclusively cowardice, always the first to run whenever danger approached, the whites of their eyes bulging out of their sockets. They were always cast in service positions, elevator operators, butlers, waiters and waitresses, janitors, and maids. But a threat? Blacks may have lacked in intelligence and ambition, an attitude I likely picked up off the silver screen, but they always were faithful and polite; for example Buckwheat from “The Little Rascals” or Jack Benny’s Rochester. Thinking back of Blacks as portrayed on the silver screen or television, Leadbelly sang “it’s a lot of Jim Crow in a moving picture show,” as prejudicial as I may have seemed, in my life time I do not recall anywhere where Blacks, as a group, were portrayed as a threat to my wellbeing.

Casting Blacks in the faithful and polite category had not always been the case however. To my grandparents and parents, Blacks were oversexed, raping white women whenever an opportunity arose, out to take over Whites’ jobs, and cease political power by any means possible. Their prejudicial views came from movies such as the 1915’s “Birth of a Nation” by D. W. Griffith which Robert Whitaker claims “invited all of America to join a lynch mob.”

“Birth of a Nation” took its history from Dixon’s “The Clansman” which told of life in the South before and after the Civil War. After the Civil War, Southern Whites, as shown by “Birth of a Nation,” were under siege attack by Blacks. “See! My people fill the streets. With them I will build a Black Empire and you as a Queen shall sit by my side” the powerful mulatto, Silas Lynch, attempting to force Elsie, a white woman, to marry him decrees. The longest cinema feature ever produced during the silent movie era, “Birth of a Nation” told of armed Blacks rebelling against whites and imposing themselves forcibly on white women. One woman, pursued alone through the woods, was forced to jump to her death to escape the clutches of a Black. In the end, under siege, outgunned and desperate, hapless White’s waited their rescue by none other than the Ku Klux Klan with Jesus, in a final scene, appearing as a hologram blessing those robed warriors.

“Birth of a Nation” was not just some KKK propaganda film limited to KKK members. “Birth of a Nation” was the silent movie era’s “Gone with the Wind” When this movie first showed in Grand Forks, North Dakota, an old gentlemen informed me that a special train ran from Grafton to Grand Forks to make sure anyone who wished to see this film could. The movie was at the time
(and for that matter still is) considered a master piece. “Birth of a Nation” lies within Public Domain and may be viewed or downloaded at: www.archive.org.

According to Robert Whitaker, the film “Birth of a Nation” opened the door to the unpunished genocidal slaughter of Africa Americans to follow. These murders included such medieval atrocities as publicly burning people at the stake, a fate reserved for Negroes in the late Ninth and early Twentieth Centuries. Robert Whitaker reminds America of its own not too distant dark past listing a number of public burnings in which THOUSANDS of Whites gathered to watch Blacks publicly roasted alive in the same manner as witches and scientists, skeptical of religion, were during the Middle Ages. IN BOTH CASES these burnings were carried out by Christians.

At the same time the Ku Klux Klan was not simply limited to a few radicals from the South. Active chapters existed in Northern States also. For example, Paynesville Minnesota; a stop on the railroad that my grandfather, uncle, and dad all worked for, had an active KKK group. According to literature located in the Museum in Paynesville, cross burnings were a common around the turn of the Twentieth Century on the hill south of town at what is now the golf course.

**Side Note:**

Listed in the Enderlin Diamond Jubilee book (1891-1966) is this note at the bottom of page 27 and continued on page 28:

“The Roaring Twenties were marked on a smaller scale, by the same absurdities that illuminated the national scene … the short skirt and shorter “bob,” the Charleston, the bootlegger, bell bottomed pants, the miniature golf craze and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan.

Enderlin had its own local Klan, the motivation apparently being a fear that the Pope was about to
take over the country. Like most such anonymous
groups, they also felt competent to guard the
community morals as well, and one or two crosses
were burned to warn local sinners to repent.”

Why this is important is Paynesville, as noted above,
was just down the tracks. As such it is fair to assume,
given the racism exhibited by the Klan (past and
present) that any black who may have wondered into
town was dealt with harshly and any black with
ambitions of working for the railroad, the area’s
largest employer, was only a pipe dream.

To think my grandfather may have belonged to
the KKK --- I have no way of confirming that at this
date; however, fair to say, a member or not, his view
of Blacks and Catholics were likely swayed by the
Klan which he likely passed along to his off spring,
namely mother. It might also help explain why my
parents held such an animosity for Catholics, not to
mention Blacks. Forgive me grandfather if this is not
true but it is difficult not to speculate that this early
bastion of hate did not influence the views of those
alive then or their children to come.

Commercialism: Advertising and its Effect:

Alongside religion, another form of propaganda, advertising, was targeting my
generation. We were literally immersed in commercialism. Advertisements and
enticements were everywhere, on radio, television, billboards, baseball outfield
fences, painted on buildings and grain elevators, race cars, windows, or anywhere a
bare spot existed. Humphrey Bogart always had a cigarette in his mouth. Cigarettes
added to coolness. The Marlboro man was free, independent, and masculine.
Before I could recite the musical scale EGBDE as “Every Good Boy Does Fine,” I
could have told you that L-S-M-F-T meant “Lucky Strike Means Tobacco.”
Frosted Flakes were “GREAT” and Wheaties was the “Breakfast of Champions.”
Long before I drank a beer, I knew that Hamm’s beer came from the land of sky
blue waters and was “the beer refreshing” and Schlitz was what made Milwaukee
famous.
Commercialism crept in completely unquestioned adding a never ceasing aspiration for more and more. It started with childhood things; toys, erector sets and Lincoln Logs, Monopoly games; Hershey kisses and Coca-Cola, Campbell’s soup, and Frosted Flakes; and graduated to more adolescent desires such as the current dress styles, pop music, the right deodorant and cologne, the hottest car, and on and on. I, like anyone else I knew, simply took all those commercials for granted. Somehow, we reasoned, we were entitled to all these things. No one gave any thought at all to what affect all these advertisements had on our values. No one gave any thought to whom these advertisements were directed or who the benefactors were or what those benefactors had to gain by throwing their propaganda out there.

I never really gave any real serious thought to advertising until its negative effects began affecting my pocket book. My teenagers were demanding Guess Jeans, blue jeans not much different than the jeans I bought for seventeen dollars other than the label that proudly proclaimed “My family can afford to pay sixty dollars for a seventeen dollar pair of jeans” whether their family could or not. Then one day I found I had become the ogre for not stopping at McDonalds or not buying some sugared cereal with a superhero on the box. Not a day goes by without the media’s mention of the epidemic of obesity in America’s young adults and children. Is there any doubt what is causing this problem? Human genes have not changed that much in the last couple decades. What has changed, however, commercials are now targeting youth more than they ever did in the past. If it were up to my children, all we would eat would be pizza, French fries, tacos, and hamburgers, sugar fortified cereal, and grease soaked, salt smothered potato chips. We’d dine at only those facilities that offer a free plastic likeness of Buzz Light Year, has Aliens hanging from the walls and ceiling, or childhood playgrounds. Of course, in each hand there would be a quart sized sugared drink of empty calories fortified with who knows what to replace all the perspiration lost by fingerling the controls of a video game.

My message here: Advertising works. Propaganda (particularly advertising in a political and religious realm) will become an important theme of this writing. A recent movie claims “If you build it, they will come” and sure enough as the stadiums and tents went up, they were filled. This writing will document Evangelical and Fundamental churches going up all over the nation. And the question that will need to be asked and attempted answered is “Why.” Who are building these churches, for what reason, and who is the chief beneficiary?
Navy Davy: Proud of my new Navy Uniform at the Age of Four:

My military indoctrination began at a very early age. Mom’s family was a Navy family long before I had even been thought of. Uncle Kenny, Mom’s brother, served in the Navy during WWII. I remember being told how Kenny left Enderlin this little whippy kid to return this rough and tough man all due to his military experience. No one messed with Kenny. My Aunt Doris’ husband, Dan, made the Navy a career. Both wanted their sons and nephews to carry on their Navy tradition and brought home children’s Navy hats and clothing to help make that a reality. I was proud of my Navy uniform by the age of four.

I really do not know exactly what effect my uncles’ gifts had on me joining the Navy but I will say this; nearly all their siblings also joined the Navy, Ken’s son, Doris’s son, Dan’s nephews all ended up joining the Navy. It was not peer pressure that moved me to the Navy for after high school as nearly every one of my best friends joined the Marines. James Clark, Barry Schonteich, Mike and Jim Flatt (the sons of a Marine Officer), Gary Sperstad, and Bill Jorgenson (the young brother of two Marines) all joined the Marines and encouraged me to do the same. Despite their encouragement and pressure to join the Marines, in my subconscious was this recording from the past, playing over and over in my head, “Join the Navy, son. At least at the end of the day you’ll have a warm bed to sleep in and a roof over your head.” As I shall discuss later, early indoctrination is an important force in forming a person’s beliefs and his life’s choices. Once indoctrinated, beliefs, behaviors, and life choices usually last a person’s lifetime. We will return to this later.

And then there was Dad. As a child sliding down a slide in grade school, Dad ran a metal object into his abdomen and ended up with what he was told was TB of bowel. As such, come time to sign up to fight the war to liberate the world, Dad did not pass the physical. Instead, he ended up at a Conservation Corps (CC) Camp in Montana as a medic. I never knew Dad was a medic until a few years before he died. “The world is truly small!” I thought given I ended up as a medic in Vietnam. Anyway, being a non-veteran, Dad could not belong to groups such as the VFW which next to churches was the largest social activity around my small
town. Called a draft dodger once, Dad openly cried which was the only time I ever saw him cry. He looked at me with his eyes swelling up from tears and told me that when it comes my turn to serve my country, do it or I’d regret not having served in the military the rest of my life.

Hollywood also did its part to reinforce and glorify the military. “To Hell and Back,” “Midway,” “The Guns or Naverone,” “Sergeant York,” “Remember the Alamo,” “The Bridge on the River Kwai,” “The Fighting Seabees.” Superman was fighting for “Truth, Justice, and the American Way.” Audie Murphy was a household name and today he is still honored at his own website. Comic book heroes like Sergeant Rock and Charlie Cigar defended America from Japan’s advance. And who could forget those great crime fighters, Spiderman, The Green Lantern, the Fantastic Four, Captain America, and the American League defending the free world from unscrupulous madmen bent on world domination. Amazingly figures like the short stocky baldheaded Lex Luthor, Superman’s archenemy, amazingly just happened to resemble, Khrushchev, who we were constantly reminded was out to bury us. I had made that connection early in life as I remember asking Dad once if Superman could do all the things television and comic books claimed he could do, why we (being the United States) don’t just send him to Russia and clean up all that evil in the world. That of course is laughable now --- but I was serious then.

And who from my generation had not seen hundreds of reruns of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Holocaust, or had not watched what Turner Classic Movies now refer to as “One Reel Wonders,” played at the theater prior to the main feature or for intermissions, patriotic films as the 1956 “Sentinels in the Air.” Stressed during this film clip was at any moment America could itself come under attack, or worse a bomb could just drop out of the sky. I remember one of my next door neighbors, a just turned teenage kid only a year older than myself, claiming he was a member of civil air patrol and his duty was to report any objects he saw flying overhead to his commander. And who could not recite JFK’s words “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country?” Contrary to the publicized, often dramatized, antiwar sentiment of the sixties and seventies, heroism and devotion to duty was being marketed to my baby boomer generation on a grand scale.

Violence as seen through a Child’s Eyes

The children in my neighborhood were for the most part two to three years my senior. That meant if I wanted to play with them, I had to be able to compete on their level. I had to run as fast, catch as well, and in softball, at least, be able to hit as well and as hard as they could. If I could not do these things, I would not get to
play. So I played as hard as I could and as it turned out I was able to perform near enough their level even if two years their junior. In terms of getting to play in my neighborhood, my performing above what would be considered my age level was a good thing. In terms of playing with those of my own age level at school however my attempting to be two to three years advanced in the sport was often seen as egotistical and self-serving. I, not surprisingly, never saw this at the time. In my mind, to play, I had to put all I could into every play.

What I could not compete with however was size. When it came to settling an argument with my neighbors over important childhood issues like was I safe on first base, I nearly always lost. The referee was always on their side since the referee just happened to be half again my size and doubled as the first baseman. Should I protest a call, either I came to see it their way or I went home with a swollen eye unable to see anything. While I may have been able to hit a ball and run well enough to stay in the game, the twenty pounds these guys had on me was next to impossible to overcome. Right or wrong, true or false, mattered little to nothing. The biggest guy usually got his way. I came to see violence therefore as having the ability to nullify facts. Violence, I learned at an early age, did not prove anything other than who has the biggest.

When I think back on my childhood and how my views on violence were shaped, aside from the discussion above, I immediately think of two events that turned me even further against the use of violence as a method of settling disputes. The first came from my home. My father early in his marriage was a wife beater. I remember one evening being awakened by Dad yelling and banging things around my parent’s bedroom over a condom that he claimed he found in the driveway. Too young to know what condoms were used for I really had no idea what the fight was all about. Looking back however it is quite possible I may have dropped it there. Condoms were, after all, usually available on my folks’ dresser. I of course thought they made great balloons; something I found out when a local drug store burned down. I found a case full of them lying amongst the ashes. I made quite the impression on my grade school teachers blowing condoms up on the playgrounds. It is not hard to imagine that this innocent infatuation with condoms had something to do with one showing up in the driveway.

I never got a chance to inform Dad that it all might be a mistake however. Even if I may have known how that condom ended up in our driveway, considering his tone, I figured I’d probably be wise to pretend I was sleeping. I was not supposed to go in their bedroom. So I pretended to be asleep even when this loud crash came from the bedroom and Dad left, slamming the door behind him. I listened for some sound from Mom but none came. Worried, I opened Mom’s door to find her in a piled up against the dresser, not making a sound. I thought she was
dead. I went over and shook her after which she began to come around. I’ve never forgotten that night. I’ll never forget what it felt like to wonder if my Mother was alive or dead. I’ve never forgotten how senseless the whole act of her beating was. What did it prove? Did it prove that condom in the driveway was anything more than a balloon in the hands of a child? Violence to me seemed only a method of control with little regard given to finding out the truth. All violence accomplished was hurt people. It rarely brought out any truths that I could see.

My second eye opening brush with violence came a few years later. Gangs, if you could call them that, were forming throughout the town inspired by the 1961 film “West Side Story” The Riverside gang was made up of a number of boys who lived close to Enderlin’s City Park and the ball diamond on the northwest end of town. Although these groups liked to think of themselves as gangs, the groups were really nothing more than local budding males watching out over their turf.

My nemesis was the “Curb Dusters.” These boys made up the central portion of town close to downtown where we often played “Ditch” a game very much like “Hide and Go Seek” only in Ditch we had teams. One person from the “Curb Dusters” was particularly aggressive. He seemed to like fights and inflicting pain on others. He loved to intimidate people. He often appeared at hangouts like the Grand Theater showing off things like brass knuckles or switchblades but in reality, I believe these weapons were more status symbols than serious weapons. I never heard of anyone being stabbed with his knives or beaten severely by his brass knuckles. That however did not prevent him from being mean spirited.

I later associated this aggression to what I called the “Small Guy Syndrome,” small framed short males with an ego to fill. They had to prove they were tougher than they appeared to be and what better way than to beat up on someone larger? Fights for them, whether physically won or lost, were a win-win deal. If they lost they were praised for their bravery. If they won, they were seen as super human.

I was often one of his victims. He would wait for me after school normally with a few others of his Curb Dusters friends for back up. Outnumbered and less experienced at fighting, I’d end crawling home with a black eye or numerous other bruises whining to my parents that they should do something about putting an end to that bullying. The answer I always received however was “Why don’t you fight your own damn battles?” Boys, after all, were supposed to be able to take care of themselves. So one day I did. I took care of myself. I cannot remember the exact circumstance; all I remember was he was giving me his usual bad time on the playground, pushing me around, and harassing me when I decided I had enough. I wound up and let him have it, right on the end of his nose with the same ferocity I put into a baseball bat when playing ball with my older neighbors. Down he went. Blood flew everywhere.
I received a lesson in fighting that day. Not only do I get hurt in fights but I was capable of inflicting some serious damage to others --- and I did not like that. I took no gratification in the fact that I probably broke his nose. The bleeding couldn’t be controlled. For the rest of the evening I laid awake worried that he might bleed to death. Mom kept me updated as to his condition. If I did not like fighting before this event, I sure as hell did not like fighting afterward. While I could handle getting wailed on from time to time, I was, after the incident with him, as afraid of what I might do to the other guy as what he might do to me. What if he died? How would I feel? Would I end up in prison? From that day forward, I avoided fights even if it meant being called a chicken.

**Pop Music: the Music of my Generation**

My generation’s choice of pop music was considered nothing but noise by our music teacher. One day our teacher walked into the room, placed a vinyl record on the turn table, and cranked up the volume. Out came “Surfing Bird” sung by the Trashmen. Raw, gruff, with few words more than “bird” and “word” and fewer notes, the song is best described as a lip flapping string of babble that sounded more like flatulence than a melody. The instructor then shut off the player, folded his arms around his chest, and asked “Does anyone dare to call this music?” No one did --- at least in his class. Outside of class however those sitting in that class with their lips sealed later walked the halls lip-syncing the lyrics “The Bird, Bird, Bird.” Whether this was called music by critics mattered little. It was the sound of our times. If it was only noise, it was my generation’s noise and we wanted it shouted to the world. To my generation, music wasn’t just notes and sounds. It was our generation shaking its fists at the status quo and nothing raised our hands higher than rumpus our parents could not stand to listen to. Our music sounded nothing like their waltzes and polkas. The accordion was rapidly being replaced by the electric guitar. The twist and other sexually suggestive dance moves rapidly replaced the gentle romantic graceful hand-in-hand dance steps of our parents. Beatle boots were replacing cowboy boots. The times they were changing and artists such as Bob Dylan were leading the way, or so many of my generation would like to think.

Our music was hope of things to come. Our music challenged the conservative status quo calling for good times, personal liberation from long established norms, civil disobedience, racial equality, and the end to war. Unfortunately the ideas of the sixties would be short lived. Rumors now have it Bob Dylan has been seen waiting for a slow train and Cat Stevens went into hiding in a Moon Shadow. Sometime around the mid-seventies all those antiestablishment lyrics seemed to have simply faded into little more than advertisements while some
Spirit in the Sky descended on pop culture like a thief in the night stealing whatever originality and purpose the sixties had brought us. Now Beatle boots can only be found in antique stores, replaced ironically once again by cowboy boots. I often wonder what John Lennon would think of “Hello-Goodbye” being used as a Target store advertisement?

**The Bomb: Life on Earth in the Hands of Man**

I did not think of it much then but looking back the rise of Rock and Roll largely paralleled the rise of a huge mushroom shaped cloud which lingered in the minds of my generation and cast a shadow over nearly everything we did. The world, as Barry McGuire blurted out in his “The Eve of Destruction,” actually seemed on the eve of destruction. We, the baby boomers, were convinced that at any time, on any day, the end would come. Consider “The Merry Minuet” as sang by the Kingston Trio:

“And we know for certain that some lucky day
Someone will set the spark off and we will all be blown away.”

The key word in those lyrics is “CERTAIN.” Not maybe. Not possibly. But “for certain” we would all be blown away. In the 1960 movie “The Time Machine” (based on an H.G.Wells novel) Rod Taylor, as George, builds a time machine. The story begins in 1899, with Taylor climbing into his time machine and ending up 800,000 years into the future saving the Eloi from the Morlocks, both the result of human evolution. The Eloi, looking like modern day humans, were largely grown as cattle for the cannibalistic Morlocks, bluish colored and hairy humans of the underworld. The Eloi are called to their fate in the underground, where their ancestors went to protect themselves from the bomb, by wailing sirens.

Once enough Eloi enter the underground world of the Morlocks to satisfy their taste for flesh, the door to the Morlock’s world would close and the all clear is given. The remaining Elois then return to their pasture, sort of speak, where they reproduce more Elois for the next time the sirens sounded. No elderly Eloi existed as all the Eloi are eaten long before ever getting old.

The plot of the movie was more about war than what happens to the Eloi and Morlocks however. George’s stops along his way to the year 800,000 AD included a stop during World War I where George discovers that his friend from 1899 had been killed in the war. The news of George’s friend’s death comes from George’s friend’s own son. George’s house, where he started his trek into the future, is all boarded up and abandoned. The second time George stops was during World War
II. England was being bombed by Germany, an air raid in which George’s house was destroyed.

George’s third stop, his last before reaching 800,000 AD, was on August 16, 1966. People were scrabbling about attempting to hustle George into an underground bomb shelter as sirens were blaring foretelling the arrival of incoming Atomic bombs. Human civilization as it was known ended that very day. Civilization did not end off somewhere in the distant future. Civilization, predicted by this movie, would end in 1966, only six years after the movie’s opening. The message being relayed to my generation, the world was about to end --- and soon.

My generation, as adolescents, had all seen Baker, the Tilapia Bomb,\textsuperscript{013} played over and over on newsreels at the Grand Theater, not to mention the destruction caused at Hiroshima and Nagasaki\textsuperscript{014} when America decided to drop the bomb on Japan. I remember the shadow of a man imprinted on a sidewalk, the only spot on the sidewalk that was not scorched by the flash of the blast. His body, vaporized by the heat of the blast, shielded the sidewalk from the full intensity of the flash’s heat leaving only his shadow as the negative of a snapshot in time. There is no denying it --- as a child in my early preteens, these videos scared the hell out of me. Life was going to be short lived. Enjoy it now.

If the real scenes of Atomic blasts weren’t enough, the movie industry began to capitalize on uncertainties surrounding the Nuclear age; for example, the possible effects of nuclear fallout. Movies like the 1954 movie, “Them”\textsuperscript{015} featured ants affected by radiation by atomic tests mutating to become giant ants which ravaged the southwest. Beginning as a mystery movie involving missing people, strange tracks are discovered that proves to be Them, giant Ants. The movie preys on man’s works worst fear, the fear of the unknown. Dr. Harold Medford makes the statement in the movie that "When man entered the atomic age he opened a door to a new world. What we'll eventually find in that new world nobody can predict."

The same year a Japanese movie, Gojira (AKA Godzilla), exemplified the nuclear testing of hydrogen bombs as destroying a previously unknown aquatic dinosaur like beast’s habitat. Having nowhere to live, the beast surfaces to ravage Tokyo. Empowered by radiation generated by H bomb tests, Godzilla possessed amazing nuclear generated powers and strength including a radioactive breath ray capable of setting buildings and people on fire. No known weapons could stop Gojira.

The beast Gojira was seen as an analogy to the atomic bomb. Any Japanese having survived those atomic bombs or for that matter firebombing likely had no problem linking the terror and horror, the despair and hopelessness those bombings created to some imaginary indestructible monster. The perfect myth existed to
describe what Japan had endured and as such the movie was a phenomenon in Japan. People, it seems, are more willing to accept a myth more so than reality if reality happens to be unpleasant.

Anyway, faced with the possible utter destruction of Japan by Gojira, the only option, ironically, was for the Japanese to build a bigger and more horrendous weapon. The weapon created to destroy Gojira was, like Gojira, a fictitious weapon; the Oxygen Destroyer. Its creator however questioned the value of this atrocious weapon’s use given its capability of unmanageable destruction just as Oppenheimer questioned the development of Hydrogen bomb. The movie raises the question the free world feared the most. What if this new awesome weapon fell into the hands of war lords and hostile nations? The question however came too late for the West. By the time the movie was released, the bomb had already been acquired by the Soviet Union. The arms race, as the movie suggests, was on. The Cold War had begun.

Evening television also stepped into the fray. Rod Sterling’s “The Twilight Zone” featured Burgess Meredith as Henry Bemis. “Time Enough at Last” tells the story of a bank teller and bookworm who could not enough time to read all the books he wanted. One day Henry slipped into the vault to read a book as nuclear war, unbeknown to Henry, destroyed the world around him. When Henry emerges from the vault, he realizes he is the sole survivor. What happens in the rest of the story line is not nearly as important as the question that the movie left hanging in every viewer’s head however. What if nuclear war really happened and I ended up as the sole survivor? Would I really want to live or would I really be better off dead? Bemis offers his audience an insight into that question. Happy about the fact that he now could take time to read all the books he wanted, upon attempting to pick up a book, Henry’s bottle neck glasses fell off and shattered on the stairs. All those books, all the time in the world, and Henry is left alone with no glasses.

Sputnik was launched October 4th, 1957 and proved to the world everyone was vulnerable to nuclear attack. I remember Mom herding us children outside to look for this new star cross the sky. We watched and watched and then there it was, passing on its route directly over our house. I remember my grim faced mother as she uttered the words, trembling and clearly frightened “That could just as easily be a bomb.” I was only eleven at the time but even then I had no qualms about what Mom’s statement meant. Bombs simply dropping out of the sky could liquidate us at any time. Nowhere was safe. Not even America which until this time always enjoyed the safety of two oceans between America and its enemies. Not anymore.

On October 30, 1961 the Soviets detonated the largest nuclear device in history, the Tsar Bomba, tested on Novaya Zemlya, an island in the Artic Sea. The blast yielded approximately 50 megatons of energy capable of generating third
degree burns up to 100 kilometers. Although Tsar Bomba’s use as a weapon was questionable because of its size, for propaganda purposes it made its point. 018 I remember debating with my friends next door, age 15, whether we, at Enderlin, would live through a blast detonated over Fargo fifty miles away. It did not seem likely that Russia would drop a bomb on Enderlin, population 1500, but Fargo --- the largest town anywhere around --- maybe.

To think an explosion that far away would level everything within the radius of Fargo to Enderlin was indeed a horrifying thought. And if that was not enough to worry about, as prophesized in the movie “Gojira,” every year up until that point, the bombs just kept getting larger. Where would it end? Well --- it ended that year, or so is the hope, but we had no way of knowing that the time.

Then came the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The Russians were stocking Cuba with offensive missiles armed with nuclear war heads. 019 President John F. Kennedy immediately responded with a Naval blockade of Cuba while the rest of the world trembled as the nuclear superpowers stood face to face, fidgeting with their fingers just above their six shooters, the button, waiting for the other to draw. No one drew. Instead the Russians put up their hands and walked away thereby avoiding a fight. Which were they, cowards for backing down or heroes for evading nuclear war, I could have cared less. I’m just glad they decided to walk away rather than reduce the world to ashes --- which apparently the U.S. was willing to do. The closest the world had ever come to a nuclear war, which I know about, had passed. That did little to console the Average Joe on the street however. Although the threat of nuclear war for the moment had been silenced, the blasts from Trinity, Bikini, Japan, and Russia still echoed in everyone’s ears. For them, it was reasonable to believe that another Cuban like face-off was irrefutably just around the corner. This time however maybe the Russian’s cowardice or generosity, whichever the case was, might not save us.

This nuclear war scare led to the Civil Defense Industry, now thought by many influential sources as a propaganda agency designed to sell construction materials and survival supplies for fallout shelters. From Billy Graham to Nelson Rockefeller, support for the fallout shelter program was proclaimed as a program that could save millions of lives. Virtually every media source had images of mushroom clouds rising over United States cities while Civil Defense was being hailed as Americans’ only hope for survival. Everything had come together to make Civil Defense and the government spending that went into it one of the most perfect propaganda enrichment programs ever dreamt up by influential people with their hands in the cookie jar.
Side Note:

“Duck and Cover” was another Civil Defense film shown in schools across America during the 50s. Children during this era were exposed to the possibility that nuclear war might happen any day and some of the so-called “ways to protect yourself” offered by these films were quite laughable, even to children. I remember one joke in particular as an adolescent: What do you do in the case of a nuclear attack? You bend over and put your head between your legs (in reference to protecting your head in this film clip) and kiss your sweet ass good-bye.

Not many children in today’s America have been exposed to these films as it is likely the fear these film clips generated was thought to be the reason for the peace movement to follow in the sixties. America since World War II has been a war nation --- with little sentiment for peaceniks.

Well --- anyway, people’s hands in the cookie jar was the better of two scenarios. The alternative thought was that people were actually being prepared for the unimaginable, a nuclear war. Kennedy openly promoted fallout shelters. For example, the September 15, 1961 issue of Life magazine featured a man in a civilian fallout suit on the cover. The issue made the claim that 97 out of 100 people could be saved in the event of a nuclear war by fallout shelters. Inside this issue contained a letter by Kennedy encouraging the American people to do something to protect themselves which was taken by most people I knew as, ‘build a shelter.’ Government publications to follow reiterated Kennedy’s overly optimist survival rates. Not many people, at least those I knew, believed that humanity could actually survive a nuclear war however. In fact, most people saw the message Kennedy conveyed as absurd. “Why would Kennedy even make such a claim?” most people I knew would ask. “Were we being conned into thinking a nuclear war might even be an option?”

No one I knew could afford to build one of those shelters to say anything about stocking it. My family could not afford such a luxury and mother was quick to point out that if a nuclear war did break out, our family, not having one of these shelters, surely would be all dead. As for the rest of the world, Mom continued, with or without a bomb shelter, life would end as we knew it. To believe otherwise, she would say, was total lunacy. Mom never was a military strategist or
an authority on nuclear weapons but she was still Mom and to my young ears her words stuck. Nuclear war was nothing short of worldwide suicide. I believed it then. I believe it now.

In the end, bomb shelters were never put to the test. Nonetheless, what bomb shelters did do was make a number of people rich selling fallout shelter construction materials and survival goods. I have not gone through the process to track this money but my guess is many politicians and their constituents benefited greatly from their own government’s propaganda, propaganda they themselves put out.

**The Protests Begin: Ban the Bomb, Stop War**

Hopeful noises were heard shouting in the wilderness however. Ban the bomb rallies were quickly becoming a worldwide chant. When I look back at the way the antiwar movement of the late sixties and early seventies developed, it is not hard to understand why they began and how they evolved. No one wanted a nuclear war and few, despite the propaganda, believed the world would survive one. In most people’s mind, the best way to prevent a nuclear war was to prevent war altogether. No more war --- no more bombs.

None of this escaped the music industry, which had no problem converting clashing emotions, fear, uncertainty, and hope into cash. Bob Dylan’s “Blowing in the Wind” said it all and was picked up and redone by anyone wishing to be a folk singer. Other songs such as Joan Baez’s “Just A Little Rain” about a boy standing in the rain laden with radioactive fallout and acid rain capitalized on the unknown dangers of nuclear fallout and pollution. Pete Seeger’s “Where Have All the Flowers Gone” redone by the Kingston Trio, spun on every juke box, radio, and stereo across nation, played wherever peace conscience people gathered. Antiwar sentiment was strong and growing and music was a powerful tool aiding the antiwar cause. Even lyrics of love songs as sung by Brian Hyland echoed and reinforced many people’s feeling that “I May Not Live To See Tomorrow” and likely had much to do with the formation of the “live for today” mentality of the Baby Boomer Generation;

We'll take the most from living, have pleasure while we can
Sha-la-la-la-la-la, live for today (2x)²

Or if that is not clear enough, try this for immediate gratification.
And if you can’t be with the one you love
   Love the one you’re with.

The message was clear; live every moment like it might be your last because the possibility exists that today might very well be your last. While it could be said that any day may be anyone’s last due to an accident or unforeseen illness, this prophecy was different. It was not foretelling of a single individual’s, a group’s, or a nation’s last moment. This end was global in scope completely detached from any individual’s bad luck or preexisting condition. We were at the mercy of other men who, if we could believe our leaders, were out to kill all of us in ways we could not even imagine. Moreover, the moment everyone would die might come for no more reason than a simple misunderstanding. Someone might misinterpret an order. In religious thinking, faith in an infallible god was one thing, but how much faith does one place in imperfect human beings? Religion teaches man is by nature a sinner, corrupt, egotistical, and erroneous, and now that man was armed with the bomb capable of ending life (as we know it) on earth it did not take a rocket scientist to figure out that if life was to be enjoyed. Enjoy it now while it could be.

The argument that every person should put forth whatever effort was needed to end war was a pitch even this adolescent could understand. I, myself, took up writing a few poems on the subject of war that I shall offer here, not so much for their literary value (of which there is little) but as a snapshot in time, to show what I was thinking around 13-15 years of age. From my poem “This Villainous World,” written somewhere around 1961 just before or slightly after I entered high school, ended with:

   But someday there shall come a day,
   When almighty man will lay down his arms and walk away,
   Leaving behind,
   As we shall,
   A died still war torn world, that he cruelly demolished due to his own self greed,
   Due to his villainous play.

Or “War” which I wrote about the same time.

   The fields did bleed, all tattered and torn,
   The country’s died, its love forlorn,
   Due to someone’s greed. Their worthless need,
   The green is gone, this land once worn.
The profits of war were under scrutiny. No longer were we dealing with the lives of a handful of men. With the bomb at our disposal, we were dealing with species preservation, the survival of the entire human race. War needed to end and end now.

While I felt strongly that every young man had a duty to his country, I also had this strong antiwar sentimentality. Somehow, for whatever reason, it never occurred to me that by joining the service I was violating my own antiwar beliefs. In fact, I saw the military as doing my part to end war. We were the good guys, the guys in white, defending the world against the bad guys, the guys in black hats. Once we were victorious there would be no need for war as goodness, being American values, would prevail. I could not imagine anyone having a problem with that --- at least then.

Was I in for enlightenment! Reflecting back, don’t ask me to explain how I figured fighting might end war. I now realize the absurdity of that thinking. I now have no idea how I could have rationalized this war to end war rationale. In fact a war to end all wars, World War I, had already been fought but according to history, all that war created was a larger war, World War II. It was all quite confusing to this young man whose only understanding of the world came from capitalistic supported and censored textbooks, the evening news, music lyrics taken exclusively from the top forty, and all the knowledge I acquired in my world travels from the plains of the Dakota’s to the western shores of Lake Michigan. It never occurred to me that Russians might have had the very same thoughts, that they wore the white hats, which goodness might be the Russian way, and their possible victory was a way to end all war as only goodness would prevail. “Who” many Russians might have been asking themselves “could have a problem with that?”

Then one day, I came across a somewhat troubling protest song that has never left my memory. I first heard Buffy St Marie’s “The Universal Soldier” one Friday hitchhiking back from New Effington, South Dakota where I worked on a railroad section crew. Sung by Donovan, it immediately grabbed my attention as a song with depth. As a collector of 45 records, I set out to find it. I never did until YouTube featured it. At any rate, because I never found it and listened to it long enough to learn the lyrics, I missed the table being prepared before me. Buffy’s words were a prophecy of how war veterans; Vietnam Veterans in particular, were to be treated in the upcoming years. Buffy’s lyrics placed the blame for the war directly on the individual soldier with the words “he’s the one that gives his body as a weapon of the war and without him all this killing can’t go on.” If its meaning was shame on veterans, it worked. I’ve never gotten beyond it.
The Rise of the Antihero: The Assault on Liberalism

While heroes were everywhere, the antihero was rising during my later years in high school. To my youngest brother, Jim, these antiheroes were his idols. Every day I’d come home to Jim glued to Rocky and Bullwinkle attempting to disrupt the manufacture of counterfeit box tops by the notorious Boris Baden and his lovely co-conspirator, Natasha Fatale. When Bullwinkle was not saving the world from the conspiracies directed by Boris’ boss, Pottsylvania’s Fearless Leader, Bullwinkle became “Mr. Know-it all” who really did not know much of anything. Not giving the matter any thought then, I now wonder if Mr. Know-it-all wasn’t designed as a shot at the liberal, intellectual establishment of the fifties and sixties. El-Kabong picked a guitar to battle the forces of evil in the world which in nearly every attempt he botched. Odd how some lame brained horse picked a guitar to battle the bad guys given folk singers like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Utah Phillips. Woody had “This machine kills fascist” painted on his guitar. Pete Seeger, another folk singer and member of the Weavers, was banned from most concert houses in America for singing songs such as “The Hammer Song” (the Hammer taken by the rightwing conservatives as a Communist symbol). Seeger and Guthrie sang songs in support of labor unions, antiwar, and songs on other social conscience issues such as the government’s treatment of Veterans. One of my favorite songs even in my teen years was “Can You Spare a Dime,” a song of social inequality which speaks to the nation’s treatment of its labor force and veterans. After working to build society’s infrastructure and fighting its wars, workers and veterans too often found their reward on bread lines and soup kitchens or begging for handouts largely abandoned by the very people they believed they were defending.

Folk singers and songs, many repeats from decades earlier, carried a strong message of socialism and humanism. Was El Kabong’s guitar a propaganda symbol used to debunk the advances made by liberals, unions, and intellectuals? If so, should El Kabong’s guitar be taken as those advancing social equality and protesting war with a guitar, Guthrie, Seeger, and Dylan as nothing more than asses with guitars? I cannot say --- but something to ponder.

While all of this hero/antihero may have meant nothing, it is fun to speculate on how the rise of the antihero may have affected the thinking of those seven to ten years younger than myself. My younger brother, Jim, and his friends, whom I will refer later in this writing to as the perfect people, seemed to have a whole different perspective on life than I even though we were considered the same generation and separated in age by less than a decade. This younger group seemed to loathe any intellectual conversation, placed being machismo at about a 2 on a scale of 1-10,
ignored all things political, and held this simple idea that anything humorous, even slapstick, was preferable to anything of a serious nature.

**A Hero’s Lament: Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient commits Suicide**

I should like to add one additional question fate placed before me prior to joining the service, “Where was Art’s reward?” Early in the sixties I worked for a farmer in Buffalo, North Dakota, summer fallowing and haying. One of the middle aged gentlemen working on the farm was Art Beyer. For the most part, Art worked around the shop but drove the hay wagon during hay season while we younger folks loaded it. I came to work one day and Art wasn’t there, so I asked where Art had gone. Turns out, Art was in Washington D.C. for a Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient reunion.

**BEYER, ARTHUR O.:**
Rank and organization: Corporal, U.S. Army, Company C, 603d Tank Destroyer Battalion. Place and date: Near Arloncourt, Belgium, 15 January 1945. Entered service at: St. Ansgar, Iowa. Born: 20 May 1909, Rock Township, Mitchell County, Iowa. G.O. No.: 73, 30 August 1945. Citation: He displayed conspicuous gallantry in action. His platoon, in which he was a tank-destroyer gunner, was held up by antitank, machinegun, and rifle fire from enemy troops dug in along a ridge about 200 yards to the front. Noting a machinegun position in this defense line, he fired upon it with his 76-mm. gun killing 1 man and silencing the weapon. He dismounted from his vehicle and, under direct enemy observation, crossed open ground to capture the 2 remaining members of the crew. Another machinegun, about 250 yards to the left, continued to fire on him. Through withering fire, he
advanced on the position. Throwing a grenade into the emplacement, he killed 1 crewmember and again captured the 2 survivors. He was subjected to concentrated small-arms fire but, with great bravery, he worked his way a quarter mile along the ridge, attacking hostile soldiers in their foxholes with his carbine and grenades. When he had completed his self-imposed mission against powerful German forces, he had destroyed 2 machinegun positions, killed 8 of the enemy and captured 18 prisoners, including 2 bazooka teams. Cpl. Beyer's intrepid action and unflinching determination to close with and destroy the enemy eliminated the German defense line and enabled his task force to gain its objective.

I couldn’t believe it. Right there on the very farm I worked, the driver of my hay wagon was a genuine Audie Murphy. I was awed. The first question I had for Art of course upon his return was “What did you do in the war to earn that medal? Tell me.” Art however never mentioned anything about what he did to earn that medal, and in fact seemed very uncomfortable about even being asked. He just looked at me, turned around, put the tractor in gear, and headed for the hayfield. I did not understand at all why Art might not wish to speak of his part in the war. I thought he should have been proud of his action and probably, with good intentions, I made something of a nuisance of myself. At that time, to me, a hero’s status was the greatest thing a human could achieve. I often visualized myself being awarded some high medal and for whatever crazy reason put it on one of my “to do” lists as if earning a medal of honor was like earning a Boy Scout merit badge. I quite clearly had much to learn about heroism.

That something was amiss about Art being a farm laborer did not take long to settle in either. A Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Art was working, no doubt, for not much more than subsistence if his pay was anything like mine, five dollars a day from sun up to sun down. “Where was Art’s reward?” I pondered. Murphy after all got his reward in show business starring in his own story “To Hell And Back” not to mention a host of numerous rough and rowdy cowboy movies where he was held up to the world for all to see what a true hero he was.

So why was not Art lifted up? Art was a hero. How is it he ended up there, on that farm, in such a lowly position, entertaining high school boys while they loaded hay wagons? Was his position one of personal choice or was something else at work? Anyway, I never did get an answer until I had to struggle with war myself. But then it was too late to tell Art that I think I understood him. You see,
one day, Art, as his story was relayed to me, went out in the barn and hung himself. A hollow was created for me on that day that to this day has never been refilled. Was this how the United States treated its heroes? A ride on a hay wagon, a dollar’s worth of ribbon to wear around their necks, and an occasional party?

**Vietnam: As seen from High School**

As a young man growing up in the sixties, Vietnam was hard to avoid. Ever since around 1962 until the following decade, the evening news was dominated by scenes of battle and mayhem in Vietnam. The most memorable news event that seared an image in my mind like some cattle brand was the picture of a Buddhist monk publicly setting himself a blaze in what I believed at the time to be a protest against the Communism. I know now however it was not Communism that monk was protesting, rather it was Catholicism. While 70% of the population of Vietnam were Buddhist, the government, under Diem, was predominantly Catholic. In police forces, the upper positions of the armed forces, civil service, colleges, and trade unions, Buddhists were being systematically replaced with Catholics. Although this fact was unknown to me at the time, I would during my tour in Vietnam pickup on the significance of this religious divide on my own.

As for Communism, history class commonly made the statement that, “He who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it” and “What did we learn studying World War II?” our teacher would ask. We learned that had we stopped Hitler when he began dissolving other nations into his Third Reich, World War II may have never happened. Remaining neutral to aggression (although we were never informed as to why the United States remained neutral) was a mistake we, the students, were reminded time and again. Blow out fires before they spread out of control. Communism, from World War II’s end in the middle 40’s to the 60’s, was deemed as one of these spreading fires. The free world watched as Communism absorbed the Eastern Block, China, North Korea, Cuba, and now Vietnam was on their plate. Called the “Domino Theory,” it was thought that should Vietnam fall next would be Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and then Indonesia.

The time to stop the Communist’s advance was now --- before we were fighting the Communists on our own soil, which according to the House Committee on un-American Activity, they were already doing. Publishers, playwrights, song composers, movies stars, and directors that so much as questioned the morality of capitalistic rightwing interests or war all needed monitored, if not outright banned from the public eye. A number of these artists were accused of communist involvement of which none were ever proven to be. Even without being found guilty of any crime a number of publishers and play writers were still jailed, not for being Communists but “Contempt of Congress” for
refusing to answer the question, “Are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” Dalton Trumbo, the author of the famous anti-war novel “Johnny Got His Gun” was one of those jailed. Even if any of these people, as Trumbo, should have been proven to be Communist, at no time before or since was it against the law to belong to the Communist Party. In fact, around the turn of the twentieth century, before the barbaric exploits of Stalin became known, it was not uncommon for intellectuals and idealists to be drawn to the idea of Communism which these intellectuals and idealists viewed as a safe harbor from the horrors and labor abuses of unregulated capitalism.

It’s difficult to remember exactly what was going through my mind watching Vietnam unfold. About my only source of information in the early sixties was the television and I feel safe saying how Vietnam was portrayed on television was how I saw it. Rather than attempting to educate its viewers with the sociological aspects and historical ramifications of this war, the media concentrated on small eye catching, sensational bits and pieces that to a large degree, early on, supported the war effort. Those people heard on the news were always the leaders of the United States’ War Effort, Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, General Westmoreland, all giving their plugs for the reason why this war was important and needed to be won. Never can I remember General Giap, for example, give his assessment of the war or explain his reason for fighting it. In short, the media coverage was very one sided, the American side. Taken a step further, it wasn’t just the American side; it was the pro-war American side. And even if McNamara and Giap would have been given the opportunity to openly debate the issues of concern with each other publicly via the media, it is likely no effort by the media would have been made to validate any claims made by either side. I would learn that bit of truth at St Cloud State College during a Journalism Class which I will speak of later.

It’s important to realize that the media is or never has been in the business of education. In essence it is tragic for there is much opportunity to inform and educate the public using the media. The opportunity is there but far too often lost as a result of commercial interests. It is no secret that the television and radio stations, newspapers, and magazines are all subject to the scrupulous eyes of corporations or other supporters who maintain the power to extract their advertisements or donations. Any publication that these corporations and sponsors feel reflects badly on them risks losing their funding. The reality is media stations, papers, and magazines either put forth what these powers want known or cease to exist. If these media sources attempt to make known what these powerful do not want the public knowing, those media sources end up preaching only to a small chorus, all of who sing the same songs. This is the Capitalist system at work. Either the media does it the advertisers’ way or no more money! It is not hard for
me to believe that many thoughtful, truthful, informative editorials were and still are not aired because of the negative impact these editorials might have on any US corporations or their economic interest.

Edward R. Murrow shares my view of the media. Speaking of his concern for what was and still is being offered on radio and television, Edward R. Murrow stated, “I am seized with an abiding fear regarding what these two instruments (radio and television) are doing to our society, our culture and our heritage.”

Murrow goes on to say that the media, rather than telling what is really happening in the world, shields its consumers from the world’s unpleasant realities. The nation, according to Murrow, is in mortal trouble for not addressing the demanding issues of the day for which Murrow reminds us our nation will end up paying an extreme cost. At any rate, Murrow’s logic went right over everyone’s head then. I was your average “if it is on the news, there must be something to it” buffoon. These were after all news people, anchors—reporters, attempting to tell us the truth or so I thought at the time. So I believed them --- until I actually went to Vietnam. Then all I believed prior to Vietnam would in time crumble.

What I was able to pick up from the media was Vietnam was different from any war experience previously fought by the United States. Vietnam had no fronts other than in isolated locations such as Con Thien and Khe Sanh. Chasing Vietcong was like chasing ghosts. Separating the civilian population from the enemy was next to impossible. An American soldier never really knew who the enemy was. Any Vietnamese swirling around any American at any given time could be on a mission to send that American home in a body bag. This lineless, invisible enemy, children dropping grenades in soldiers’ laps, snipers in trees, booby traps, was not the Vietnam many presented by the Media however. The media tended to report on the major battles all of which were ultimately won by the United States. We, according to the early media at least, were winning battle after battle.

And then there was this all important body count; Vietcong’s number dead versus America’s number dead. It was supposed to display progress if we could show that we were killing more of them than they were us. This absurd idea occurred to me right off, due largely to my high school history teacher. Speaking of the waves of Chinese that threw themselves in harms-way by the tens of thousands during the Korean War, according to our instructor, China could have lined up its population single file and marched them straight into a machine gun with the net result being China’s population would increase. I have not done the math to know if my instructor’s scenario is true, but the logic of his argument seemed sound and stuck with me. The more people you have, the more people you can stand to lose and Asia represented the bulk of the world’s population. Ho Chi
Minh understood that stating: “You can kill ten of my men for everyone I kill of yours. But even at those odds, you will lose and I will win.”

And Ho did win the war --- even at a higher cost than ten to one odds. I remember from my past a movie about Cuba’s revolution. All though I cannot remember the name of the movie, I can recall one scene were a man runs out into the street and blows himself up taking with him his targeted group. “Did you see that” the star astonishingly proclaims “Do you know what that means? That means they won.” I’ve never forgot that.

CHAPTER TWO
We See only What Our Eyes See

One of the stories as told by my brother, Jim, was his view of the world before he received his first set of glasses. Jim was always pressed up against the television screen, eyes squinting, in an attempt to make sense out of what everyone else in the house seemed to have no trouble understanding. Jim often had no idea of a movie’s plot. He could hardly read. He was seen as clumsy, often bumping into inanimate objects and tripping over anything in his way. If an object, such as a bird, was pointed out to Jim, he often missed it entirely to the frustration of both the person pointing out the object and Jim. To say the least, Jim grew up non-athletic as in a sport like softball Jim had to be able to see the ball in order to hit it.

Then one day Jim had his vision checked. Jim could hardly see. Fitted with glasses, Jim walked outside to see for the first time in his life that trees had leaves and grass had blades. Until then, trees and grass were nothing but a green blob according to Jim. His retention of whatever he watched on television instantly improved. How could we, those with eyesight, expect Jim to comprehend what he could not see?

Growing up in rural North Dakota amongst the amber waves of grain, never did it enter my mind that the world was ever any other way, having lived no other way. Sure, I heard of the Indians, the bison, Custer, and cowboys but how much the world had changed since those days I just never truly comprehended. My friends and I would drive out in the country, hunting, killing time, and in all that time never did it occur to any of us just how little time the world existed as we were experiencing it. Only a century before, which now at the age of 60 no longer seems like a long time, the land we were driving through was all tall grass prairie, waist to chest high, with wild flowers and wildlife flourishing everywhere. Bison, passenger pigeons, prairie chickens all existed in abundant numbers. Hardly any people lived here and those that did were largely migratory, existing as hunter gatherers. More importantly, before Europeans with their Christian philosophy
began settling this area and domesticating the wilderness, this land had been prairie, as described above for at least ten thousand years. It only took Europeans a short span of about 100 years to completely change ten thousand years of natural evolution. I never saw this however, until I tried on a new pair of glasses other than those provided for me by my ancestors. The corrective lenses were to come later, after returning from Vietnam, in Biology class at St Cloud State.

`History in High School: What was not told us`

History was one of few classes in High School that I enjoyed. My theory has always been if I needed to read anything, I might as well learn something hence books on history were always high on my list to read when reading was required. My favorite subject was World War II. My favorite character: Adolph Hitler. By my junior year in high school, I had already read “The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,” an accomplishment even for an adult. How much I retained is questionable but it did open my eyes to how damaging the use of propaganda and too much power in the wrong hands can be.

At any rate, given my reading and the history courses, I prided myself on my knowledge of history. Of course I was judging myself by those around me, many who lacked any interest in history at all. I never was big on exact dates; in fact, I saw learning dates, generals, and politician’s names as a distraction. “As long as I knew what event came first, Pearl Harbor, D Day or the Battle of the Bulge, what did it matter if I could tell you the exact date?” was my reasoning. And while this reasoning may run contrary to what is considered the established norm for teaching history, I learned in later years that my often implied “negative attitude” had some very good merits. A person can learn the exact date of any historical event but completely miss the importance of why the event happened in the first place. The media often reminds us that on this date forty years ago, this or that happened but does that really say anything other than some trivial point that on this date that happened?

By stressing dates, names, and events, it is possible to miss the important lessons that history is telling us altogether. I did. I missed those lessons history was telling me in my early days anyway. I could tell you all sorts of trivia about history’s main players, for example Hitler was a recipient of Germany’s highest medal of valor, the Iron Cross, during World War I. I knew Carl Marx wrote the “Communist Manifesto.” I knew Hitler wrote “Mein Kampf.” Having never read either document (readings that should have been required in high school) I missed all the important history that emerged like some gruff beast from those pages. In spite of all my history classes and reading, I could not tell you what the basic politics and economics of either Communism or Fascism were. Like someone
suffering from autism, one that may be able to tell you on what day of the week any given date fell on (or will fall on) but cannot tell you which date came (or will come) first, I could tell you all trivia concerning battles or personalities but had no idea what those battles were really over. All I knew was the Fascists were the bad guys. Why they were the bad guys, I had only some generalized stereotypical vague idea, for example, they killed Jews.

Like most I knew, I could tell you the two Japanese cities that the atomic bombs were dropped on. I believed, as most I knew, that the bomb was dropped to save American lives by avoiding an invasion of Japan. I could tell you that America held an isolationist view toward entering World War II but I had no idea why. I had mistaken America’s isolationism as an attempt by America to remain neutral and to prevent American deaths again on a foreign soil. I now know different. American businesses were getting rich providing weapons and war materials to not only those who became our allies but Germany itself (more to come on this).

Once in the war however I believed America’s goal was and has always been to set the whole world free against the forces of evil and tyranny. I now know I was wrong given America’s support for the Shaw of Iran, not to mention a number of brutal regimes in South America and Asia. I thought America was battling against rogue religions (Shintoism), Atheism, and Paganism (Nazism) but I found out I was wrong again. In fact, with the exception of Japan, America was largely battling fascist Christians’ gone array --- and World War II would not be the last time given Srebrenica. In Srebrenica, as if their orders were taken directly from the Old Testament,

And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.

(Deuteronomy 20:13-14)

an estimated 8000 Moslem men and boys from twelve years old to sixty were herded off and executed by Christians. The women, as if directly out of the Bible, were spared apparently for the enjoyment of male Serbs. By the end of the Serbs reign of terror, it is estimated that over 200,000 Muslim civilians were murdered in the greatest ethnic cleansing to hit Europe since World War II. This would be the second time American Troops during the twentieth century were deployed into Europe to defend an opposing religion from the wrath of a largely Christian
population. But “Oh” Evangelicals may try say “Those people were not Christians” to which I would reply “Oh, Yes they were” by any definition other than your own.

**Prayer in Public School:**

**A good Argument Challenges my Religious Belief**

Another issue of the early sixties that had an effect on my thinking was the day the United States Supreme Court threw prayer out of the public school system. Again it was my history teacher, in a class entitled “Present Day Problems” that brought the matter to my attention. The year was 1963. The case was *Murray vs. Curlett*. While prayer was not a huge factor in my high school at this time, prayer was significant a number of years before in grade school. About the fifth grade, the day opened with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance directed by a woman teacher with an affection for Jesus Christ.

I considered myself Christian at this time. I wasn’t the town’s model Christian, however I still held most the Christian views beaten into my brain before I had developed any mental defenses to ward off the attack. What struck me about that Supreme Court ruling was the argument being used by those opposed to prayer in school. It made sense. Given the First Amendment:

> Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

I could not understand how promoting Jesus Christ in public schools could be seen as anything other than promoting Christianity in school. Those in opposition to prayer in school argued if Christian based prayer was allowed in the classroom, so should be the prayers of Buddhist, Hindus, Moslems, and Jains to name a few. Imagine, I remember the argument, sitting for hours as every religion in the world is allowed recognition. To most the students in school, the argument was absurd as none of these other religions had a presence in our school. But what if these other religions did have representation I would ask myself. I would have hated to sit through hours of religious babble --- but I would have had to defend it as fair if other religious groups were present and demanded equal time. I agreed. If one religion was to be recognized, they all should be. To avoid all that, I would prefer not being forced to observe any.
While this argument did not change my Christian beliefs, it did weaken my beliefs by forcing me to consider opposing beliefs as being somehow equal to my own. It follows to any thoughtful mind that if other beliefs are seen as equal to my own, the question of whose faith is correct just begs to be asked. And ask I did but the answers I received were never to my satisfaction --- until my own unreligious awakening in Vietnam.

The Russians are coming: Forrestal Cracks

On May 22, 1949, unbeknown to me, James Vincent Forrestal supposedly climbed out his bedroom window while at Bethesda Naval Hospital and jumped thirteen floors to his death. Conspiracy theories abound from Russian agents, Zionists, to government agents’ attempting to cover up what was known about UFOs but none were ever substantiated. What was known, however, is both James Forrestal and his wife, Josephine, shared a paranoid fear that the Reds, being Communists, were out to get them. In fact, it was reported that shortly before Forrestal’s death, Forrestal was seen wondering around outside in his pajamas calling out “The Russians are Coming.” The phrase outlived Forrestal. Upon being admitted to the hospital, Forrestal reportedly made statements about being stalked by “Zionist Agents.” It should be noted here, for the sake of clarity that Zionists and Russians are thought of as the same by people of fascist and neo-Nazi leanings.

But they do not have the intestinal fortitude to tell you these FACTS for fear of reprisals from the International Jewish Conspirators – World Communism – they are ONE of the SAME.

I have no evidence at the current time to suggest that Forrestal was an active member of the Nazi party or even a fascist for that matter. All I have to go on is a definition of fascist, which I will get to, and what I know about Forrestal life. When the two, my definition of fascist and Forrestal’s life, are laid side by side, many points can be found that overlap. I also know that a number of international American businessmen back in the twenties and thirties surely were sympathetic to Nazis and Fascists, if not actively involved in Nazi and fascist philosophy themselves. One was Henry Ford (I will get to him). If Forrestal was not an active fascist, he most certainly made his rounds in a circle that was.

Why is this important? Remember; we went into World War II to rid the world of Fascism, not Communism. Hundreds of thousand young American and Allied men died taking Europe back from the Fascists, hundreds of thousands of young who died not even knowing what Fascism was. All they knew was those in
brown and Black shirts with swastika arm bands goose stepping around with their right arms extending straight out were the enemy. As such, it is therefore understandable how when these young men returned to America, they (as do most today) believed the threat of Fascism was gone. It was not. In fact, it was Fascists here in America, or those of a very similar philosophy, now pointing their fingers at the Fascist’s greatest enemy, the Communists, as America’s number one enemy just as Hitler did. Unfortunately, most Americans with very little thought and knowledge, turned their heads away from the political ideology that just claimed thousands of their young men’s lives and shifted their attention to those who served as our ally during World War II, namely the Communists.

I’m not saying Communism is any better than Fascism or that Communism was never a threat. I am simply making a statement that in the annals of history is largely true, at least, more so than not. The name Forrestal until just recently meant absolutely nothing to me. In fact, the first naval super carrier launched in 1954 that bears his name, the USS Forrestal, never rang my bell either, not even while I was in the Navy. I had only heard about the USS Forrestal, but not ever seeing the name spelled, I always thought the carrier’s name was “The Forester” as if the Navy was honoring tree management. Embarrassingly, I must admit this displays the depth of my youthful ignorance.

John Forrestal came into politics under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who appointed him administrative assistant on June 22, 1940 and Undersecretary of the Navy about six weeks later. John Forrestal became the Secretary of the Navy on May 19, 1944. Forrestal would, according to James Carroll, make his mark by lobbying for larger and larger defense budgets by over exaggerating the Soviet Union’s military capabilities while at the same time underestimating the abilities of the United States. The size of the military, it is worth mention, is an important element to the fascist mind set as will be pointed out.

After college Forrestal began as bond salesman for William A. Read and Company (also known as Dillon, Read and Company) which granted him a partnership in 1923. In 1937, Forrestal would become the president of the company. Forrestal as such was a true Red White and Blue true Capitalist and in the eyes of rightwing capitalists, communism was like a fire in an ice house. If the fire is allowed to grow, all the profits will melt. Communism, to any capitalist, was just plan scary.

To what lengths were capitalists willing to go to battle the blaze of Communism? The debate is still on over what our intention was by dropping the bomb on Japan at the end of World War II. Japan, for all practical purposes, was defeated and had no internal resources to rebuild their war machine. Japan toward the end of WWII was really dead in the water. America would have never needed to invade Japan to bring Japan to her knees. The Allied Forces simply could have
established a naval barricade around Japan and sunk any and all of Japan’s ships coming or going. Japan, with no sea access, would have simply withered on the vine like bindweed soaked in Round Up. A blockade of that nature would have required patience and time however, something America had little of.

And this is not only the opinion of some arm chair general whose only knowledge of the bomb being dropping on Japan comes from history books, propaganda, and hear-say. Eisenhower writes in his book “Mandate for Change”

But the Secretary (Secretary of Defense), upon giving me the news of the successful bomb test in New Mexico, and of the plan for using it, asked for my reaction, apparently expecting a vigorous assent.

During his recitation of the relevant facts, I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives.

So why the rush to end the war --- with a bomb? The most likely scenario is that the United States wanted to limit the Soviet Union’s influence in the Pacific. Having defeated Hitler in the west, Russian was moving east to enter the war in the Pacific which was unacceptable to American Capitalists with their eyes on Asia. Something needed to be done to end the USSR’s involvement in Asia and needed done quickly. The longer it took to bring Japan to her knees, the more influence the USSR would gain in Asia. So what would be wrong with that? The Soviet Union, after all, was our ally was it not? Well, not if you asked those in the White House or in other high government positions at the time including the then acting Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal. Forrestal had an influence on whether to use the bomb and it is fairly safe to state, while pondering whether to use the bomb, being a true red white and blue capitalist, Forrestal’s eyes were as much on the USSR as Japan.

As it turns out, the decision to drop the bomb on Japan according to a number of historians came as a result of a number of factors including racism and revenge. The United States fighting men, who according to their own propaganda painted on their tanks, fuselages of planes, and helmets, saw themselves as the exterminator of Japanese rats and were out to kill as many “yellow peril” or
“yellow monkeys” as their weapons would allow. Down grading people to sub-humans is a common technique used to make killing other human beings much easier.\textsuperscript{014} The bomb was the ultimate pest control and America, the real Orkin Man.

But even racism played second fiddle to the message being sent the Soviet Union. It was the Soviet Union that capitalists such as Forrestal feared the most. The Allies really had nothing to fear from the beaten island nation of Japan then adrift in the Pacific without a sail. The real target of the bomb was Russia. By dropping the bomb on a bunch of yellow monkeys, the message Russia would receive would be “Stay out of Asia. Stay within your borders. We, being the United States, have the bomb and here is the proof we are not afraid to use it.”\textsuperscript{015}

Clark Clifford, special council to Truman, in his “American Relations with the Soviet Union” reporting to Truman put it this way:

The language of military power is the only language which the disciples of power politics understand. The United States must use that language in order that Soviet leaders will realize that our government is determined to uphold the interests of its citizens and the rights of small nations. Compromise and concessions are considered, by the Soviets, to be evidence of weakness and they are encouraged by our “retreats” to make new and great demands. The main deterrent to Soviet attack on the United States, or to attack on areas of the world which are vital to our security, will be the military power of this country. It must be made apparent to the Soviet Government that our strength will be sufficient to repel any attack and sufficient to defeat the U.S.S.R. decisively if a war should start. The prospect of defeat is the only sure means of deterring the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union’s vulnerability is limited due to the vast area over which its key industries and natural resources are widely dispersed, but it is vulnerable to atomic weapons, biological warfare, and long-range air power. Therefore, in order to maintain our strength at a level which will be effective in restraining the Soviet Union, the United States must be prepared to wage atomic and biological warfare.\textsuperscript{016}

Dropping the bomb on Japan proved to any doubting onlooker that Clifford meant exactly what he said. Keep in mind that Japan surrendered on September 2,
1945 whereas this report by Clifford came out only a year later. It would be hard to believe that a trusted ally, if the USSR ever was, should be considered such a threat merely a year later. Indeed the Soviets were considered the greater threat to the interests of United States and Christianity than Japan all along.

Before leaving this discussion, we should take a final look at James Carroll’s *House of War* and how James Forrestal fits into all this. What brought Forrestal crashing down from thirteen floors up is still debated. Maybe he was thrown from the window by some Zionist Commie, not to imply as many Christian Patriots may claim that Zionism and Communism have anything in common. It is as likely that he became a victim of his own propaganda. We may never know the answer but we know this; Forrestal was always lobbying for larger and larger defense budgets. Forrester was not below “scaring the hell of the American people” as his friend Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, Forrestal’s main ally on Capitol Hill, claimed Forrestal had to do to get his way with the national defense budget.

Anyway, the question to ponder is “Was Forrestal’s intention for lobbying for bigger and bigger defense budgets solely based on national security interests or might there have been another more personal reason?” Keep in mind Forrestal’s former job as president of Dillon, Read and Company. Dillon, Read and Company was a company that profited heavily from investing in armaments. Might there have been something in those defense budgets that may have profited him, bonds, stocks, kickbacks? I do not know --but I do know it is not below those in government office to profit by selling war materials and services. Just ask Cheney. Well, no --- don’t ask Cheney. He’d probably deny he ever did.

Returning to my childhood, I had no idea at the age of two from where the words “The Russians are coming” came. I can remember them chanted wherever I went and could recite them as well as any nursery rhyme or Christmas Carol. I cannot remember where I picked this up, from the radio, television, hearsay, or a dream, but I remember a figure in public office preaching about being prepared to fight the Russian Invaders to the death, house to house, here at home because it was inevitable that they, the Russians, were coming. I remember, as a small child, having dreams about battling the reds right in my backyard using my Daisy air rifle. Hence the Red Army, “The Russians are coming” was certainly on my mind and a heavy burden for a child to carry around. If I was an example of the American people, clearly someone scared the hell out of me. I however could not vote but my parents could. I wondered what effect all this had on my parents’ generation. Since my parents are dead and gone, all I have are the results of how much money for defense was appropriated. In terms of military spending, the two decades following World War II, the Pentagon spent $100 billion dollars, ten times the federal spending for health, education, and welfare combined. Six million people worked for businesses linked to the Pentagon and American universities
became increasing dependent on research devoted to the military industrial complex.

**To Scare the Hell out of People takes a Preacher**

Stirring up people is one thing, but scaring the hell out of them requires a minister capable of yielding fire and brimstone! One such minister was Billy Graham:

> The Communist revolution that was born in the hearts of Marx and Engels in the middle of the nineteenth century is not going to give up or retreat. No amount of words at the United Nations or peace conferences in the Far East is going to change the mind of Communism. It is here to stay. It is a battle to the death - either Communism must die, or Christianity must die, because it is actually a battle between Christ and anti-Christ. **019**

Billy Graham 1954

Graham was not the only one preaching fire and brimstone against the Communist menace either. The airways were abuzz with fundamental rightwing preachers, Rex Hubbard, Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Billy Hargis, and Carl McIntire to name a few which at the time were all spewing anti-Communist rhetoric, claiming Communism was “Satan inspired.” The Bible further establishes that in today’s world Satan is (1) the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11); (2) the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4); (3) the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2); and (4) the prince of a realm of demons (Matthew 9:34; Luke 11:15).

If I accomplish anything in this book, I want to establish the fact that the Communist revolution didn’t just happen, that Satan initiated, is leading and is responsible for its world success.

Satan is indeed the prince of the unbelieving, Christ-denying, amoral, truce-breaking world in which we live. The clenched-fist fanatics (Bolsheviks) who are dedicated to bringing down the United States in order to build an anti-God, socialistic state are followers of the prince of this world. **020**

Billy James Hargis
Even the pope, Pius XII, came out in stern opposition to Communism, putting into practice a prayer for the conversion of Russia into every Catholic mass around the world. In 1948, the pope excommunicated every Communist on earth, something the Pope had not done for either the Nazi regime or Hitler himself. Normally, Vietnam is not considered a religious war in the same sense as the Crusades but when you figure moves such as these on the part of the church and various Evangelical leaders, perhaps the war in Vietnam needs rethought. Given that the American military was cast into a war to support a dictatorial Catholic minority, I find it hard to think of it as anything other than another religious war. While Vietnam lacked major religious denominations fencing off against each other as we have seen in Ireland for example, clearly many religious groups and their leaders saw Vietnam as a battle between god and the anti-god. If that is not religious in nature, I have no idea what else to call it. And that does not even take into account those Buddhist priests who lit themselves on fire or Buddhists who fought on the side of the Vietcong believing their mission was to liberate Vietnam from Catholic domination.

The Russians are coming! Hell, they are already here

They (communists) have infiltrated every conceivable sphere of activity, youth groups; radio, television, and motion pictures industries; church, school”

John A Stromery

Yelled from radios, televisions, and newspaper stands and booklets left in hospitals and barber shops across the country was Communists existed under every rock. According to Eisenhower, Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed he held a list of 215 card carrying Communists employed by none other than the U. S. State Department. Eisenhower never believed there were 215 card carrying Communists in the State Department however. He was simply responding to what he, Eisenhower, viewed as propaganda put out by the McCarthy camp. But that propaganda was just the tip of the iceberg. Eisenhower himself answered to Communist bosses according the John Birch Society’s founder, Robert Welch. George Marshall was a dedicated agent of the Soviet conspiracy. Marshall, Welch claims, wanted the United States fighting against Germany in World War II to take pressure off Stalin then facing Germany’s army. In fact, any organization whose mission was to make the average American’s life a little better via federally funded education, labor unions, unemployment compensation, social security, FHA, welfare, federal programs such as Soil Bank, were all guided by the hand of Communists. Many Christians, ultra-fundamentalist preachers such
as Carl McIntire and Billy Hargis climbed on Welch’s bandwagon for reasons which will be spoken about later. Any religious group or affiliation found to be liberal in their teachings, those that did not believe the Bible should be taken literary or dared speak a Social Gospel were quickly condemned. These ultra-fundamentalists attacked the National Council of Churches in 1950 as being Marxist and spreading Communist propaganda. Any idea that appeared to call into question private ownership and the profit motive was seen as Communist inspired such as employee owned businesses as Hy-Vee grocery stores. McIntire writes cooperatives utterly destroy private enterprise. This communal ownership McIntire claims is communism, pure and simple. Labor unions were attacked as interfering with private and free enterprise by McIntire. McIntire preached that the Wagner Labor Act needed to be revised to protect competition and a free economy. Also according to McIntire, the Sherman Anti-Trust Act should have offered protection to corporations against the monopolistic actives of labor unions.

The John Birch Society
The Right’s Blue Print for Political Takeover

The spearhead of the Radical Right movement is the John Birch Society, the large and monolithic organization of self-proclaimed patriots operating through some 4,000 semisecret chapters at the grass-roots levels in communities from coast to coast and boasting some 75,000 to 85,000 members spread throughout every state of the union.

For the record we are talking the fifties and sixties. While the John Birch Society (JBS) is currently thought of as ancient history it remains a force to be reckoned with. Furthermore, many of the original members are still funding rightwing causes such as Coors, the Koch Family, the Bradley Foundation, and the Pew Foundation.

And with that said, the John Birch Society (JBS) was founded in 1958 by Robert Welch, a former board of directors member of the National Association of Manufactures (NAM) beginning in 1950. Welch also served three years as NAM’s regional vice president and two years as the chairman of NAM’s Educational Advisory Committee. Worth mention is the fact that numerous high level members of NAM also sat on the original Council of the JBS. Of these were John T. Brown, vice president of Falk Corp and former president of the J.I. Case and longtime member on the board of directors of NAM; Wm J. Grede, chairman of the board at Grede Foundries, former president and chairman of J. I. Case and
NAM as well as the former president of the National Council of the YMCA; N. Floyd McGowin: former president of W. T. Smith Lumber Co. and NAM, former president of the National Lumber Manufacturing Association, as well as the regional vice president of NAM; Wm B. McMillan, former president of Hussman Refrigerator Co, on the board of directors of U.S. Gypsum Co, A.P. Green refractories, Studebaker Corp, Pet Incorporated, Mercantile Trust Co, and the American Investment Co. He also served as the regional vice president of NAM and president of the St Louis Boy Scouts; and J. Nelson Shepherd, former President of the Midwest-Beach Company and board member of NAM.

Side Note:

At the time of my writing this book, it was obvious to me that the rise of Evangelical Fundamentalism was given a huge boost by the formation of the John Birch Society. Since then Jeff Sharlet has published the book, The Family, The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power which does not take away from my premise but does add some interesting facts unbeknown to me. The Family, an evangelical sect of which the books writes, was founded by an anti-labor evangelical named Abraham Vereide (pg 8). At the suggestion of a former military officer, Major Douglass, Vereide set out to bring the gospel to the nation’s elite (pg 110). In a short time Vereide was surrounded by businessmen whose mission it was “to take back first the city, then the state, and perhaps the nation from the grip of godless organized labor. (Pg 111)”

In 1942 a group of businessmen and congressmen invited by Vereide to his weekly Prayer breakfast at the Hotel Willard in Washington DC. The speaker that day was Howard Coonley, the then president of the National Association of Manufactures (NAM) of which Robert Welch would later obtain board member status. (pg 138)

While overtime the JBS became often an object of satire, even excluded from the definition of conservative by what began as a faithful allegiance by conservatives such William Buckley, I mention a few of these original founding
members as they were not just simply some redneck, gun touting, brainwashed, keg beer fly no minds protesting in the streets. These were powerful, influential CEOs of major corporations with considerable means at their disposal and they were willing to use it to suit their will. This redneck, hillbilly designation of John Birch Members came from propaganda created by once closely associated conservatives wishing to distant themselves from the JBS conspiracy rhetoric that has recently resurfaced with conspiracy weaving celebrities such as Glen Beck.

In any event, “The Blue Book of the John Birch Society” has become the new right’s and religious right’s blue print for a political coup d'état. The JBS’s mission; to reverse the advances made by liberals, labor unions, cooperatives, governmental regulation, socialism, welfare, and anything else that stood in the way of laissez-faire capitalism, private enterprise, and property rights. The influence of the JBS on later forming conservative groups has been noted and documented by Martin Durham also who writes that even after William Buckley’s and other conservatives condemnation of the JBS, the writings of the JBS have been adsorbed by the conservative right and often quoted. One such example is “None Dare Call It Conspiracy” by Gary Allen that sold over 3,000,000 copies influencing numerous conservatives and evangelicals and those who claim to be both.

Welch understood the power of the pen. The written word was Welch’s favorite media form. Welch warned of the use of television and radio as resulting in nothing more than “glancing blows” in the battle to reestablish Conservatism. Once aired, at a great cost, television and radio ads are gone, Welch wrote, unlike a great book that can be passed from hand to hand, read again and again, and lasts for years to come. As such, Welch instructed his disciples to fill doctor’s offices, barber shops, dentist offices, and other waiting rooms where people congregate with conservative articles such as the JBS’s “American Opinion”, “The Dan Smoot Report”, and ironically, since like a snake Buckley ended up turning on the JBS, William Buckley’s own “National Review.” This Welch states should be “expanded as rapidly as it could be done without too much waste.”

Although Welch warned against the cost of radio and television as a propaganda medium, he goes on to state that conservative radio programs that attract large followings should be supported. The programs Welch mentioned in the Blue Book included Dean Manion, Billy James Hargis, Carl McIntire, Clarence Manion, and Felton Lewis. The JBS should help raise money whenever necessary to keep these programs on the air and expand their influence, Welch suggests, by getting those programs on more stations. They, JBS members, should seek to get as many commercial sponsorships for those broadcasts as possible “to make the sponsorship a paying proposition so that they (the stations) would not ever think of dropping the program.”
Where I feel the JBS made its greatest lasting effect however was in the realm of religion and various other conservative think tanks that owe their beginnings and success to the money and tactics of former members of the JBS. Welch addresses the issue of religion in which he claims that fully one third of the Protestant Churches in America (being mainline churches attached to the National Council of Churches for example) give little more than lip service to Divine teachings, watering down the faith of their fathers. Welch attacks the “Social Gospel” as an advocacy of the welfare state, socialist politicians, and Liberal Theology as replacing faith with “pragmatic opportunism with hedonistic aims.”

For religion to be an effective tool in stopping the spread of Communism or as Welch puts it the “core of strength for all that we (the JBS) might to do” religion must be based on a bedrock of faith. Man must believe in the Divine, a creator who created man with a “predetermined” purpose. (Remember the word predetermined as I will return to it.) Welch stresses that man must be instructed not to steal, to honor property rights, to not murder or harm his fellow man, to be industriousness, and accept responsibility for his trespasses. For all this Welch claims, the fundamentalists, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Jew, are “the moral salt of the earth.”

The result:

Between 1960 and 1964, the subscriptions to Hargis’s Christian Crusade grew from $58,000 to 98,600 and McIntire’s Christian Beacon from $20,000 to $66,500. While the Christian Crusade’s (Billy Hargis) income floated along at $800,000 over this period, McIntire’s donations rose $635,000 in 1961 to over $3,000,000 in 1964. The JBS (John Birch Society) went from $60,000 in 1960 to $3,200,000. McIntire’s radio ministry went from one station in 1958 to 540 in 1964 along with Life Line (HL Hunt’s propaganda machine out of Dallas Texas) which was carried in 42 states over 300 stations.

“We are fast coming to a point, Gentlemen” Welch writes “where we’ve got to offer something that people are willing to die for” to which I must ask throughout history what greater cause than religion have people been willing to die for?” Welch surely knew that answer.

The rise of Christian Fundamentalism is also mentioned by Lowell Streiker in his “Gospel Time Bomb”. Streiker claims that (what he refers to as) Ultra-fundamentalism rose up in the fifties to combat communism. “It was fairly easy for Bible-belt evangelists to regard the godless Marxists as pawns of Satan” Streiker
writes and to picture “God-fearing Christian America” as the chosen instrument of God’s purpose. A god-fearing Christian America was exactly what the members of the John Birch Society wanted to create, and poured millions of dollars into fundamentalist collection plates across the nation to help make that a reality.

Given Welsh’s suggestion that fundamental and evangelical sects should receive the support of the wealthy members of the JBS, it follows that a dramatic increase in fundamentalist and evangelical religious sects beginning in the late 1950s should be seen if any credit is to be given to the JBS. As a child, I did not much care at the time about who was being featured on radio or television. Had I then, I may have noticed the inconsistency in religious programming that existed at that time or even today for that matter. Nearly every religious program was nondenominational, evangelical, or fundamental in nature whereas the majority of people at the time attended mainline denominational churches; Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist and liberal Baptist.

How many people attended the mainline churches however was about to change. Lowell D. Streik er points out that following the Scopes Money Trial, the type of Christianity that was dominating the media in the fifties, existed in the early thirties as little more than radical protest to ideas such as evolution or what was known as the “Social Gospel.” By the 1970s, however, one fifth of the American population, approximately 30,000,000 people would call themselves evangelical Christians. This conversion of the American sector from mainline denominational churches to nondenominational evangelism and fundamentalist churches, assuming the monies from the JBS and/or those of a close mindset had any effect on the overall American religious psyche, would not be complete if the money flowing into the mainline churches remained the same. But it did not. And leading the charge to cut the funds to mainline churches were again members or money recipients of the JBS. I could not find Welch in his Blue Book come right out and say to stop funding mainline churches. He left that to his supporters and those the JBS supported to surmise. Cutting off supply lines can be just as important to winning a war as the grunts fighting, and no one would know that better than a retired general. In 1965 Former Major Gen Edwin Walker in a speech to the Hargis Christian Crusade Convention in Los Angles urged the audience to stop putting money in church collection baskets on Sundays and instead send it to the Christian Crusade. David Sheehan, a devoted John Bircher, while distributing leaflets in Chicago urged people to stop placing money in the offering baskets of churches connected with the Chicago Archdiocese or the Church Federation of Greater Chicago. Furthermore, a book sold in JBS book stores “A Compilation of Public Records of 658 Clergymen and Laymen Connected With the National Council of Churches” by Myers G. Lowman allegedly exposed Church groups and clergymen
of other religions who were mixed up in Communist activities. Keep in mind that supporting labor unions or government regulations were and still are seen as Communist activities by the right. The message being relayed in short was, “Do not support these groups as to do so is to support Communism.”

The best example I found however of calling for cutting off funds to any Church groups deemed as liberal or preaching the “Social Gospel” comes from Carl McIntire’s sermon: “Capitalism and the Bible.” Blasting a Princeton professor’s paper called the “Ecumenical Social Ethics beyond Socialism and Capitalism,” McIntire claims groups, in this case the Christian Peace Conference of Czechoslovakia (a Communist organization according to McIntire), come over to America only to learn Anti-capitalist sentiment from, as McIntire puts it, seminaries funded with capital from capitalist’s pockets. McIntire states that some “Dumb, blind, foolish capitalists” are placing their money in collection plates of ecumenical bodies that believe capitalism should be a thing of the past. Rather than place money in these ecumenical bodies’ collection plates, hold on to this money, McIntire states, so the devil doesn’t get it.

one thing is we ought not to use it (money) to support Church bodies (the National Council of Churches for example) that are working against the system (capitalism) that gave it to us. God Bless.

Keep in mind that with money supplied from the JBS, McIntire’s radio ministry went from one station in 1958 to 540 in 1964. That translates into 10 stations for every state in the union and wielded a considerable unchallenged influence. Exactly how much influence the JBS had on the funds received by mainline churches is unknown. I do know this however; fundamentalist groups such as Jerry Falwell’s Thomas Road Church expanded rapidly (key word – rapidly, suggesting a large sum of money had suddenly came their way) during the 1960s. This includes conservative Christian groups such as the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, and Focus on the Family. Fundamental and Evangelical religious broadcasts dominated radio and television all through the 60s, 70s, and 80s and for that matter, still does. At the same time, mainline Protestant churches felt the pressure from declining financial support and had to scale back their operations from their national Washington offices.

Religion after the formation of the JBS was clearly in transformation. A 2008 survey examining religious affiliations conducted by the Pew Foundation, assuming surveys by the Pew Foundation can be believed, bares out this transformation. The largest changes over the years according the Pew Foundation have occurred in those people who claim no religious affiliation. This by no means,
indicates Pew, points out that Americans are putting aside religion as important to their lives. While 16.1% of the people identify themselves as not affiliated with any particular religious sect, 5.8% of those claim religion is somewhat to very important in their lives.\textsuperscript{059} The other big winner is nondenominational Protestants whose numbers have tripled over the years. The largest losers of course just happen to be the mainline denominational churches, Lutherans, Methodists. The greatest loser was the Catholic Church which current matters involving pedophilia likely did nothing to help.\textsuperscript{060}

\textbf{Side Note:}

\begin{quote}
The members of what has become known as the Family attempt to avoid not only titles such as religion denominations but even the label “Christian.” (pg 19) Religion, the current president of the Family, Doug Coe, states distracts people from Jesus. (pg 29) “We gotta take Jesus out of the religious wrapping” Coe states. (pg 30) This means that simply because someone does not identify himself with any religious sect, or even as a Christian, makes that person a skeptic, an agnostic, or atheist. Indeed, that person may belong to one of the most dangerous religious movement in America today.

Referenced from “\textit{The Family}” by Jeff Scarlett
\end{quote}

You might ask why a foundation based largely on oil and shipping revenue might be interested in what the religious trends of the day are. It turns out, J. Howard Pew, a Bircher himself and member of NAM, was a bit ahead of the JBS in supporting Rightwing Christianity. In 1950, after failing in an attempting to move the National Council of Churches to the right, Pew with a grant of $50,000 created the Christian Freedom Foundation (CFF) which during the 60’s and 70’s was further supported with Pew’s money to the tune of 2.3 million dollars. Pew’s goal was to elect Christian conservatives to Congress in the hopes of making America a Christian Republic. By the 1960’s the CFF was mailing its magazine, Christian Economics, at no charge to clergy across the United States.\textsuperscript{061}

I see no reason to challenge the Pew Foundation results as their findings in fact support my theory. I believe America is indeed turning right both politically and religiously. I do have considerable reason to be skeptical of any article published by the Pew Foundation as J. Howard Pew served on the editorial advisory committee of “\textit{American Opinion},” the official magazine of John Birch
That should send up a red flag to anyone seeking reliable information given the wild conspiracy tales known to have been spun by the JBS. Am I saying information put out by the John Birch Society is not reliable? Let me answer by saying their version of history and recorded history can often be found to be at odds. As such, my opinion is any article published by the Pew Foundation, given the preceding, should be subject to scrutiny.

So why might the Pew Foundation wish to fabricate this information? The most obvious answer is image. You’ve heard the cliché that “In America, the majority rules.” That cliché, as we shall see, is one of the delusions most Americans mournfully accept as true. A politician may get to office carrying the majority of the vote but that does not mean that politician will honor the majorities’ wishes. None the less, the perception that any given political vision represents the majority’s is important enough that a group which represents only a small minority might choose to add to its image by calling itself something like “The Moral Majority.”

To give the appearance of being larger than one actually is an old frequently utilized propaganda technique. Grizzly bears are known to place scratches as high on a tree trunk as he can possibly reach to announce to other bears “I am this big. If you are not this big, stay out of my area.” The spots on some butterfly’s wings appear to a predator as eyes which makes the butterfly seem to be much larger and threatening than it actually is. The appearance of size is important --- all the way down to the level of insects. Why should people see size differently?

The second and most obvious reason is money. After pouring millions, as already mentioned and as we shall see later, into the Religious Right, members of the John Birch Society (Pew) might want to know if their investment (not donation as a donor expects no return on his money) paid off. If it can be shown that money has the ability to lead religion off in some political direction that serves the investor’s (those who expect a return) interest is something "The New Philanthropists” might wish to know. “A return?” you might ask. “What kind of return would those investors be looking for?” I’ll get to that later in my section on how Christianity supports fascism.

While on the subject of the JBS, I’d like to add a few surprising names to the alleged list of the JBS membership. One is Tim LaHaye. Tim was cofounder of the Council for National Policy and a member of the Moral Majority Board of Directors. In fact, LaHaye was listed in the February 7, 2005 issue of Time Magazine as one of the 25 most influential evangelicals in America. His greatest contribution to the Evangelical cause was his “Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Day” which had eleven sequels, a series that sold more than 42 million copies not counting the spin-offs like kids’ books, CDs, and greeting cards. Jerry Falwell claimed that LaHaye’s “Left Behind” sequel had a greater
impact on Christianity in modern times than any other book outside the Bible. LaHaye places the membership of the JBS squarely within the evangelical camp of Christian soldiers; and not just on their sidelines either --- but as one of its top generals.

Side Note:

LaHaye has also came out with a video game. This is a video game where the forces of good (being Rightwing Christianity faces off with the forces evil (Jews, atheists, agnostics, or even other denominations of Christianity.)

“While the Left Behind books portrays a world beset with violence, and the final installment of the series is full of gruesome scenes of destruction and the killing of Jews and others, the video game avoids such stark portrayals. If the game had stayed true to the level of violence in the books, it would probably not have been able to keep the “Teen” rating it garnered.

However, the inclusion of a “Left Behind” book in the package for “Left Behind: Eternal Forces” creates a direct link between the two. Together they promote the overall message of an exclusivist religious system that considers the proselytization of Jews to be an imperative. This theology portrays itself as the only path to salvation. And Jews, people of any other faith, or those of no faith who do not convert before it's too late, are destined to suffer horrible deaths.”
R. John Rushdoony is another former member of the JBS. Rushdoony is the author of many books and writings and considered the point man in the Reconstructionist movement. Reconstructionists believe that Old Testament Law, Mosaic Law, should be carried out to the letter. Homosexuality, for example, should be a capital crime as should being a rebellious son. To make matter worse, according to Reconstructionists, Jesus will return only after Old Testament Law has been enforced on earth for some time.

Rushdoony has been credited with being the father of home schooling with the intended purpose of furthering his return to Biblical Law philosophy. To achieve that goal, Rushdoony believed a school system outside of government control was required. No government, no regulation. Home Schools would not have to follow mandates set up by the courts or government. For example, Creation could be taught without church state issues being brought against them. Home schools, unlike Public Schools, are privately owned and privately owned schools as well as religious based schools do not have to conform too many of laws that apply to public schools.

For Rushdoony home schooling was seen as a run around the end. If the idea was to return the government to Mosaic Law, given the ferocity of those laws, the fear of god would have to weigh heavily on a person’s mind. If god did not create people, rather people evolved, people might begin to question what else about the Bible should fall into question? Mosaic Law would likely be one of the first items on that list --- and in fact, the ruling is already in. People rejected Mosaic Law centuries ago and to return to them now would be like backing off a cliff.

R. J. Rushdoony also founded the Chalcedon Institute which was largely funded by Howard Ahmanson Jr, heir to the Home Savings and Loan fortune. Ahmanson, like LaHaye, was listed in Time Magazine as one of the 25 most influential evangelicals in America. It needs mentioned that at this time any direct affiliation with the JBS by Ahmanson is unknown. Worth mention however, the membership of JBS was to remain by design clandestine. Even if Ahmanson was not a JBS member, he walked beside and supported those who were.

I could go on and on exposing the tentacles of the JBS’s hydra but I’m going to leave that up to interested readers. My point, which I hope I clearly made, is without the members of the JBS much of the conservative movement we are experiencing today would not exist. Martin Durham has said it better than I could have wished to,
The John Birch Society is the most important example of the radical right, and the influence of some of its ideas is a good measure of the extent to which the Christian Right, in particular, can be said to have adopted a radical right frame work……Indeed, the situation is complicated still further by the partial rehabilitation of the Society after the events of the 1960s, in which it both forged links with the New Right and, though a right-wing coordinating group, the Council for National Policy, can be found alongside Christian rightists and other prominent conservatives. 

I should mention, quotes such as Martin Durham’s above, did not influence my thinking on the John Birch Society. I had formed my opinions about the John Birch Society well back in the eighties, long before Durham’s book, published in 2000, was ever in print. It is somewhat comforting however to realize that I am not alone in my thoughts.

**The Tainted Color of Communism: Not Red, instead more like Pink**

Communism, as it was portrayed, was gobbling up the nations of the world, one by one, all orchestrated, as the public was led to believe, by a cunning fiendish, demonist Kremlin intent on world domination. Propaganda had it that a Communist pandemic orchestrated by the Kremlin was set loose to infect and enslave the free world.

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow.

Winston Churchill, March 5, 1946

In Asia, the Communists were gobbling up one country after another. As a result of Japan’s surrender in August of 1945, Korea was divided along the 38th
parallel into two occupation zones; one controlled by the United States and the other by the USSR. This division was meant to be only temporary until the USA, UK, USSR, and China could derive a workable trusteeship. This trusteeship was presumably further frustrated when in 1949 China fell to the Communists. Perhaps egged on by the success of the Communists in China, North Korea launched a massive invasion of South Korea on June 25, 1950 forcing the first collective action of the United Nations Command (UNC). War ensued, the south defended mainly by the US against the Chinese “People’s Volunteers.” In 1953 an armistice agreement was reached between the military commanders of the North Korean People's Army, the Chinese People's Volunteers, and the UNC. Neither the USA nor South Korea was participants in the final armistice. A peace agreement has never replaced the 1953 armistice.

In Southeast Asia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam were all portrayed as being on the Communist’s chopping block. In the spotlight was French Indochina, particularly Vietnam. The Communists under Ho Chi Minh had captured the city of Hanoi as early as September 1945. The Potsdam Conference however listed Nationalist China, not Communist China, as North Vietnam’s liberator from the Japanese and as many as 200,000 looting, ravenous, and diseased Chinese poured into Hanoi that same month. Ho, sidestepping a conflict with China, attempted to placate the Chinese by dissolving his Communist party to appease Lu Han, China’s commanding general. The general in turn would allow a coalition government of Viet Nam Quoi Dan Dang (VNQDD), a militantly anti-French Vietnamese group created by Chiang Kai-shek’s Chinese Nationalists, and Vietminh members. Chiang Kai-shek however had other plans. He was prepared to allow the return of the French if the French were willing to give up their old concessions in Shanghai and other Chinese ports. In February of 1946 the deal was finalized and by March, 25,000 French troops were allowed to return.

The return of the French pleased everyone but the radical Vietminh. Even Ho preferred the French to the Chinese. Countering charges by his critics that he was siding with the enemy, Ho made the statement that he believed the returned of the French was better than a Chinese occupation. The French, in Ho’s view, were weak and their days in Asia numbered. If allowed to remain, Ho felt the Chinese would be in Vietnam forever. “As for me” Ho stated, “I prefer to sniff French shit for five years than eat Chinese shit for the rest of my life.”

But in the years to come skirmishes broke out between the French and Vietminh resulting in all-out war and the loss of 90,000 French troops, killed, wounded, or missing in action by 1952. Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles saw the French as vital to containing the Communist expansion throughout Indochina and by 1954 threw $2.5 billion dollars toward the French military. All that monetary support would prove to be for no avail. On May 7th, 1954, the
French garrison at Dienbienphu fell. Shortly thereafter North Vietnam fell to the Communists.

I, of course, knew nothing of the recent history of Vietnam, the country that in the years to come would challenge all I had been taught and felt confident believing. Vietnam, in the fifties was to me nothing but a passing word thrown out from the evening news or radio. Assuming I even knew how to spell the word “Vietnam” to point it out on a map would have been impossible. In fact, I thought, or thought I knew, that spot on the map was French Indochina. At any rate, even after arriving in Vietnam, given the propaganda I was exposed to, I believed North Vietnam was largely merely a puppet of Communist China. To say the least, when I came to Vietnam, I was very naive. The fact is Ho Chi Minh, a Vietnamese Communist, was battling the status quo in Vietnam years before China went Communist. Besides, Ho did not like taste of Chinese shit --- Nationalistic or Communist.

Cuba, however, was different. Cuba was in terms of the world almost home and fell to communism under Castro in 1959. Cuba represented the first truly Communist government in the Western Hemisphere and in the minds of those around me offered the Communists a stepping stone to Central American countries such as Guatemala and Honduras. Mexico was portrayed via propaganda as a fuse to the US with the match to light it in the hands of the Kremlin.

I really had no idea exactly what any of this meant. As previously stated I did not have the slightest idea what communism was. The word “communism” meant nothing to me other than it was something no one, I knew, wanted. Why? --- I wasn’t sure. It had to do with basic human freedoms, or so I thought, the right of free speech, press, religion, to assembly, to protest, all of which we, the so called free world, were told we’d lose should the Communists win. But that is all I knew. I would not have been able to describe the basic political theories of communism nor did I know anyone who could, other than perhaps my history teacher, if he even could. It mattered little what he knew however. If he could describe Communism, he wasn’t sharing his knowledge with any of his students.

Of course, I thought I knew that all these alleged advances on the part of the Communists were instigated and directed by the Kremlin as some Russian plot to seize control of the world. This “Communist Conspiracy Theory” was shoved at me like some spoon-fed toddler. I gobbled it up. As it turned out what I was largely ingesting was nothing but empty intellectual calories. Ho Chi Minh’s regime was neither indorsed by the Soviet Union nor did the Soviet Union so much as send an observer to aid Ho’s early regime. Dean Acheson, the developer of the so called “Domino Theory” naively saw Ho Chi Minh as a pawn of Russia and China. In fact, Ho, like the Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, was far more concerned about Vietnam’s Independence from France and China than what he could contribute to
global communism. As to the supposed American view that Ho Chi Minh was the USSR’s Southeast Asian puppet, the Soviets proposed that both North and South Vietnam should be recognized as independent states. Both states, the USSR suggested, should be given representation at the United Nations. It was the good old USA that rebuffed the Soviet’s suggestion. The United States, looking more to preserve and spread capitalism worldwide, was unwilling to recognize a Communist nation in Southeast Asia. As Stanley Karnow put it, this rebuff from the USA turned out to be a “Grievous Mistake!”

As for Cuba, the Soviets, in 1959, had no idea how Castro’s Cuba related to them. According to Sergei Nikitich Khrushchev (assuming he can be believed), son of the Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, “Neither the Communist Party Central Committee’s International Department, KGB intelligence, nor military intelligence had any idea who Castro was or what he was fighting for.” When Nikita asked Cuba’s Communists who Castro was, the Communist Party of Cuba reported that Castro was “a representative of the haute bourgeoisie and working for the CIA.” Furthermore, the Soviet embassy in Cuba had been closed since 1952.

Contrary to what was being preached by our political leaders about the Communist’s desire for world domination, the Kremlin did not have some master plan to enslave the world nor was it the instigator in the numerous Communist uprisings around the globe. According to Edward R. Stettinius (AKA Melvyn P Leffler) Professor of American History at the University of Virginia, the Soviet Leaders after World War II were not concerned with worldwide revolution, rather they were concerned with protecting their own country and preserving their rule. The Soviets had no preconceived master plan of worldwide revolution nor did they have any plans on making Eastern Europe, China, or Korea Communist nations. While it may be true Soviet clients, pursuing their own interests, did drag the Kremlin into a number of involvements, these over all were involvements the Kremlin did not want.

CHAPTER THREE
My Military Experience Begins

To keep myself as honest as possible when discussing my military service I shall offer my letters home, support via Marine Corps records, and chronological events as recorded in history while I was in Vietnam. I shall begin with my letters. Reading over my letters, the first thing that comes to my mind is how juvenile they are. If even I can get by my own spelling, about all I really seem concerned with is old friends (high school buddies), music, and cars, all childhood things. But then, I, like most veterans, was barely a man, a mucus covered butterfly emerging from its
chrysalis, about to take flight – soon - but not yet. My wings were still wet and my exterior still elastic, yet enough of a man that I wanted everyone to see what a man I was. Hence, I had wings to unfold before all would know I was a butterfly, come of age. Remorsefully, for too many young men, those wings are supplied by the military. You enter boot camp in civilian clothing, a grub – commonly referred to by a drill instructor as a maggot, go through a pupil phase (boot camp itself), then - -- Wahoo! You emerge fully attired, in your entire splendor, in your neatly pressed full dress uniform, an adult butterfly ready to take flight.

Well --- anyway, that is what young men are led to believe. But under that exterior, if you really look into the eyes of those in their later teens or early twenties, there is still this child, indestructible, naive, agile; yearning for childhood rewards; recognition, praise, love, belonging, adventure, all of which are skillfully manipulated by the powers that be (in this case the military) to serve their ends. Being elastic and fashioning themselves as indestructible is perhaps why nations of the world choose mostly boys when they require their soldiers to die like men.

My first real awakening that military service may be in my immediate future came in the summer of 1964. By law I was required to sign up with the selective service board which meant that soon I might be drafted. “Drafted!” The word rang out like “Incarcerated.” It wasn’t the military that I objected to. It was the idea that I would be forced into a branch of service not of my choosing that bothered me. A couple of my older friends felt the same and joined the National Guard to avoid the draft. Somehow however the National Guard did not fulfill my idea of service to my country as the National Guard was seen in the 60s as a way around military service. So to avoid the draft I joined the Navy. I could after all – choose the Navy. It really never occurred to me that in either event I was being forced into military service regardless of which branch of the military I chose. Given what I know today and the chance to do it all over again, I suspect the outcome would be quite different.

My first letter home begins with my April 3rd, 1966 letter from Milwaukee written prior to my joining the Navy. A few important items may be pulled from this letter. One has already been mentioned, I did not want to be drafted. The infantry did not sound interesting to me for a couple reasons: Call me chicken, but assaulting machine gun nests did not sound like something I wished to do. I was interested in higher learning even at this point in my life. One of my main reasons for joining the service was the GI Bill. My parents surely did not have the means to put me through college and I accepted that if I was going to make college, I would have to do it on my own. I saw the GI Bill as my only alternative. I already knew how to shoot a gun. I wanted to experience and learn more than just cleaning weapons and pulling a trigger. The Navy promised me all kinds of career training opportunities basically free. If I could learn a trade, I reasoned, that could also help
me through college. College was to become my life’s motivating force. I would never take my eyes off college from this point on in spite the all the pain and challenges college would inflict on me after the war.

Another issue exposed in this letter is the hernia I developed, no doubt, working on that farm outside Buffalo. Not only was my employer an exploiter of child labor, he was a slave driver. In spite of the fact that he had bail elevators to lift bails into his haylofts, he thought the elevators were too slow and too much bother to set up. He wanted us to throw the bails up into the loft using pitchforks to save time. It was in the process of lifting these eighty pound bales at the end of pitchforks that I first developed a dull pain in my right groin area later diagnosed as a hernia. I feared being rejected, like Dad, during my military physical but they took me. By the time I left boot camp, this hernia grew to the size of a softball and would speak strongly about my determination for staying in the Navy. I could have gone home at any time with a medical discharge had I wished to avoid my military obligation. To do that however meant no GI Bill.

**BOOTCAMP: Race in my Face: A Black Superior**

May 2, 1966 is my first letter home from the Navy, and already I am making reference to that hernia. What else might be picked up in this letter and the letters that follow is my attitude. I saw boot camp, the hernia, and all the other garbage that the military could throw at me as simply something that I must put up with and get through. My May 6, 1966 (wrong year on letterhead) letter does mention my discontentment with other recruits that for reasons unknown to me were appointed my superiors. I did not see them as having anything special on me. It turns out, in the years to follow, I learned when one is dealing with class, most resentment is not leveled at others in higher classes (in this case regular Navy Staff or Commissioned Officers), rather resentment is normally leveled at one’s own peers (recruits) who are seen as receiving favoritism.
Of course there was good old Mr. Corethers (pictured last page), 1966’s Company 269 Company Commander (CO). Corethers would do about anything he could to get under your skin and humiliate you, but then I understood that was his job, getting under your skin to weed out the questionable. Chief Corethers was a larger issue than purely my CO and intimidator however. He was Black --- and my superior. A Black --- my superior --- a in my face Black superior? I, by military standards, had to snap to attention every time he walked into the room and address him as “Sir.” Prior to this time, the only exposure I had to Blacks were those hanging out in front of liquor stories in Milwaukee. I always took notice of Blacks in front of liquor stores. Blacks, unlike whites, always made me uncomfortable when I, underage, stood outside those stores waiting for Roger, over 21, to return with the goods. Whites, like Roger, or so I reasoned, were probably there to buy something. Blacks just hung out probably having nowhere else to go. It never occurred to me that those Blacks standing outside that liquor story may have been there for the very same reason I was. But I wasn’t prejudice!

Then there were the Blacks who worked at motor castings, many of whom worked at that foundry for years. I could have only imagined working at that plant as a short term means of support before entering the service. Anyone, I thought, with any ambition in life certainly would not stay long at Motor Castings. I never talked to any of these Blacks about why they might have remained here however. I just thought they, given who they were, must not have wanted; or worse were incapable of, anything more. But I was not prejudice. Prejudice people like my Dad would not even have worked here with Niggers. I wasn’t like him.

At any rate, Chief Corethers challenged even my more liberal (relative to my parents) my stereotypes of Blacks. The Chief spoke in clear fluent English. In fact, so did the other Blacks within our company. If anybody fouled the English language, it was Southern Whites with their Southern Drawls. I was expecting something different. Plain talking Blacks were not what I had imagined given Miss Prissy and Mammy. But then I had never talked to a Black before. Now having done that and having Corethers in face, it did not take long to figure out I had a few things to adjust about what I came thinking I knew about Blacks.

How society, particularly much of the South, treated Blacks was another matter. Not being able to use a public bathroom because of one’s skin color was beyond my comprehension. I, being from North Dakota, had no idea that such segregation as a policy was even in existence. North Dakota was my reference point and North Dakota had no such a policy that I was aware of. But then, North Dakota did not have any Blacks either, at least that I was aware of. Blacks could not handle the cold I was told. They were after from the tropics. Anyway, even in Milwaukee, working at Motor Castings, white and Blacks shared the same
restrooms and showers. In North Dakota the policy of segregated bathrooms was a sex thing? It never occurred to me that if Chief Corethers and I ever went out on the town together, we might require separate bathrooms.

As it was, this was California and the military. Segregated bathrooms were none existent here also. While Blacks and Whites sharing the same restrooms and showers was nothing different than anything I would have grown accustomed to, for some Southern Whites, sharing anything with Blacks was inimical. Their murmurings and objections could be heard anytime the smoking lamp was lit (cigarette break) in private conversations with other whites. As racism was prohibited by the military (at least openly), I do not remember any instance of race suracing in joint company. Yet the undertow was always there. Whites gathered with Whites; Blacks with Blacks. Not being part of their mix, I have no idea how Blacks talked about Whites at that time, however I do remember the word “Honky” being used from time to time. I did not take Hunky” as insulting, however, as Blacks were known to call members of their race “Honkies” also. Some even addressed members of their own race as “Nigger”. Their use of “Nigger” however was much like calling another friend “dude.” Like “Hey Dude -- what’s happening?”

I do know when Whites, particularly Southern Whites, spoke of Blacks in the company of other Whites; Nigger was the term often used to describe them. Nigger in this case was not meant as any casual greeting. Whites did not address Blacks as “Niggers” without expecting a confrontation. Whites did not address other Whites as “Nigger.” Whites may have addressed other Whites as a “piece of shit” or “asshole” but “Nigger” that was reserved for the lowest possible thing anyone could be. I was not quite sure how to respond. I often felt peer pressure at times to side with my White counterparts who harbored this resentment of Blacks; however, I did not share their feelings. No Black I ever knew had ever done anything to me to deserve such slander.

In my May 14th letter, I stated my disgust that we always flunked inspection. As unjust, disappointing, and bogus as failing inspections seemed then, failing inspections, I was to learn, was by design. No level or preparedness would have passed inspection early in boot camp. Something was going to be found wrong no matter how trivial and we, the members of Company 269, were going to suffer for it. I later came to understand it was not our bunks, our lockers, or floors that were being inspected. It was us. Our reaction to what we might deem as an unjust call was really what was being watched. The worst thing a recruit could do was protest a call. For the intelligent, regardless of how trivial, unjust, or in error a call might be, the correct response was always “Sir! I will take care of it, Sir!” But for the poor boot that never seemed to figure it out, never able to figure out the only words out of his mouth should be “Sir!” there was Hell to pay. And Hell did
not usually come from Corethers. Corethers punished everyone for the persistent errors of a few and left what to do about it up to those who did not appreciate being punished for another’s mistakes. For those of constant mistakes, the blanket party was reserved. In the middle of night someone would throw a blanket over the offender’s head and the rest of the company would beat the Hell out of him with socks loaded with soap bars.

Corethers would always manage to show up shortly after the disturbance subsided and all the party goers were back in bed, demanding an answer to “What the Hell is all the noise about? Is there a problem in here?” Corethers knew what was happening. He did not come to break up the party or to catch and punish the partiers beating the hell out of their own members. He just wanted to give the impression he did. And again, the correct answer, from everyone --- even those left black and blue from the soap bars, was “No Sir, No problem here, Sir!”

Rethinking the ordeal, we were being conditioned to be our own police force, to demand perfection from everyone to prevent being the victim of someone who just, no matter what, could not pull the grade. At the time blanket parties seemed barbaric and brutal but then later we’d all learn one person asleep on watch could potentially cost the lives of everyone who depended on him being alert. Boyhood independence was over. Our lives depended on the performance of each other. The slackness of one was not to be taken lightly by the group.

One day we were rousted out of the sack early in the morning. We normally were up before sunrise but today there seemed to be urgency inexperienced before. We were herded off in the dark to the chow hall earlier than any time I remembered in the past. Usually we got to the mess hall around sunrise. Obviously we were going somewhere and no time was to be wasted, or that is what I thought. In the military we had this saying “Hurry up and wait” and today we were in for one of those days. Wait we did, standing at parade rest in front of an administration building in the dark until well after the sun came up.

When the time finally came to enter the building, I thought my knees were locked in place. We must have been standing at parade rest for well over an hour, maybe even two. I was ready to move. A series of tables were set up in rows with separate compartments made of plywood separating one man from the other. We were instructed to sit down and there in front of us was a number of folders, a set of ear phones, and pencils. In the folders were a series of exams which over the course of the morning we spent filling out. Reading comprehension, writing, math, mechanical amplitude, and tone differential (sonar) were a number of the items tested as well as IQ. I cannot remember if some version of a mental aptitude test such as the MMPI was offered however. Apparently being insane was not a reason to be rejected from military service.
With the morning over we were then herded back to the chow hall for lunch then back to the building and called back to parade rest once again. This time, when we entered the building, the center of the table top compartments were removed and on the other side, directly across the table from the recruit, sat a Navy petty officer pouring over the material and tests of whoever it was he, the petty officer, was going to interview. There must have been twenty five of these makeshift compartments set up.

My name came up as it usually did, in alphabetical order, meaning I got to stand around at parade rest half the afternoon before being called into one of those compartments. When my time came, I planked myself down on a chair and pulled myself up to the table with my interviewer directly across from me. He liked my reading comprehension and math skills. While they were not outstanding, they were well on the high side of average even though I thought I did horrible. What really caught his eye was my ear, my ability to distinguish one tone from another which came natural to me. I had a good ear for music.

“So,” the sailor sitting across from me asked, “What would you like to do while in the Navy for the next four years?”

Personally, I thought I had already answered that question. Part of the reason I joined the Navy in the first place was because the Navy guaranteed my choice of duty and my choice was deep sea salvage work, if not Underwater Demolition (UDT). Being a Fourth of July baby, I loved to blow things up. Bill Jorgenson and I were always making homemade pipe bombs capable of destroying 2X6 planks nailed together. We were not out to injure anyone. We just liked the noise. In fact, the math instructor at high school used to call me the “Bomber”.

“I wanted into underwater salvage work.” I answered “If not that, then Underwater Demolition (not fully realizing exactly what UDT meant).”

“The Seal Team!” he answered which is what UDT meant unbeknown to me.

I had never heard of the Seal Team before. All I knew was the Navy had these so called frogmen who swam around and blew things up and that sounded fun to me loving to swim and blow things up.

“You do realize,” the man continued, “that of those who enter the Seal Team’s boot camp, few make it?”

“Boot camp?” I exclaimed, “I thought I was in boot camp.”

“Look kid,” the man continued, “I know when you signed up for the Navy, the Navy guaranteed your choice of duty and I want to make sure you get that. But --- unless you have at least five choices, the Navy may not be able to provide you the choice you want. Didn’t your recruiter tell you that?”
“Really?” I responded, because I did not remember being told about five choices in my conversation with the recruiter. “Well,” I thought, “maybe I missed that.”

“So ---!” the sailor continued after a pause “What would you like to do?”

Hell, I did not know. All I thought of was demolition, four years of Fourth of July fireworks, fun and frolic. I really had no idea what else the Navy had to offer other than painting ships and mopping floors.

“Well, look here” the guy went on “You scored an almost perfect score on sonar. What would you think of going into something like submarines?”

“Submarines?” I thought --- “That would not get me in the water swimming but it would get me under the water although I probably would not be able to see much of what was out there. But it might be interesting.” So I nodded OK. Demolition first, then submarines.

I passed over a few other rates offered like pipe fitter. I did not see myself as a plumber. Plumbing was not one of my favorite activities with my father --- but we talked about it anyway. Then there were rates like being a shipmate, painting and cleaning. That did not seem like much fun either. Nor did working on a flight decks as a signalman. A radio operator sounded boring. There was one rate however that I qualified for that the sailor would spend considerable time explaining to me. That rate would go a long way to guarantee me work even after the service. That rate was Hospital Corpsman.

“Have you thought of going into medicine?” the guy asked. “Good field to get into. You would never have to worry about mopping decks or painting ships if you got a Hospital Corpsman rating. Hospitals always have the best food, the best beds, the best working conditions, and the work is not that hard. After the service you should have no trouble finding employment and if you wanted to go into medicine, this would be a good start.”

“Well, I did not know about all that, but it would beat mopping deck,” I thought. “Being a nurse of sorts could not be all that bad.”

“Well ---- how about it kid?” the guy inquired staring at me like we had to get this over with “Should I put Hospital Corpsman down as one of your choices? You need five! This would fill the bill. I mean, if you did get the Corpsman rate and you did not like it, you could strike for something else later.”

“OK,” I answered, figuring that nothing was likely to come of it anyway. “You can put down Hospital Corpsman as my fifth choice.” Having been there for seemingly hours, I just wanted out.

That got me out of there alright but it did not take too long before I learned what created demand for Corpsman. Most Hospital Corpsmen end up Marine Medics on the battle front and the prognosis of those did not sound encouraging. That petty officer, I just talked to, conveniently left that bit information out of our
conversation. He made it sound like as a Hospital Corpsman, I would either be on a ship tending to the ill or stateside in some hospital.

I did end up taking the entry test for the seal team. Being a good swimmer, I took first place in a two lap race back and forth across the swimming pool. I thought that would get me a serious look so I put all I had into it. I had a few things going against me however. One, I got into a number of scrapes with the law before joining the service; dumb kid stuff, like shooting ducks in the city lagoon. Then there was the Corpsman rating. Such a rating largely meant the Marines had their hooks in you and did not want to throw you back. Once a corpsman, as explained to me, always a corpsman.

The last thing explained to me was something of a surprise. My effort and beating everyone in the swimming pool may have worked against me. It seems, or so I was told, that the instructors of the seal wannabes weren’t looking for the best, fastest swimmers. They were more interested in someone they figured they could improve upon with the least amount of effort on their part. If they took those who on the surface, like me, seemed to be good swimmers, not only would they have to train me to swim, they would have to un-train me. If they noticed in my swimming anything that they felt might inhibit me from becoming their kind of swimmer, the fact that I swam as well as I did meant I had been swimming my way for some time. That means they would have to stop me from using what worked so well for me in the past and then retrain me to do something else. Habits are habits and hard to break. Retraining, I was to learn, is often harder than training. This point will resurface later in the section on religion.

Service week or KP duty as it is often called, is written about in my May 19th letter home. People have to eat and someone needs to prepare the food and do the cleanup. So was the week, cooking and cleaning. I also make mention of my rate. By then I had received the grim news that I was on my way to being a Hospital Corpsman. I also mention again my desire to take on college.

While I was sitting in boot camp whiling away time, there was another event that took place outside the realm of the military that would soon shake my view of the world. Cassius Clay, in spite of being an immense underdog, rocked the world by beating Sonny Liston for the heavy weight title of the world. We in boot camp, of course, had no radio or television to watch this event but in the days to follow, Clay was the topic of many discussions. I vaguely remember any reference to the man before entering the service. He’d won a gold medal or something like that in the Olympics. If I remembered anything about him, he had a fast talking, big mouth. Other than that, for now, I did not care much about Clay but that would change.

I left boot camp on the 21st of July with orders in hand to report to Hospital Corps School at Balboa Naval Hospital on the 18th of August. The rest of my
letters from Boot Camp largely reinforce anything mentioned to this point. College was why I was doing this. Medically, given my hernia, I hoped I could just make it through boot camp which could not get over soon enough. I was beginning to hurt and was ready for lighter duty.

**Corps School and Camp Pendleton**

My August 11, 1966 letter tells of my return to California. Danny, my Aunt Doris’ son, lived not too far outside of San Diego and was usually available if I felt the need to escape, which was fairly often. Dan had a VW converted into a Dune Buggy and we enjoyed heading for the foot hills just behind his place to tear up the countryside. Another of our favorite activities was the speedway; funny cars and fuel dragsters. North Dakota, having only stock cars, had nothing comparable.

In terms of what my future held, I admitted to my family the inevitability of where my rating, Hospital Corpsman, was to take me, namely Southeast Asia. There was no reason to hide it any more. I was very likely headed for Vietnam with the Marine Corps as their medic. “Well” I consoled myself, “being a medic had to be better than being a grunt.”

My October 28th letter gives an insight into our training at the naval hospital in San Diego. Some of the new corpsmen trainees who had some college behind them were surprised to discover just how intense the training was. We were, in no uncertain terms, being prepared to make house calls. I did not think much of the nursing aspect of the training. Emptying bedpans was not something I wanted to devote much time to but the rest of the training was quite interesting. One of my friends kept telling me that after this training I’d have no problem finding work in a hospital back in civilian life. To me that translated into a place to work while I was going to college. I liked that even if meant emptying a few bedpans.

The training we received at the hospital placed us somewhere in a grey zone, not nurses, not doctors. While we were not qualified for surgery as an MD, we were able to perform medical procedures that nurses, by Navy standards at that time, were not qualified to do; for example, suturing. We were being primed to make simple diagnoses and writing prescriptions, although I never did any of that until I reported to Yuma after my tour in Vietnam. Starting IVs and drawing blood, however, were standard procedures and we practiced those two procedures on each other all the time. If any of us were pulled over in downtown San Diego, we could have easily been hauled off to the drug tank for all the needle tracks on our arms.

We also received all sorts of first aid training, learned CPR, and how to take blood pressure and pulse. We were taught how to stop bleeding by clamping off bleeders, splint broken limbs, and how to deal with the possibility of a broken neck or back. Sterile technique was always stressed. Use only sterile instruments, cloth,
bandages, and gloves were stressed over and over. We even were taught to perform
tracheotomies. We were only to use tracheotomies in the event of an absolute
emergency where a clear airway could not be achieved; however, should that
situation arise, we were not to hesitate. As our instructor pointed out, the man in
the field without an open airway would die anyway. “If we did happen to cut into a
person’s vocal cords,” the instructor asked, “would the person rather have a hard
time speaking or a tombstone?” And if we did cut an artery, oh well --- the guy had
a tombstone on the way anyway.”

Stressed at corps school was the idea “The greatest good for greatest
number.” Anaphylaxis shock was always a possibility anytime vaccinations were
given. The possibility of an allergic reaction by one or two was not reason enough
to stop the vaccinations of the group, however, because not to give the vaccinations
to protect the few was seen as detrimental to the whole. Cholera could take out the
whole unit. Many a war has been won or lost as a result of disease and our job was
to not let disease become such a factor. In the event of mass casualties, we were
instructed to overlook those most seriously wounded and concentrate on those who
would benefit most from immediate first aid, namely the bleeder. Those missing
limbs, head injuries, sucking chest wounds, and exposed bowels probably would
not be much benefit to the outcome of a battle even if saved. Controlling minor
problems before they become major problems such as bleeding was therefore the
priority. Get those back into battle that could still fight and only afterwards worry
about the more seriously wounded. I came to believe in Vietnam, however, that
this save the less wounded mentality was a military tactic left over from World
War II when returning as many of the wounded to combat immediately may have
been difference between winning and losing the battle. In Vietnam, few such long
involved battles ever occurred. Most battles were over in a matter of moments. No
battle’s outcome that I was ever in depended on returning the wounded to battle.

My next duty station was the Naval Hospital at Camp Pendleton. There I
was placed on the eyes, nose, and throat (ENT) ward taking care of Marines with
tonsillectomies mostly. I was placed under the command of a lady nurse, which
was a new experience. I did not get along with her very well. I felt she was trying
to make me into a den mother for a group of boy scouts. I did not like her
degrading me by performing what I considered women’s work, chauvinistic for
sure on my part. I did not see the Marines as incapable of waiting on themselves
for such small items as getting a glass of water. There were a few in bed
experiencing a lot of pain for whom I did not mind being a go-for but for the most
part, most were up and around on the ward as much as me. She was the only one in
my four years of military duty that gave me a poor job performance report. She
also likely helped expedite my deployment to Vietnam. She was, after all, an
officer.
On December 9th the Navy repaired my hernia. Not just the left side either, but both sides. The operation was a bit strange in that I got to watch the whole procedure via mirrors. They did a spinal tap rather than knock me out. After a happy injection, I got to watch the whole operation with a smile on my face. Everything was funny, even being cut open. A few days later, I returned to the ward, doing light night duty. This placed me in the position of being by myself most the time which at the time I did not like. I, at this time, was a fairly social animal. I liked being surrounded by friends, partying, and being the center of attention. The only good part was I did not have to deal with my female superior.

Something else happened that day unbeknown to me which would challenge my perspective on the military and Vietnam. The National Council of Churches, to which my hometown church belonged, voted to stop bombing North Vietnam. I would not discover this for a while but when I did, it struck me as “Really!” First off I did not think churches had any business in foreign affairs given the separation of church and state clause. Secondly, it brought me back to all our discussions from confirmation class about war. Since my church saw Vietnam, at least the bombing, as unjust, shouldn’t I? And so began the paradox I was later to be completely immersed. Was Vietnam a moral war? Are those serving there good or evil?

On January 21st 1967, I was promoted to E3. The advancement really did not mean much other than I had made the grade in spite of my problem with my nurse supervisor. E3 also put me in line for E4, HM3. As it turned out, this wish for E4 was used to manipulate me and numerous other Corpsmen I suspect after learning how combat seasoned Corpsmen were to be treated by the military after returning to the states. Anyway, now an E3, I was told by the powers that be that the next chance for advancement in rate would be in six months, or about July. If I’d think about volunteering for Vietnam, E4 would all but be mine in July. E4 now would mean by the time I returned from Vietnam, I could be up for E5, more pay, able to get into the NCO club and high enough in rank that I would not have to take crap from just anyone. If I did decide to make the military a career, E5 would put me in place to make E6 either prior to extending for another four years or shortly thereafter. In short, in career terms Vietnam, it then appeared, would be a good move.

Worth mention here, at this time, I was contemplating making the Navy a career as did my uncle, Dan Scallen. Up to this point, life in the military was not all bad and I liked the idea of never having to worry about medical care. Retiring at 40 did not seem like a bad idea either given most civilians who I knew worked all their lives for a retirement never lived long enough to enjoy it. Either they died shortly before retirement or shortly thereafter.
In spite of the advantages of going to Vietnam early in my career I was in no big hurry to get there. When I was pulled off ward duty and placed in the pharmacy, my hopes were that I’d become a pharmacy tech, a desire which I expressed in my February 17, 1967 letter. Pharmacy was about the best duty a Corpsman like me could hope for --- but it was not to be. By my March 22nd letter I knew that Vietnam was in the works all along. I did not volunteer for Vietnam but might as well have. My thinking is my favorite female superior volunteered me instead. In reality though, I could not stand the thought of continuing to work for her. Vietnam as far as I was concerned would be, by far, less stressful duty.

But even then events were playing out beyond the military that would really challenge my views of Vietnam. One challenge came from a most unlike source, the same professional prize fighter that rocked us in boot camp. On February 6th, 1967, Cassius Clay defended his title against Ernie Terrell and won. The fight was broadcasted to our club at Camp Pendleton and nearly everyone I knew at the time, remembering Clay’s defeat of Liston, was present, cheering or booing. On April 22nd he beat Zora Folley and we were there again, in the TV lounge, cheering and booing. Those who jumped on Clay’s band wagon, like me, were amazed by how he floated and danced around the ring. “Fly like a butterfly, sting like a bee” was Clay’s saying, and he did just that. To Clay’s opponents, it was his mouth and ego that they came to see knocked down. His opponents would just cringe every time Clay would stick his jaw out and brag about what a beautiful face he had. “I’m the Greatest!” Clay would shout, and the lips of those against him would just quiver. If the fight wasn’t entertaining enough to watch, Clay made the people watching his fights just as interesting.

Then Clay pulled something that created a great deal of mental confusion for me. He, out of what seemed like nowhere, changed his name to Muhammad Ali, claimed to be a Moslem (whatever that was), and tossed his world title to the wind by announcing that he would not serve in the military. I really (and I stress really) did not know what to think. Here was a man at the beginning of what seemed like a career that most fighters would die for throwing it all away; over what? Like Elvis, had Ali entered the military, he’d have no doubt been placed at some secure post teaching self-defense or something of that nature. Putting Ali in harms-way, given his popularity, would have been a risky political move to say the least. But where he might be stationed did not seem to be Ali’s complaint at all. Ali was stating he would not support in any manner a white man’s war. “When did Vietnam become a race issue?” I wondered. Or was Ali’s refusal to fight a religious issue? In either event, a boxer, an American Idol, was defying the government of the United States over his own government’s foreign policy and made it clear that he was willing to go to jail for his beliefs.
Martin Luther King was also making some rather strange noises. Personally, I thought that all King did was make noise, but I’ve already stated all my qualifications for coming to that conclusion. Anyway, Martin Luther was calling Vietnam a blasphemy and was calling for an end to the bombing and a withdrawal of American troops. Alone, Martin Luther might have been easy to blow off but he was not the only making such demands. Huge protests in New York and San Francisco, in these cases my peers, were calling for the same thing. Nearly two hundred draft cards were burned in a number of these protests. If that did not beat all, a group of Quakers on the so called good ship Phoenix sailed to North Vietnam offering aid they brought from the United States.

As for the war, the DMZ was heating up. Heavy fighting was being reported in the hills around Khe Sanh and along the DMZ, Con Thien, and Dong Ha. All were Marine positions which meant of course, if I was headed for Vietnam with the Marines, I was likely headed for the hottest part of the war. While I had resigned myself to the fact that I was going to end up in Vietnam, realizing that I had a good chance ending up in the worst of it was not the news I wanted to hear. At least being a medic I would not have to live like the grunts sleeping on the ground in the rain – or so I thought.

I entered Field Med School at Camp Pendleton on the 26th of May, 1967 and finished on the 27th of June. I spent most my time while there wondering why we were there at all, as it seemed we did nothing more than line up for roll call. In fact, I cannot remember anything I took from that school other than the saying, “A dead Corpsman is no good to anyone. Never run through an ambush and wait for an area to be secured before entering.” All those instructions would prove laughable once in Vietnam however. Rarely were any areas I entered secured before I arrived on the scene or was security ever provided unless already in place. That is not to imply the Marines were not doing their best to protect me. I mean, how is security to be provided in a mine field in time to treat a Marine bleeding to death with a blown off leg? How can an area be secured to treat the wounded if it is being fired on by mortars and artillery from a foreign country? Not all situations in need of emergency medical intervention were under the control of the Marines.

I remember all the instruction we had on not moving the person until we could assess whether his neck or back might be broken. In actual combat, there he lies in the open, being fired on by automatic weapons and we’re not to move him until we know whether or not his spine is severed? Leave him there, broken neck or not, he’ll damn sure be dead, not to mention myself, before I got him strapped on a board. Besides, we never carried back boards or neck collars. But --- we were always told to make sure we knew if his spine was severed before moving him. It was damned if I did; damned if I didn’t. If I did run out there and pull the man back, I was left with the feeling that I should have spent a little more time
examining him in case he actually did suffer a back or neck injury. Leaving him there long enough to do that examination was unacceptable however. He needed moved and moved now before someone pumped him, or me, full of lead. But what would happen if it was found out that I moved him with a broken neck and the man ended up paralyzed? Could I be held responsible? Once back in the States, if I came across this individual would he accuse me of negligence? This paradox, the feeling that I could be damned if I did or damned if I did not would haunt me throughout my tour in Vietnam and end up following me home. This same feeling exists to this very day in many things I must do to live and work in this society today and when experienced, I am transported right back to Vietnam. Call it one of those ghosts that can turn on combat veterans at any time whenever at home they themselves in vaguely similar situations.

CHAPTER FOUR
Hello Vietnam

Da Nang: My Arrival, Black Teeth and Blank Faces

My July 3rd, 1967 letter places my arrival in country on July 1st, three days before my twenty first birthday. When the back of the C130 that brought us from Okinawa opened at the Da Nang airfield, the heat and humidity of summer in Vietnam instantly glued my clothing to my skin. By the time I was down the ramp, my shirt was soaking wet from perspiration. I looked like I had just walked through a sprinkler. And there was this odor. The smell of spent jet exhaust, diesel fuel, night soil (soil fertilized with raw human waste), the smell of burning sulfur, and garbage decaying in the heat all blended together permeating the air with a stench never experienced before or after Vietnam.

At the airbase in Da Nang, new arrivals such as I were warehoused under a tin roof pole barn with no sides. I did not know it at the time but no sides were by design, offering a quick and easy escape in any direction should incoming mortars or rockets occur. I, at the time, figured it was the military just being cheap and not caring for the welfare of those under this pole barn’s roof. Sides, after all, would have helped keep the mosquitoes at bay which were the immediate problem in my mind. The mosquitoes, come nightfall, were unrelenting. To provide us some relief we were given a repellent of pure DEET and even then I had to completely cover any exposed portion of my body, including my head, with my vinyl poncho after the sun went down. Call enduring the additional heat by sleeping under a poncho blood conservation.

Inside the pole barn all there was to do was lie on or sit on the eight inch wide twelve feet long wooden benches a little lower than knee high. Under the
benches was sand. Anyone attempting to sleep on these benches usually ended up between them, on the ground with whatever called the sand home; snakes, spiders, scorpions, chiggers, ants, and an occasional rodent ranging in size from a shrew to a large cat; not to mention the creatures what did not live on the ground like mosquitoes, biting flies, and gnats.

The roof over the pole barn provided us also hinted at what we could be in for at any moment. A round hole about the size of a small dinner plate with the medal folded down toward three missing benches served as a grave prophecy that we may come under rocket attack at any time. The rumor was the missing benches and the rocket that took them out also claimed the lives of two Marines about to get on a plane and fly home. The message being conveyed by that story --- you are never safe while in Vietnam, no matter where you were or how little time you had left. The end could come anytime, anyplace, even here, completely surrounded by security --- right now.

The ride out to the Battalion Area was also a memorable event. Not only did it take me over and through some of the area that I would be operating in but it gave me a view of some places that would be frequently talked about by the Marines. Dog Patch was one such example, the red light district of Da Nang where rumors abound of serviceman who went seeking sexual pleasures to never return. The trucks took us right past Dog Patch where standing in their doors like tellers at Wal-Mart waiting for someone to check out, were the gals waving as we drove by. The district itself was something of culture shock but the real shock would be finding how young many of those girls were. As a few Marines would say, “If they’re old enough to pee, they’re old enough for me.”

Not everyone waved however. As we headed for the gate along a chain linked fence separating the base from the city, stood numerous women, missing teeth or blacken by betel-nut, with children hanging on their hips or standing alongside them. Old men also watched us with an expressionless face that in time I’d come to understand. Young men, those of military age, were noticeably missing. These expressionless faces were how most civilians, the poor, the field workers; the common villagers always greeted us. To them, we were the invaders. We never spoke their language. We did not look like them. We did not value the same things. Worse, we looked more like the Imperialist French that robbed them of their resources to profit France rather than their liberators. They, after all, had dealt with a capitalist white race before and I doubt their memories of doing so were very pleasant.

Another problem, overall; we saw ourselves not as their equals --- but as superiors. We were, or so many of us thought, the “Justice League” flying in to save the day. As such, passing that fence and looking into those stone sober faces was not what I expected. I expected an atmosphere of awe, people waving,
cheering, and smiling, welcoming their liberators to their country. But there was none of that. Just stone cold sober faces and the understood, non-verbalized, “Look --- There goes another truck of them.”

Mike Hill and I reported to our Battalion area on July 3rd 1967. By some twist of fate, we ended up not only spending our last month in the States together, we flew over to Vietnam together, spent most the year in Vietnam together, minus July and August when Mike was with Fox Company, and flew back to the States together. Such a close association was almost unheard of in Vietnam. Most Vietnam Veterans went there alone, which it could be said I did, not knowing Mike well, and came home alone which I did not having been with Mike the whole year. Upon entering the Second Battalion First Marines Battalion area, the Battalion Aid Station was about the first thing I saw after getting off the truck. In the first few days following our arrival, our only duty was giving immunizations, general office work, and cleaning the area around our tents and hooches. In the evening we had access to a club were they served beer and soda. An outdoor open movie theater also existed which rolled the film shortly after sundown. Sundown came early in Vietnam being nearer the equator.

The club was a typical hard back hooch with the entrance in the center rather than on the end. Stepping inside, you were right in front of the bar with wings of seating chairs and tables spreading parallel from the bar. The limit on beer was two each, but no one counted. One particularly unpopular beer was Ballantine. Because of its lack of popularity, it was not uncommon for all the other beers to be drank up leaving only Ballantine. When that happened the word would come down, “No more beer until the Ballantine is gone.” Attendance at the club would always fall off during those periods. The good news was, if you could stand it, you could drink all the Ballantine you could hold.

The main conversation at the club, other than jokes and light hearted jousting, was of course the war. Being there July 3rd to perhaps about the 5th, the topic of Con Thien was front and center in many minds. Only a few days before, the 9th Marines around Con Thien had taken a beating, 96 KIAs (killed in action) and 211 WIAs (wounded in action). Two battalions of the 3rd Marines were airlifted into the battle resulting in an additional 159 KIA over the course of about two weeks. The exact number of casualties was never made known to us however while we were still in Vietnam. All anyone knew was the Marines KIA around Con Thien and the DMZ were large numbers. But there was reason to rejoice we were told --- the battle was estimated to have claimed the lives of 1300 Communists as if that was supposed to offer some solace. I found this news hard for any reason to rejoice. I did not see any amount of dead Communists worth my life.
Other than Con Thien, the topic always being discussed at the club was Operation Independence, an operation carried out in late January 67 by the Second Battalion First Marines (2-1). Independence this, Independence that, “You should have been here during Operation Independence”. Operation Independence, by the Marines at the club, was talked about as if Independence was some defining point of the Vietnam War.

Sandy Carlson reports in “We Remember” that Hotel suffered 5 KIAs and 26 WIAs. Sandy’s numbers however do not match the actual record. The S-3 Journal, reporting on the events of the operation as they occurred, claims only two Marines died, Private first class (PFC) William Dumas KIA Jan 29 and 2nd Lt O’Conner, KIA Jan 31st. Furthermore, it appears the majority of med-evacs suffered on Independence were heat casualties. To a Marine lying in a rice paddy who gets shot at every time he pokes his head up to see what is going on around him, the battle likely seemed much more intense. To imagine any med-evac going on during battle as a dead or wound comrade is not uncommon. Whether this affected Sandy’s recollection of this event is unknown. In doing this research, I found myself often misinformed on a number of events that I wrote home about. I found that it is no discredit to any soldier who in the heat of combat believes the battle going on in front of his eyes was worse than it actually may have been. That’s not to say all war stories are intentionally inflated. Whether actual or imagined matters little to the person telling the story as he is likely convinced that what he reports is true, a burden, real or imagined, that he will carry around with him everywhere he goes.

Carlson also mentions that over the two days following Independence, Vietnamese peasants carried 22 dead Vietnamese and 18 wounded Vietnamese to the 2nd BN 1st MAR compound. The Vietnamese claimed these dead and wounded were civilian casualties suffered as a result of the Marines on Independence. Sandy believes those peasants were actually Vietcong attempting to obtain retribution. That Sandy believed those peasants were actually Vietcong was common thinking. I was to discover during the month of July 67 that almost any Vietnamese killed or wounded were labeled Vietcong whether combatants or not. Many Vietnamese homes, built of grass and bamboo, possessed small bunkers and shallow caves which when discovered automatically received an M-26 grenade. When the remains were brought to the surface, the dead or wounded were nearly always listed as Vietcong, a conclusion I frequently questioned. Vietcong or not, I hurt in indescribable ways every time the remains were women and children.

Why these Vietnamese would hide in these bunkers and holes constituted no mystery to me either. Given the same situation the Vietnamese civilians were in, if I as they, had to live under the constant threat of being shot or mortared, it does not
matter from which side the bullets and mortars came, I would have chosen to build a bunker or dug a small hole to take shelter in also. And given that we, the Marines, were the foreigners, if I as a Vietnamese child, saw a group of armed foreign combatants headed my way, I would have hidden in one. Those children were apt to be scared to death. As such these children would remain unresponsive to a command from a foreign language they did not understand. All they would have heard from above would have been this angry growl “Get your ass up here!” which meant no more to the listener than the snarl of a pit bull. I understood if these children hunkered down and resisted coming out, a crime which was often punishable by death.

Not many episodes of watching and listening to what I felt were largely just some blank justification for the murder of women and children were needed before I made a promise to myself. I would not, in the future regardless of any negative impact on myself or the organization to which I was attached, make such blanket generalizations to defend either myself or the organization. I did not know whether or not these people were Communists. What I did know was they were woman and children. They were not Vietcong until proven otherwise, unless Vietnamese deserved less rights than Americans. They were not gooks. They were not zippers. They were women and children. Since then, I have become very sensitive to government organizations, particularly military organizations, corporations, or individuals calling anything that which it is not. B-36’s, for example, were not peacemakers as they were dubbed. They were bombers, war machines designed to kill. They were machines designed to wage war, not make peace.

On the other hand, these so called combatants (Marines) were, for the most part, nothing more than elderly children themselves. In defense of the Marines, and the adolescent men in it, Vietnam was not some cops and robbers, cowboy and Indian game we played as children with cap guns. If shot, you did not argue with the shooter whether you were hit or not. In Vietnam, the bullets were real and spoke for themselves. A few automatic weapons and machine guns can wipe out your entire group if given a chance to do its damage. The situation of being pinned down and taking casualties requires action unless you simply want to lay there and die. Hence action is taken and people die. And the people that die are not always those who you want dead, particularly when the enemy and civilians are a salt and pepper mix. As to the bunkers and the children and women that died in them, all it takes is one time for a real Vietcong to pop up with an automatic weapon to earn you and many of your comrades a trip home in a body bag. Given that, what’s more important; you and your friends --- or some unknown person in a pit? It’s a tradeoff. Go ahead --- make the call from your comfortable chair in which you sit reading this some thirty years after the event. My guess is you are as qualified to make that assessment as well as those back in the States, having never experienced
life and death that close up, labeling us “Baby Killers” at that time. And if that seems like a harsh statement on my part --- Gee! I wonder what makes me feel this rage.

The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) records the events of Operation Independence in their “Vietnam, A Television History.” On disk two under “America Takes Charge (1965-1967): “A Village Raid,” PBS pits the Marines of my future version of what took place during Operation Independence against the villagers who suffered the assault. Interviewed by PBS were Captain Banks, Hotel’s Commanding Officer (H-6), and Pvt. Jack Hill. While Banks lays out the grim military situation Hotel Company found itself in, Hill puts it on the gut level of a grunt Marine. Trapped with what he believes were Marines all around him being killed, Hill tells of wounded Marines crying for their mothers, asking to be shot because they could not take the pain any more. Hill goes on to describe assaulting the village and blowing up bunkers and tunnels, and how an eighteen old adolescent Marine machine gunner who just watched his buddies get blown away really has no mercy for whoever might be on the receiving end of his M-60. Keep in mind, by Hill’s testimony, it could be surmised Hotel suffered numerous KIAs but only two KIAs were recorded by Marine records.

On the Vietnamese side are Nguyen Bay and Le Thi Ton. Bay tells of being a fourth grade boy when the Marines came. According to Bay, the Marines came asking where the VC were and denies that anyone knew. He states that the Marines began killing his people and that he only escaped being killed by hiding under dead bodies. The Marines then proceeded to kill all their livestock, shot and killed those who were wounded and smashed people’s heads in with their rifle butts. Le Thi Ton’s testimony supports Bay’s. When the Marines arrived, they seemed to hate the people she claimed. They just threw a grenade into her house and nine people fell died, one of whom was her own son. Then the Marines set fire to all their homes so no one had anywhere to live.

So which is the correct version? There are likely elements of truths, errors, and exaggerations in both. I however clearly could see and understand both sides, a paradox that still haunts me to this day. I often spoke of the desperate position the Vietnamese people, children especially, were in. Imagine being a child old enough to understand what is going on around you. One day these foreigners, white and much larger framed than your people and armed with automatic weapons, come into your village and tell you that if it is found out you are talking to the VC they (being the foreigners) will come back and burn your village down. To make their point perfectly clear, a Marine might even gun down a pig as a demonstration of what might be in store for the rest of the villagers should any of the villagers not to follow the Marines instructions.
Then just after these foreigners leave, the VC, who may even be living in your village, comes in and tells you that if you are ever seen talking to the Americans again, they will murder your mother. And just to make their point perfectly clear, they may gun down a pig as a demonstration of what might be in store for the rest of the villagers should any of the villagers not follow the Vietcong’s instructions. Even after the military this two edge sword would still hack my emotions to pieces. Which side of the sword was used to do so never mattered.

The fact that Independence did not shape up to be the decisive battle of Vietnam as it often seemed at 2-1’s club, does not mean that the 2nd BN 1st MAR did not participate in any large battles before my arrival. Fox Company, for example, during Operation Union suffered heavy casualties in one of the 2nd BN 1st MAR’s heaviest battles of the war. Gary Martini was awarded the Congressional Medal Honor posthumously. Operation Union also resulted in one of two MIAs from the 2nd BN 1st MAR. The body of GySgt Roger Hamilton was never recovered. Lost forever that day were 32 Marines. The possibility of suffering heavy casualties was always before us and always weighed on our mind.

A Shot in the Dark and a Marine Dead

The theater at battalion also had a story attached to it. A myth arose over the movie “A Shot in the Dark.” As the story goes, some Marine about to rotate back to the States was shot in the head from a stray bullet during that movie. No one knew the Marine took a fatal bullet however until the end of the movie when the Marine, found in a pool of blood, did not wake up. A Corpsman was called and attempts to revive this Marine failed. “Wow!” I thought, “What a coincidence.” A shot, from who knew where during the movie “A Shot In the Dark” resulted in one dead Marine. Well, a coincidence I thought until I began rehearing the story a number of times from different sources stating this incident happened at completely different
times with the person killed belonging to different companies. Some had the event happening a good year before. Others had it happening in the early spring and a couple had it happening just before I got there. Even today this fable lives on with those telling it all swearing their version is correct. I therefore had this story and its tellers document their version of “A Shot In The Dark” in an earlier book “We Remember” that I helped compile and publish by the Vietnam Era Veterans of the 2nd BN 1st MAR.

Now the surprise of all surprises, the shot in the dark story, which was originally published in “We Remember” largely as rumor, turns out to be at least partially true. I believed this to be largely a myth right up until Robert Hughes, via a phone conversation on March 15, 2006, claimed he was reviewing the Command Chronologies of 2/1 when he came across the event. What movie was playing at the time is unknown or was the time the man had remaining in Vietnam. I now know the man’s name that gave rise to this story. The event is recorded in the December 1966 Command Chronologies of 2-1 with the death of Lance Corporal (LCpl) Howard Matson of Fox Company.

Tara Revisited: As Atlanta after Sherman

A few days after checking into battalion, I was assigned my new unit, Hotel Company 1st Platoon. The Marines always mustered to hear the orders of the day. Once the orders were given it was off to supply to gather up whatever gear was needed for that evening’s patrol, after which it was down the trail we went. Michael Rodriquez, a street smart observant Hispanic usually led the pack taking us to a hostile frontier area where gun fights usually broke out. Appropriately the area was nicknamed Dodge City. Other points frequently visited were the Tracks, an abandoned RR line, or the Anthill, an Arvin encampment on top of a dome shaped mound within walking distance from battalion.

The trip to the Anthill took us through a Combined Action Cadre (CAC) Unit, a defensive perimeter shared by Marines and ARVINs with the mission of providing a safe harbor to the civilians inside. Once passing through this CAC Unit, I stepped into an opening between two rows of hooches when this gun shot went off sounding like it was point blank in my face. I was the only one in our squad that responded. I instantly flattened out on the ground but at the same time I realized that I was the only one in the opening of those two rows of hooches. So I quickly crab crawled out of that firing lane. Nothing more occurred, other than people, Marines and Vietnamese both, laughed at me. I did not see it as a laughing matter however. I was sure that shot was meant for me. I heard what I believed was the bullet sizzle by me. The blast was not directed away from me --- I’ve heard
numerous shots away from me before, from childhood to the military but this one was different. It was too loud and sharp.

My thoughts instantly turned to what I’ve heard so much in the past that the Vietcong loved killing radiomen, commissioned officers, and Corpsmen. I was alone in that firing lane. If the bullet was not meant for me, it was likely meant for anyone packing a 45 pistol on their hip. As such to prevent being picked out of a crowd (if that is what I was) again, I traded off my 45 for an M16 the next time that I was back at battalion. From that day on, I wanted to look like everyone else. I carried a demolition bag rather than a Corpsmen’s Unit One (medical bag), grenades, and machine gun ammo just like any other Marine. If I was going to die in this hell hole, it wasn’t going to be because I looked important.

The area of Dodge City and the Tracks was much like I would have imagined returning to Tara, Scarlet O’Hara’s legendary home from “Gone with the Wind.” Gone was the agriculture that once flourished. Rice fields, now wild grass, lay surrounded by dikes now only used as cover during fire fights. Numerous tree lines, mainly bamboo, sectioned off individual fields and provided cover for snipers and troop movements. At the end of many of these tree lines was a rectangular lot on which a home, many formerly brick, once stood. Now these virtual mansions, compared to the grass shacks of the larger majority of Vietnamese, lay in ruin, collapsed, roofless with their sides riddled by bullet impacts. Their insides were burned out.

One of first places I remember going was across this bamboo bridge which took us into a no man’s land on the other side. Often this bridge was booby trapped. If the bridge was not booby trapped, the trail getting there or getting back for damn sure was. The S-3 Journal, pages 37-145 documents our movements in the month of July 67. Being found constantly were mines and bobby traps. Some were found and
destroyed. Those not found before being detonated resulted in nearly daily med-evacs.

Booby traps came in a variety of forms, the most common being the M-26 grenade. The delay fuse would be removed so that when the pin was pulled the resulting explosion was immediate rather than delayed. I remember a story told me by one of the Marines. Never trust a grenade found along the trail. A Marine sergeant out on one of these maneuvers found an M-26 grenade on the trail with the pin still intact. Not completely trusting the grenade, the sergeant decided to dispose of it in the river. He walked to the river bank, pulled the pin, and went to throw it. As soon as the grenade left his hand however and the handle popped off, the grenade detonated resulting in the loss of his hand and half his head.

As a booby trap, with the delay element removed, the M-26’s pin could be loosened and attached to a string which when caught by a passing foot, the pin would be jerked out. The next sound heard was the ping of the handle flying off thrown by striker spring. The striker then sets off the primer, but without the delay element, the explosive ignites immediately --- and bang!

Another favorite method of rigging an M 26 grenade as a bobby trap was to pull the pin and carefully, not to let go of the striker handle, place the pin-less grenade in a can large enough to accommodate the handle but small enough not to allow the handle to lift up and set off the striker. So seeing a can lying on the path; what do boys do with a can? They kick it. Out rolls the grenade, the striker handle goes ping and the grenade goes bang! The can could also be laid sideways anchored to the ground or vegetation with a string attached to the grenade. Trip over the string, the grenade is pulled out; ping goes the striker spring launching the handle, and bang.

With the bang of course came the blood and screams, and shrapnel wounds. These types of wounds however usually meant a ticket home as rarely were these grenade bobby traps fatal. Unlike the movies, grenades do not blow buildings down or flip cars over in the air. Grenades are for the most part simply large fire crackers with shrapnel. Common wounds inflicted by grenades were called “Husses” meaning not usually fatal but serious enough to get you a ticket home. “Husses” were by many considered a good thing. They got you home alive; moderately to seriously wounded perhaps, but alive.

For years after Vietnam I considered empty cans dangerous. I still do not kick them or if driving, I swerve to miss them or anything else that might conceal an unexpected surprise such as an empty box lying in the road. If a box, for example, did not have explosives in it, it could very well conceal a cement block. When I was with others after returning home in the seventies who would run out and kick a can or veered to flatten a box on the road, my instinct was to throw my hands around my head, duck, and brace myself. Occasionally I still do.
As common as these M-26 booby traps were the question that had to be asked was how so many American made M-26 grenades ended up on the trails as booby traps? Theories circulated. Maybe the Vietcong had access to M-26 grenades. Or maybe these grenades were being stolen by the Vietnamese working at the Marine Bases. Worse, perhaps the Arvins, which America supplied with weapons, were using them against us. Or maybe, and I almost hated to think of this possibility, Marines were loading themselves up with ordnance going out in case we were attacked at night and then, not wanting to lug it all back in the morning, left part of their load there. Given what I know about the Vietnamese, every site we left was policed clean the very next morning for anything forgotten, lost, or just left. Ordnance taken out of battalion supply by the troops was never held to an accounting.

It goes without saying that the larger the ordnance booby trapped, the more destructive it was. Should an artillery round, a mortar, or bomb hit the ground and not detonate, sometime while on patrol along the trail, some Marine would either be lucky enough to see it before stumbling over the trip wire or unfortunate enough to trip it. The resulting casualties, usually more than one, would often end up missing limbs or killed in action (KIA). Vietnamese were very efficient at converting any explosive devise into a booby trap.

Not all booby traps were grenades, mortars, or some larger ordnance. Many were just long nails or sharpened metal objects like sharpened railroad spikes pounded through boards and placed upright in depressions along the trail or under the water of rice paddies. Already mentioned were punji stakes pits and swinging logs with razor sharp stakes protruding from them. A similar trap was short punji stakes; bamboo cut to about 8 inches long and very sharp hidden in grassy areas just off the trail. As Marines would come walking along; some Vietcong would fire a few shots to get the Marines to dive for cover, right onto the stakes. Nearly all these stakes were soaked in Buffalo urine or some other fowl material to all but guarantee a severe infection should any unfortunate soldier be impaled by one of these.

Very simple mines were made with things like shotgun shells. A nail would be driven through a board so it just penetrated the opposite side on which would be placed the firing cap of the shell with the shell facing up. Should someone step on one of these, Bang! These were rarely fatal but very efficient at removing a foot.

Of course, every time a bobby trap or land mine was set off, not only was there this big “Bang!” that everyone in the neighborhood heard but the call “Corpsman Up!” would announce that the very person the Vietcong supposedly loved to kill would pop up running. If the Vietcong enjoyed killing Corpsman nearly as much as I was led to believe, all they had to do was watch and wait. Some Corpsman was bound to flip up like a duck in a carnival arcade any time a
Marine stepped on a mine. That thought was always in my mind each time I was the only person up and moving around following an explosion. All I could hope was no sniper was in the area.

When I think of my early trips to the bush, a few events come to mind immediately. On my very first trip to the field, we had just set in for the evening and were about to get some shut-eye shortly after it became dark. Suddenly came this flash right above my head immediately followed by a deafening blast, the concussion of which caused my cloths and hair to flap in the down draft. That was close, really close --- but what do you do? I began scanning for better cover when another went off nearly rolling me over. I figured if I stayed where I was I would die, so I retreated to the center of our perimeter.

To my surprise, no one did anything. No one returned any grenades. Nothing. Everyone just sat staring into the darkness. Wondering why we did not retaliate in any manner, I asked the Sergeant, “Why doesn’t anyone throw at least a few grenades?” only to be told that no one was sure where the other squads were. “What?” was my reaction but I did not say anything. “I’m out here,” I thought, “and someone is throwing grenades at me and I’m being told we can’t return grenades because we do not know where other Marine Units are? Or worse, we are not throwing grenades back because it might be other Marines throwing them at us.” The thoughts that went through my head in the next few hours were far from comforting and did little for any security I may have felt being with America’s supposed number one fighting force.

In the year to follow, knowledge of our and other’s location was life or death knowledge. Lost in the night or the jungle, forward observers (FOs) often called in mortars or artillery not really knowing our or other’s exact position. Often we’d sit and watch where a given round would impact to help us determine exactly where we were before adjusting fire on the target. One of the places a round might land was right on top of us but we took the risk anyway. Today, GPS can give its operator his exact location to within a few feet. What we would not have given for that technology in Vietnam. Many lives would have been saved --- or in the case of the enemy, lost since the enemy would not be given the notice that death was about to come their way and thereby avoid it.

Anyway later that night we had abandoned our position on the ground and took up positions in a destroyed brick home. I remember looking up at the sky from this roofless building thinking to myself what a large basketball hoop that was to anyone with a good long shot. Any resulting explosion would have been far more intense contained within those walls. That realization did nothing to help me sleep. I sat awake all night hoping no Vietcong would go for the three pointer.

The following morning, a group of us were sitting around, talking, and breaking into our C-rats for breakfast. One Marine sitting beside me wiping down
his M-79 grenade launcher, stroking it like his favorite pet, began asking me if I had ever killed anyone. Strange question, I thought, but then we were in a war zone. “Maybe he had the need to talk about someone he killed.” I thought “Maybe he felt a need to dump a feeling of his on someone.” Being the corpsman, part of my duties included being the resident psychologist. Marines always dumped their inner most feelings and fears on their Corpsman.

As it turns out, he had not killed anyone to date --- but he was looking forward to it. Having that much power over another individual to decide the issue of life and death appealed to him. The whole conversation made me uncomfortable. Why would this guy be confiding his desire for killing someone with me? This was language that to this point in life I would have been considered totally repulsive. Never had I heard anyone claim that they would delight in killing another person. Sure everyone used the phase, I’d like to kill that ----, but this guy was serious. He just wanted to kill someone. Anyone.

Recently I was reading somewhere reasons why people kill each other. One of the answers that jumped out at me was “Because they enjoy it” and I believe that answer has a great deal of merit. Some Vietnam Veterans actually enjoyed their job. They saw killing as fun, the thrill of the battle exhilarating, and a kill a trophy. My job however was not nearly as exciting. I found nothing exhilarating about zipping up some mangled body, some of whom I knew, in an army tank green body bag.

One day, very early in my tour of Vietnam, this Marine got his chance. A woman came down to the river to gather some water. Her basic need for water, however, cost this lady her life. To my knowledge she was doing nothing threatening nor did she possess any weapons. She was just there, by herself, and an available target for an M-79. His justification for blowing her away; “She was likely a Vietcong sympathizer. Most these people were Vietcong sympathizers” he claimed. As far as I know, the incident never was reported. She was just left there, face down in the river. Face down in the river, half blown apart, I suspect is how her family found her --- and likely they knew who to blame for her death. The thought of how events such as this might affect our peace effort (at least that is how I liked to think about my being there - as absurd as the thought was) from that day forward was always on my mind. If we were here to represent the USA, we were lousy ambassadors.

Having just arrived in country, I had really no idea how to deal with what just happened. I did not know if this was standard procedure, common practice, an isolated occurrence, or what. It seemed like murder to me but then I had never been a war zone before where outright murder and justifiable killing, if any killing can be justified, often becomes blurred. I did not feel that I was in a position to make such an assessment having just arrived. As my tour lengthened, however, I did
come to realize that this event was not standard procedure nor was it common practice. What I would consider murder however did happen, and when it happened the individuals involved were likely protected by the group rather than punished. In Vietnam, the guy with the Black hat usually got away protected by an unofficial system. This, in my mind, did not speak well for military justice or our mission. I thought our mission was to protect these people, not murder them. And they were people, not some subhuman gook, zipper head, or dink.

On a lighter side of my first trips to the bush is the story of the U-Mack Bird. We had just set up at the edge of a tall grass area which gave a fair view of a large open area. As a Corpsman, I did not have to stand line (hole) watch but I did have to stand radio watch at some point during the night. About 0200 (2:00 am) my turn at radio watch came. Handing me the radio, the Marine just lay down and went to sleep. So there I sat --- in the dark --- surrounded by complete alien noises. There was some cluck-cluck sound of who knew what and a shrill buzzing sound like cicadas chirping in the trees. There was the constant buzz of mosquitoes and flies, frogs croaking, but the one sound that really set me off was this audible “Uck-Coo” “Uck-coo” it went --- again and again. The more I listened, the more it sounded like “Fuck you.” “Fuck you” in broken English perhaps but clearly “Fuck you.” I heard of Vietcong shouting at troops just to freak them out so I thought I’d better wake the sergeant and let him know what’s going on.

“Sarg – Sarg! Wake up!”
The sergeant awoke with a “What? Huh? What’s going on?”
“There is someone out there yelling “Fuck You.”

The sergeant listened --- then laughed. “That’s just some damn lizard, Doc. We call him the U-Mack bird. Can I go back to sleep now?”

On another day we were set up in a tree line when I heard this “Hey Doc! Doc! What’s this?” Corpsman had no short list of duties and titles; doctor, therapist, confidant, but today my position became the resident zoologist. It often amazed me how much some of these Marines thought corpsman knew.

“What’s what?” I answered.

This snake moving along that rice paddy dike."

Snake! I had to see that. I got up and jumped right into the machine gun hole. It was a snake alright, about a ten to twelve foot long snake and it was coming along the dike right in front of us. Then as if wanting to watch what was watching it, this huge cobra raised its hooded head right in front of the gun. We did not want to shoot it and give away the machine gun position so we, the snake and us, just stared at each other until the snake lost interest, lowered its head, and continued down the dike.

Yes, snakes were a danger and yes, we lost people to snakes. For example, the S-3 journal records a poisonous snake bite at 0330 July 8th and on the 13th at
2045. An engineer is bitten by a poisonous snake right in the chow hall. The moral of this story: you are never safe in Vietnam, not even at the dinner table.

Danger just did not come from snipers, booby traps, and snakes either. Human error often cost lives. Mistaken for a Vietcong, two members of his own squad shot and killed a Marine on July 14th. Returning to the BN perimeter, particularly at night, was always serious business as at any time an uninformed, half asleep, or overzealous Marine might open up. One particular recipe for disaster was two squads, losing track of each other, like we did the night I was awakened by that blast, and then spotting the movement of the other, opening up. The result would be two Marine squads battling it out with each other until someone figured out what was really happening. When I think of any number of possible horrible events to take home with you, to mistakenly kill a comrade would have to be one of the most undesirable memories I could think of. I feel bad enough about not be able to save them. I can only imagine the torment one must feel knowing he mistakenly killed a comrade.

Up until the 16th of July, life in the bush was fairly much as described. On a daily basis we were sniped at, members of our units either found or stepped on booby traps, a few small fire fights broke out, and every other night I found myself out in some unknown location wishing for the morning to arrive. Too much time existed to think of the things that might go wrong and over time all this uncertainty began to wear on you. The ground you walk on may suddenly turn against you. A snake, seeking warmth, might curl up next to you as you slept. One evening, lying on the ground alongside a trail, grabbing some shut eye, I became aware of something on my chest. I opened up eyes to see two black beady eyes and black nose with whiskers staring back at me not but inches away. It was a big black rat about the size of a cat --- nose to nose to me, twitching his nose as if it just found dinner. In the most coordinated move I have ever made in life, before or after, my right hand came up, grabbed that damn rat by the scarf of its neck and sent it flying in a throw that would have made John Elway envious. Pumped full of adrenaline for the remainder of the night I just sat there and shook.

On July 15th the Da Nang airstrip was hit with rockets. I do not know if the events were related, but the following morning we were loaded on trucks and sent down the road on a company sized operation. I hated those convoys. What a target for any Vietnamese, anyone of which could have been the Vietcong, milling alongside our trucks. One satchel charge or grenade and a half loaded truck of Marines would be on their way home. One or a couple automatic weapons hidden in any building or tree line could have produced mass casualties in a matter of seconds. I always felt like livestock on the way to market when cooped up in the back of one of those trucks.
All along our route, children, any one of which could deliver a bomb, ran out begging for food at any point the trucks slowed or stopped. Most Marines just ignored their pleading hands out stretched in the air, however, one Marine stocked up on discarded C Rations for just such occasions. Anything thrown away, cocoa, bread, meals, that other Marines did not want, he’d stash away to give away anytime he was out among the general population. His favorite recipients were the children, as he felt it was the children that needed aid the greatest. Like some lone missionary, an angel among war gods, he dispensed whatever he salvaged.

Not all were so benevolently inclined however. One Marine in particular was brutal. He would sit at the back of the truck and lure the kids in closer with a can of Rats then instead of handing them the can, he’d haul off and throw it as hard as he could. As a can rebounded off a kid’s chest or head, this Marine would bellow with laughter as the child staggered away often bleeding. In all of my tour this is one event of only a few that I wished I had reacted to stop him. But like a sap I just sat there and observed, saying nothing, an inaction that I regret to this day. Who after all is worse, a lone perpetrator or the crowd which does nothing to stop actions they believe is revolting? While in Vietnam I could make all kinds of excuses for inaction, like being fragged (having a grenade rolled under your rack in the middle of the night by a disgruntled comrade). But now thirty years later, I cannot help but wonder how I could have let such actions occur on my watch. I always pictured myself as more courageous than my actions showed here.

Troops are often spoken of as “the brave” but I’d find it hard to describe my inaction in this case as having anything to do with bravery. Bravery, by my standards, is action taken without consideration for one’s own safety or well-being. Inaction in the face of a reprehensible act can only be seen as consideration for one’s own safety, in this case mine. What would have everyone else thought of my action had I attacked that Marine or reported him? What might be the group’s response? What might his response, then or later, have been? I did not know and I let that piece of the unknown rule my action. I often wondered afterwards what that said about me --- this guy that put on his to do list winning a medal for bravery.

We reached our objective early that afternoon. Unloaded from our livestock trucks we were sent on a sweep along a river when suddenly all hell broke loose. Small arms fire, like numerous strings of fire crackers going off, shattered the silence. Grenades were exploding; howling orders the Marines were charging this hedge row directly in front of us. One Marine jumped in the thicket and immediately following was unleashed a clip of ammo. There was an actual Vietcong (VC) in a shallow hole, shooting at us, and the Marine was making sure that Vietcong was not going to be a threat to anyone thereafter. Swiss cheese would be the best description of that man when he was finally dragged from his hole.
In the meantime, the fateful words of “Corpsman Up!” came from below along the river bank. I jumped up and ran over to the bank to see about twenty feet directly below me two Marines, one of them clinging to a small sand strip at the river’s edge. Climbing down the bank, it became clear I could do nothing for the injured marine other than help him up the bank when the shooting stopped. The injured Marine was lying on his back at river’s edge with no visible wounds. Fleeing a Vietcong he had jumped in the river only to have a grenade follow him in. The concussion of the blast in water tore him up inside; hence we needed to get him on a chopper as soon as possible as his only chance for survival was surgery. But, we had this twenty foot bank to haul him back up and we were receiving fire from the opposite bank about 200 yards away. We laid there as little plumbs of water were thrown in the air by enemy fire impacting all around us. The fire ended with a roar of an angry god as this F104 spread a huge fire ball of napalm all along the other shore line. With that, we were able to get the injured Marine back up the bank and on a chopper. And off he went --- with no news back if he lived or died.\textsuperscript{010}

After that we saddled up (Marine talk for getting ready to leave) again. With the events of the past couple hours fresh in our mind, we started down a trail when not in the too distant future a huge Black cloud rose from a group of trees followed immediately by a deafening blast. I was close enough to feel the concussion. Then came again those dreaded words “Corpsman Up!” When I arrived a few seconds later, Gallagher, the other Corpsman in my platoon, was already busily working away on one of the two WIAs, one marine and one corpsman (Cochran), both of whom had lost their legs. I quickly began doing what I could for the other.

I had not been in Vietnam but a couple of weeks and was completely unprepared for what I, with only two months of Corps School training and Hollywood’s anodyne version of war to draw from, was now facing; two pieces of meat laying on the ground, barely alive. And I was supposed to save them? I could not help but remember in all those movie screen combat scenes, how people shot or hit by artillery rounds simply dropped over, dead perhaps but always intact. As likely as not, their shirts never even got dirty. In reality if they were left with their shirt still on, they were lucky. It was not uncommon for a blast to rip the cloths right off the wounded and unfortunately with those pieces of clothes went chunks of the individual. Looking at those two laying there, both missing legs, I had to wonder if they were not better off dead. Silently, I pondered putting them out of the misery – but I was never alone to have the chance of carrying out what was running through my head.

Instead, I did what I could after which we loaded them on choppers, and off they went --- again, with no news ever if they lived or died.\textsuperscript{011} In retrospect, I ruefully wondered whether these two survived for over two decades. They both did
but for two decades that followed, I knew nothing. I found out about Cochran years later through Dave and Marian Novak who made the trek to Arizona to see Milt. Until then, I simply had no clue if Milt lived or died. I did not know if my efforts mattered or if I did the right thing by not ending his misery?

I visited Milt in Arizona in 2005, twenty eight years later. While still in a great deal of pain, getting through the day on a morphine pump, I found Milt matters to his wife, his children, and grandchildren. Given that, I can now say my actions did matter since it was Cochran (I believed) I worked on. When I think back about Vietnam, one of the experiences that stood out in my mind was loading someone of a chopper, someone who may have been a good friend or valued companion, and off he went with never any news back whether he lived or died. For days or months, if not forever after, I would wonder if those I loaded on choppers made it out alive. How could I find out? What if they did not? Where could I give my last respects? I can relate to those parents who live with the pain and turmoil a missing child might bring? Where is he/she? Is he/she being cared for? In pain? If he/ she is dead, where is the body? Funerals are held for the living, not the dead. While nothing can be done for the dead, a funeral offers closure for the living, a final farewell. Never were we offered an answer to any of these questions. We were just left --- to wonder.

On July 16th, after returning to the battalion area, rumors had it Gunny Thomas wanted to press charges against Casanova after losing his weapon jumping in the river to save his fellow Marine. If anything, I thought, Casanova should have received some sort of medal, battling his way up to the Marine drowning, jumping in the river, and hauling the Marine from the river while all the time still under fire from the opposing shore. Casanova then, disregarding his own life, lay consoling the wounded Marine in clear sight of snipers from the other side of the river. Casanova’s actions, in my mind, deserved a slap on the back, not a slap in the face. If I had any good feelings about the Marine Corps to this point, Thomas, a Marine fundamentalist, quickly set about destroying them.

July 16th was soon followed by July 18th, perhaps an even worse day. At 1050 an M-26 grenade booby trap was tripped resulting two W IAs. Two minutes later another M-26 is found. At 1325 two more Marines are wounded by another booby trap. Moments later more booby traps are found. At 1615 a Marine from the third platoon moved a chair in an abandoned house and if what the Corpsman, talking about incident, claims was true, the Marine watched as one of his testicles flew by his face in the resulting explosion. Then came my first death. The third platoon of Hotel called for a med-evac at 2300 for one W I A (Wounded in Action) only to change the call a few minutes later to a K I A (Killed in Action). Pfc Paul MacKay was shot dead by friendly fire, in this case by one of his fellow Marines.
My July 19th letter admits that I ran into some action but I gave no details, just a “Well, I expected that (the action).” Though out my tour, few details were ever given as to what we were really up against as I did not want to worry my parents. None the less, booby traps, snipers, and accidents were always on my mind. The bridge just south of Da Nang is mentioned in this letter and will become an important part of my tour. From the time I arrived in Vietnam, bridge duty at the Cau Do Bridge was portrayed as the best duty anyone could wish for. Hotel Company was looking forward to bridge duty and getting out of what they called the bush. For now, however, the war continued to roll along with night patrols, ambushes, battling ghosts, dodging booby traps, avoiding snipers and trigger happy Marines like the one that shot MacKay. The wounded and dead were beginning to pile up but never in my letters were they ever mentioned. Dead were Sgt Stephen Dibb of Foxtrot LCpl James Huckabee of Hotel, both KIA July 21st.

Jim Groth
A Hometown School Friend Killed in Action;
picture complements of Enderlin Independence

Approximately July 22nd my incoming mail caught up with me. Anxious to hear from home, the first letter I received told of Jim Groth. Jim was MIA (missing in action). This was news I did not want to get. Jim wasn’t just somebody, another face in the crowd. Jim was close enough to me that he dated my sister. A good athlete, he frustrated me, normally known as a good hitter, at bat from his pitcher’s mound, blowing curve and knuckle balls past me. I remembered his back yard basketball hoop where he almost always put me on the bench in the game of horse. He was a lifelong acquaintance but now he was missing in this hell hole. Jim was one of the mellowest people I knew. Dying in war was not something that only other people did anymore. War had come home and by taking a lifelong friend. With my tour only beginning, Jim’s death represented a grim reality of what I might be in for.

I cannot speak for Jim here, for I do not know how he would have seen the reason for his death. I do know this however. Jim was never known as a fighter. He was never known as a violent person. My guess is he simply preformed what his country coerced him into doing and for doing so, his life was lost. I doubt he
willing gave his life. Had he been given the choice between jail and death, he most likely would have taken jail. But dying in a war is never presented as a matter of choice. There is no sign at the induction center that reads “enter here and die.” There is not even a sign that states enter here and take your chances. Instead a person is given the choice between the military and jail, not jail or their life. Most see the military as simply giving up a small amount of time and returning home and like most, I suspect, Jim had aspirations of just putting in his time, getting through it, and going home. Jim went home alright and has never left.

I did get some good news the same day I learned of Jim’s death, however, which helped to offset some of the bad news. I was up for E-4, just like it was explained to me at Camp Pendleton. Making E-4 now would put me right in line for E-5 upon my return to the states just as I planned. My military career, if that is what I chose, seemed right on track. Meanwhile, back in the world (the USA) a Roman Catholic archbishop appealed to President Johnson to withdraw from Vietnam. At the same time a Gallop poll reports that 52 percent of the American people disapproved of President Johnson’s handling of the war. Over 40 percent of Americans felt that sending troops to Vietnam was a mistake. 56 percent Americans believed at best the United States is only treading water or worse; we, the Vietnam Veterans, not America, were losing the war. America after all does not lose wars.

Regiment: Poker and Beer

My July 30th 1967 letter places me at the First Marine Regiment. Life, or so we thought, was about to get better. If nothing else, the area was more secure. We still had patrols at night but nothing overnight. Few, if any, booby traps were encountered or were we constantly harassed by snipers. Compared to the rest of our battalion, we were on vacation as our battalion’s casualty records confirmed. While every other company of 2-1 was receiving KIAs, Hotel, now taking their turn at regiment, was not. To compare the differences in lifestyles between Battalion and Regiment, I cannot, for example, recall simple things like where in battalion I hung my hat if I ever did. I do not recall if I slept in a tent with the Marines or up at the Battalion Aid Station (BAS) with the Corpsmen if I did either. At battalion, I do remember spending many nights with the Arvin’s at the Anthill where we ran numerous night patrols. I hated the evenings when I had to go out on patrol with Arvin forces. I had often been told the Arvins were not much of a fighting force. Some were rumored to just run away should a fire (gun) fight break out. When on patrols with the Arvins, thoughts of infiltrators, Communists in Southern Uniforms, and cowards ran through my mind constantly.
In fairness, the Arvins always got me back safely. In fact, I cannot remember a single casualty while on patrol with the Arvins, which to my untrusting mind raised a few questions --- like why not? Why were these guys so good at avoiding contact with the Vietcong and booby traps? In reality the idea that Arvins were poor fighters had as much to do with Marine Corps vanity as anything else. I often heard the Army was not good fighters either. As for why the Arvins missed contact, so did the Marines. Rarely, if ever, did we make contact after dark hence wondering why the Arvins never made contact was perhaps more the workings of my insecure mind. Never did any Arvin that I ever served with discredit his country’s war effort or deserve the negative connotations that were associated to them. I know that now. I did not know that then.

The other reason why I do not remember much about where I spent my time at battalion was quite likely because I spent very little time at battalion. A platoon of Marines consisted of three Marine squads but only two Corpsmen. Each night the Marines rotated, one squad headed for the bush, the second squad headed to the anthill, while the third remained at battalion for a rest, a movie, a dinner and perhaps a couple of beers to wash it down. The problem was whenever a squad of Marines left, they took a Corpsman with them; hence if you do the math, the Corpsmen were either in the bush or at the Anthill. Therefore one night I was out with the snakes, snipers, and grenade throwers in Indian Country or I was surrounded at the Anthill with people I did not understand or trust, the Arvins. In short, justified or not, I existed in a constant state of terror that I just resigned myself to.

Regiment changed all that. I remember where I slept at Regiment. I remember going to the club. I can recall events that were not related to the war in nature, like playing cards and chess. Mostly I remember the showers. I think back to the day a squad of Marines and I were enjoying in a nice warm shower when some zapper opened up outside perimeter and sent splinters of wood flying inward from the walls. Nothing but assholes was pointing up in that shower. As serious as the situation was then, it is just one of those things you remember and laugh about today when old vets gather together.
Medcaps: To Win the Hearts and Minds of the Vietnamese

While at regiment, part of my duties, as explained to me by the forces that be, was to win the hearts and minds of the local people. Twice a week or so, a squad of Marines would lead me off to some neighboring village where people would gather around me with their children and their assortment of ailments. There I, with my three months of first aid training, peroxide and band-aids, was supposed to take care of whatever ailed them. “Bac-si, Bac-si” (Vietnamese for doctor) they would chant, but I felt more like a witch doctor given the medical problems they brought to me. Fragmentation wounds, massive ear and eye infections, unimaginable skin rot, dysentery, parasites, malnutrition, malaria, broken limbs, puss oozing scabs, names just a few common problems.

On one of those days, in the mist of providing what treatment I was capable of, this lady, looking twice her age, motioned for me to follow her. I wasn’t sure if I should go with her but she kept pleading with hand jesters that could not help reveal her pain. She led me to her grass hut where in a portioned off small room laid her son. His head appeared to be about twice the size of the infant he appeared to be. His abdomen bulged out like a huge boil. His arms and legs were hardly as big as round as my M-16’s barrel. Today, I know that I was looking at a child on the brink of starvation but at the time I wasn’t sure. Starvation was not something I was trained to diagnosis. I didn’t know if I should touch him or not. Whatever he had, I did not want it. The child was med-evaced to Da Nang, again with no news back of his prognosis. This child’s condition again was left to my imagination, wondering if I had caught any disease or not.

As for the lady, she gave me a lesson in life I never forgot. Clearly she felt shame for not being able to provide for her own child’s welfare. Her son’s
condition was not something she wished to share with her fellow villagers. Ashamed of being unable to provide for their offspring, parents, I learned, do not display their starving children in the public arena. To observe these children takes looking in the back alleys, secluded rooms, or other places hidden from the public eye. If starvation exists and is clearly viewable in the public domain, it is likely starvation is so wide spread that no attempt to hide it could ever hope to succeed.

Sometime later on another med-cap, I was sitting in this village surrounded by a group of children and their mothers when down the trail came about a half dozen Buddhist monks. All decked out in the orange robes and birthday shoes, these monks proceeded to the center of the village and began burning incense, chanting, and performing whatever hocus-pocus Buddhists monks do. It did not take too long before all the mothers began gathering up their children to join these monks. I was told by a few bystanders that the monks were healing the children.

From where I sat, it appeared more like a magic show, a side show that went on for fifteen minutes or so. Then bowing and passing out blessings like leaflets in a door to door campaign, the monks turned around and began to leave. Before they left however, they proceeded to help themselves to whatever these villagers had in the form of rice or produce. Then they were gone and the children were no better off, at least that I could see, than before they came. In fact, it could argued the children were worse off since the Monks helped themselves to the very thing the children needed most, their family’s food stock which was always in limited supply.

While it was easy to see the idiocy of the religion that I had just witnessed, a bunch of nonsense passed off in return for food and social status, I uncomfortably found myself making correlations to my own religion. A door was thrown open to a room I had never seen until now and in that doorway I stood looking in. Eating that bread, drinking the wine, the prayers, the music, the burning of incense, the bells and chimes, the choir --- was that just all show?

**CHIEU HOI: An Open Arms Program; Friends or Foes**

A Chieu Hoi was in Marine language a Vietcong who had converted and came to the aid of American or Vietnamese forces. They supposedly offered information on enemy positions, troop strength, or just basic field knowledge like how to identify a booby trap or where a booby trap
most likely would be located. Often Chieu Hois were used as scouts both by the South Vietnamese and the Marines.

The Chieu Hoi program, the most expensive psychological operation of the Vietnam War was, according to Midshipman Jason Thomas Chaput in a 2000 AD thesis, the brainchild of Rufus Phillips and Sir Robert Thompson, head of the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam Thompson has been credited with introducing the Chieu Hoi Program to Vietnam’s then President Ngo Dinh Diem. In spite of this the United States wanted the credit for the Chieu Hoi Program and came out with the government booklet, Chieu Hoi and National Reconciliation, which claimed the Chieu Hoi Program was originated in the minds of the Agency for International Development in 1962. 014

The idea of the program was to attract Vietcong to what the propaganda of America and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) called “the just cause of the RVN.” The Vietnamese word “Chieu” means to appeal and “Hoi” means “to return.” Taken together Chieu Hoi is a call for the Vietcong to return to their family, South Vietnam. The theme song of the Chieu Hoi translated into English lyrics reads “Bird, fly home to your warm nest.” 015

As it turned out, the program was hailed as a great success. On paper, in dollars alone, the Chieu Hoi Program saved the governments of America and Vietnam millions of dollars as the average cost to convert one Communist to the Chieu Hoi Program was figured around $127 compared to the estimated $300,000 it took to kill one Vietcong. By April of 1975 it was estimated that somewhere around 150,000 Vietcong and members of the Communist under-ground converted to the Republic of South Vietnam with as many as 15,000 being North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regulars. Many of these converted Communist fought bravely against their former comrades and one, Lieutenant La Thanh Tone, who defected to the Khe Sanh Military Base on January 28, 1968, is credited with saving the base by providing the Marines the NVA’s battle plan. 016

Of course, none of the information given to me about the Chieu Hois mattered. If it could be said that I never trusted the Arvins, nothing needs to be said about how much faith and trust I put into these former Communists. They were trying to kill us once and still could be as Chieu Hoi infiltrators. And yet, on occasion I’d discover myself being led off to what I always feared was my life’s end by Chieu Hois. On these occasions, I would not sleep all night. Rarely would my eyes be taken off them or my finger from the trigger. From my eyes, Chieu Hois were the most scrutinized people within the boundaries of Vietnam. They converted once --- why not twice?

On one of our visits to the anthill I did get into a conversation during a poker game with a Chieu Hoi who spoke fluent English. Vietnamese liked poker too and if they were not good at anything else they were good losers, always gracious. In
the course of the game, the topic turned to the war effort. I wanted to know how the Communists ever thought they had any chance against the United States. This Chieu Hoi’s answer surprised me. In his words, North Vietnam had no intention of defeating the United States on the battlefield. If victory meant having to defeat the United States on the battlefield, the North Vietnamese would have abandoned their war effort the instant it became clear that the United States was entering the war. “No,” said the Chieu Hoi, “the hope of North Vietnam winning the war relies upon the anti-war demonstrations developing on the soils of the United States and around the world. If the United States was to be defeated, the conquest would be on the political front, not the battlefront.”

Most importantly, the North Vietnamese reached out to the American people, making the distinction between the anti-war movement and our government. For a people facing American bombs, this was a heroic, calculated, and principled gesture. I realized how heroic it was when I met some of the victims of our own bombing and heard them transcend blind rage in order to send greetings to the American anti-war movement. Politically, the Vietnamese always believed in the importance of the anti-war movement as small and impotent as it may have appeared to some of its supporters. They encouraged it as best they could, knowing that creating a climate of hostility to the USA’s war effort would be one important way winning a favorable outcome for them.

Hearing the Chieu Hoi describe how the anti-war movement was inspiring North Vietnam to remain in the war was the first hostile feeling I felt against the anti-war movement. To that date, I had seen the anti-war movement as just that, a movement to end war, not as a movement to end the war in Vietnam. While I had reservations about Vietnam and my contribution to it, my thinking was more toward ending all war even if that meant fighting a few minor wars like Vietnam was in my eyes. I thought of Vietnam like back burning to save a forest from fire. Back burning is lighting a series of smaller easily controlled fires in front of the main fire to consume the tinder before the larger, much hotter uncontrollable fire arrives. I saw the United States’ effort in Vietnam as back burning.

This Chieu Hoi cast a very negative net over the anti-war protestors that increasingly seemed to be taking their eyes off war while glaring at us, the U.S. soldiers. Furthermore, now desperately attempting to save the lives or limbs of many of my comrades cast into the Vietnam War, those who willingly looked forward to a real cowboy and Indian game, those coerced like me who joined the service in an effort to avoid being drafted, or those forced by the draft or court committed, I found it increasingly difficult to sustain any positive feelings about the anti-war efforts. If what this Chieu Hoi claimed was true that those in the United States screaming, “Get out of Vietnam,” were fueling North Vietnam’s fire by giving them hope that the United States commitment to South Vietnam would
dissipate. Saying this however --- does not mean that I changed my mind on war. I still believed, and still believe, that humanity would be best served if the human race could somehow outlaw war and disarm all nations’ militaries.

The Bridge: A Questionable Summer Vacation Spot

My August 10th 1967 letter home placed us, Hotel Company, at the Bridge, that theoretical tropical rest and relaxation resort just slightly south of Da Nang on Hwy 1. And indeed, a resort best describes duty at the Bridge. There was swimming, beer, ice, Dolly’s place at the south end of bridge where Marines fraternized with the local girls and Da Nang with its commissaries and clubs was just up the road to the north. In terms of what I had seen in Vietnam up to this point, the Bridge, assuming all was secure, was the best duty a combat soldier could wish for --- in Vietnam that is.

But I remembered being told right off, from Corps School to Field Med School “You are never safe in Vietnam.” All the training I had ever taken reinforced that and to date, I had seen no reason to doubt it. As such, anywhere I went I scrupulously examined the area for any weakness in security that might leave me vulnerable. The movie theater made famous by the shot in the dark, for example, was open to a long range sniper lying out in the rice paddies on the other side of our perimeter. The showers at Regiment were exposed to small arms fire, which we had already found out, if some shooter decided throwing a few rounds at it was worth the risk. Now we were at this bridge, a supposedly safe bridge where everyone celebrated and life was easy. So why was I feeling so uncomfortable?
Two French bunkers (upper right of picture) sat at each end of the bridge. These were strong cement structures capable of withstanding considerable force, particularly small arms, rifle grenades, or small mortars which most likely represented the armament that would be used against this position. The inside could have easily supported a number of racks for those merely sleeping and not out defending the perimeter. But the Marines had some problem with fortified bunkers and protective perimeters. The Marines believed in being the aggressor, not the defender, and I think, given my limited military study, that their idea became something of an obsession carried to an extreme. They preferred a machine gun on top of the bunker (notice sandbag bunker on top of cement bunker) giving a wider range of fire than firing through some small hole in the wall of a bunker might provide. That I could understand. What I could not understand was exposing the noncombatants to enemy fire when structures such as these bunkers could have proved far better security than the screen hooches we ended up sleeping in.

The hooches at the bridge were very similar to the wooden framed, screened hooches at battalion. The two hard back hooches at the bridge were built of 2X4 frames to which plywood and screens made up the sides, plywood made the floor, and tin sheet medal covered the roof. These were quite comfortable structures given that we had a cot to sleep on and protection from mosquitoes offered by the screening. They were however, vulnerable to enemy attack. Small arms would have had no problem penetrating them and being up off the ground left them precariously susceptible to things like satchel charges being thrown under them.

Apparently these hooches, as was the area, were thought of as secure. In reality though, they were a death trap. Worse yet was a tree line right in front of those hard back hooches, close enough that a well thrown grenade could have
easily reached, a sobering thought if you happened to be a Corpsman that slept in one. To add to our vulnerability, Highway 1 existed about 12 feet above those hooches forming a steep bank which required ascending should a ground assault come from that tree line. Even if missed by a grenade or RPG, the fired round would detonate on that bank directly behind those hooches making any escape to the highway above extremely hazardous.

To my knowledge, the other side of that greenery was totally unprotected. No known positions existed in front of those hooches and whatever protection offered them would have depended on Marines positioned above on Highway 1 or the gun site located atop the French Bunker. I shuttered to think how easy it would have been to sneak in under the cover of darkness and from that greenery just pick people off milling around. I was told that the bridge was perfectly safe, yet not once did I ever feel comfortable while there. “But hey, have faith;” I’d tell myself, “I’m sure those responsible for our safety have taken all these seemingly short sighted breaches in our security into consideration.”

My main job while at the bridge was caring for everyone’s bumps and bruises, passing out Malaria tabs, med-caps, and determining who might need to be transported back to BAS or Da Nang for further medical treatment. Always a concern was venereal disease. Corpsmen were not known as “Pecker Checkers” for nothing. Rumors spread about a particular strain of syphilis, Black Syph, as being incurable; however, that rumor was pure myth. Gonorrhea was another matter. Some strains of gonorrhea had become quite resistant to antibiotics. One urinary tract infection obtained through sexual intercourse, nonspecific urethritis (NSU), was beyond the reach of modern medicine although it was largely benign beyond a burning sensation on urination and a clear discharge from the urethra.

Venereal disease in a Marine combat unit in Vietnam? The question might be asked “From where did these sexually transmitted diseases arise?” R&R was one source. Once during a tour in Vietnam, each soldier was granted R&R where he would be flown to some safe location as Australia, Bangkok, Taiwan, or Hawaii for five days of rest and relaxation (R&R). Many wild oats were sown during these short vacations often resulting in one parent Asian families with Asian-American offspring. The United States would discover this years later. Many of these racially mixed children were raised in extreme poverty; these children were also subject to racism, shunned by their peers, and refused equal stature by their government, in their case, the Asian governments. Efforts by the United States would be made years later to retrieve these children, but I suspect many died and many still remained paying the price for consequences of other human beings’ misbehavior.

I was also no angel and am tortured from time to time wondering if there is a child, now a middle age adult, wondering the streets of Bangkok who looks a lot
like me. I do not wonder about leaving a child in Vietnam. I stayed away from Vietnamese women. In fact, I stayed away from Vietnamese altogether. I did not trust Vietnamese. In Bangkok however, things were different. There in a relatively safe environment with five days to make up for what was lost in a half year, woman everywhere buddy up to any available American serviceman hoping for a ticket out of country, the temptation was too much for this sexually deprived young man.

Another source of VD and perhaps as great of problem was the local Vietnamese girls. I’d like to say women but girls really best describe those I saw. Marines often eloped at night to visit the local population or these young ladies were secretly ushered into the compound. I was invited on a number of these excursions however declined for a number of reasons. For example, rumors often circulated of Marines murdered in houses of ill repute. Rumors also circulated that women were inserting razors into their vaginas. How? I had no idea but I really had no desire to test whether the rumor was true or not.

Everyone knew these excursions into the night were occurring. When called into question, however, these excursions were justified with words like, “It’s human nature, Doc,” by those whose jobs should have demanded a closer attention to protocol. My declining these offers by those wishing to justify their own behavior by having everyone else around them involved in the same behavior, like teenagers and cigarettes, was often challenged with comments like, “What, Doc, you gay?” No --- I was not gay but in spite of the homophobia displayed by military, homosexuality did exist as some dirty little secret among the ranks and possibly contributed to a number of cases of venereal disease itself.

One day a Marine lured a young lady (12-13) into the French Bunker on the southwest corner of the bridge. I am unclear about the consensual nature of this ordeal, whether it was agreed among the participants, prostitution, or rape. In any case, with the two in the bunker, performing sex, another Marine decided to harass the two by smoking them out. A smoke grenade was tossed in and as the grenade detonated, considerable damage was done to the young girl’s foot.

The Marines brought her to me. While they wanted me to help her out, they did not want news of this event getting out. They leveled the threat, which was not uncommon, at me that should command find out about this, things may not go very well for me the next time we headed to the bush. I knew what that meant and was wise enough, or cowardly enough, not to take it lightly. So I cleaned up the girl’s wound the best I could with my band-aids and hydrogen peroxide, wrapped up her foot, and sent her on her way. To this day I wonder what happened to her. I wonder whether she made it or died of infection, tetanus, gangrene, or any number of things that my treatment did not cover. When I reflect on Vietnam, this event stands out as one of those breaches of moral fiber I would like to believe I
possessed. I tell myself regularly, I should have stood up and took the moral stand that I thought I was capable of and reported these individuals even it meant possible personal harm down the way. I’d like to believe that I was more courageous than I turned out to be. Oh, little girl, where and how are you now? And I wondered “What does this say about me?”

The treatment of these young Vietnamese girls does bring up a sexual incident that surfaced decades later after returning to the States. It turns out that a former Marine known to me in later years, ended up serving a prison sentence for child molestation. When I first got word of this, I had to wonder about the residual sexual mentality of those who, in Vietnam, sought sexual pleasures from these young ladies or watched from the sidelines as many did. Did some of this prevailing mentality, that age was not a consideration, come home with these veterans? If it was acceptable to sexually assault young girls in Vietnam, it really is not that far of a stretch to ask, “What is wrong with having sexual relationships with children period?”

Now --- this is extremely difficult to write about because of its potentially inflammatory nature but I believe it needs to be asked. To not ask is to evade some of the turmoil that goes on my in head. I am sure this behavior occurred all over Vietnam or for that matter anywhere servicemen in general have been isolated in a location where the only sexual gratification attainable was/is young girls offered up by desperate families. Could a correlation between child abuse (state side) and these returning servicemen be made and if so what is the government’s responsibility to the children assaulted by these returning veterans? For that matter, what is the United States’ responsibility to those women and children in Vietnam, the Philippines, Okinawa, Cambodia, or anywhere else such behavior is knowingly allowed by those responsible for maintaining protocol?

I, for one, could testify that those who contacted a venereal disease while serving with my unit, whose sexual contact was limited to the young girls of Vietnam, never had any disciplinary action brought against them. I cannot state that my statement is true in all cases, but were at least true for those I witnessed. I have no doubt that if the records were scanned with careful scrutiny, my observation that no one was punished for this behavior would be found more true than false. I wonder how prevalent this behavior still remains with those who were involved in or witnessed it in Vietnam, not to mention anywhere troops are isolated in locations where prostitution of young girls may be seen by the local residents as a remedy for their economic survival.

A tough question for sure. I took the liberty to explore the question of whether anyone has done any research on returning veterans and child molestation stateside. What I found was very inconclusive. For example, a returned Ex-Marine captain, Michael Joseph Pepe, age 53, was arrested in Phnom Penh by Cambodian
police for sexually abusing four girls ages 9-12. No details were giving regarding this man’s military career, hence at this point it is even unknown if he served in Vietnam. Judging by his age, it is likely he missed Vietnam. That however does not remove the possibility that he may have been involved in conduct similar to that exhibited in Vietnam at some other military location. In fact, Cambodia would be one of those economically depressed areas where such behavior would be expected.

At this point research on the question whether returning veterans have a higher incidence of sexually assaulting children has not showed up in the literature. No correlation between veterans and child molestation therefore can be made. The fact that this topic has not shown up in the literature, however, can only mean two things. Either it really is not worth mention --- or no one has ever looked at it. Anyway, we simply do not know how having sex with children in the military influences sexual behavioral later in life. I believe a study of sexual molestation by veterans returning from these regions would be a topic worthy of further study, a great graduate paper for those in sociology or psychology.

GEORGE GALLAGHER:
Picture complements of Marian Novak

Then came the early morning of August 29th. This just happened to be my day at regiment. George Gallagher, the other Corpsman in my platoon, was at the bridge. I have no idea what I did the evening of the 28th. I likely played poker, hung out in the club, and climbed into the sack about 2200 like usual, but this was not to be a usual night. Unbeknown to me, at 0235 small arms fire was reported at the bridge but command did not believe the bridge was under attack at that time. No doubt, command simply assumed the bridge was receiving a few harassing rounds. At 0245, First Tanks received about fifteen incoming 60mm mortar rounds. Then at 0255 a large explosion was reported at the Cau Do Bridge. The bridge was officially labeled as under attack at 0315.
Lt Dave Novak, asleep at regiment, wasted no time. The instant he had heard that the bridge was being assaulted, Dave ordered the Marines in his platoon to saddle up. A few moments later Dave and his platoon of Marines were on their way to the bridge. A few mortars fell around them but Dave states he did not know if it was “friendly fire” or not, nor did he care. Getting to the bridge was his objective. Then came a loud blast and the bridge was down. Arriving at the bridge a few moments later, a fire fight was in progress on the north side. Being there to reinforce his troops, Dave led his reinforcements to the north side by crossing the fallen twisted metal bridge. By then, however, the attack had fairly well subsided.

I was awakened early that morning before sunrise and given the news. We were needed at the bridge. So we saddled up and down the road we went, arriving at the bridge just before sunrise. We struggled getting to the north side of the bridge through the twisted steel and broken boards, but it was passable. About all we got to see of the fighting was what I was told was a dead Vietcong being loaded on a chopper.

George Gallagher, HN, died that morning of August 29th. Actually, a number of young men died that morning in the violence that ensued but most of them were Vietcong. No one seemed to care much about them. In actuality none of the dead were any more or less tragic than the others from where I sat. All were human beings. All had a family somewhere. All were likely being exploited by the powers that be regardless of which side of the battle they were on. Only two months in country and already I was having serious questions about why and what we were doing there. Reverence for human life it seemed had been lost. Certainly here, in the place, life was not sacred.

My thoughts did not speak for most. One death was by far more significant than any of the others and that was George Gallagher. Gallagher was “Doc.” Everyone knew Doc. Even today if I happen to attend a reunion of my old comrades, people, faceless people, never before realized people, walk up to me and say, “Hi ya Doc. Do you remember the time that…” and I have to stop them and inquire who they are. It does not mean I was anything special in real life or
inattentive. I just happened to be one of two corpsmen the Marines depended on to keep them alive. There were far more Marines for Corpsmen to remember than Corpsmen for Marines to remember. In fact, if you do the math, Marines outnumbered Corpsmen about twenty to one. To make remembering people more complicated, people were rotating in and out all the time. About the time you got to know anyone, he either rotated back to the States or transferred or med-evaced or worse dead. Then add about twenty years to that mix of things to remember and you are standing in my shoes.

What little I knew about George, as we rarely got to spend any time together, was that he was a likeable guy. He had this little goatee and humor to go with it, able to make anyone forget for the moment the horrors of war. He was far more outgoing than me, able to slide into a group and make himself at home effortlessly. In terms of his duties, he knew what he was doing. George could be depended on. With George in the squad or platoon, if it was your bad day, George was there to try keep “your” bad day from becoming “thee” day. George, many Marines felt, was not just “Doc.” George was a respected and valued friend.

To me, George was the other Corpsman. Given that two of the three squads in the platoon were usually out each night and each took a Corpsman, George and I, although in the same platoon, rarely saw each other. When we went to regiment later in July, the two of us rotated back and forth between regiment and the bridge. One night George would be at regiment and I at the bridge. The next night it would reverse, George would be at the bridge and I at regiment. We were very close in that regard being the opposite hand of the same body. The night George died, sleeping in one of those hooches pictured below (Native Enderlin Marine James Clark in photo) at the foot of Hwy 1, had it been the evening before or after, it would have been me who died that early morning --- a sobering thought for sure.

What George never was, however, was the marvel that through death he became. Have you ever competed against a dead person? It’s impossible. No matter how good or bad an individual may have been, after death they made no mistakes. If the dead were liked at all, it becomes taboo to say anything bad about the dead or to even hint at the fact that he might have been just another average person. We do not honor nearly as much those who survived war as those who died fighting it.
How we ended up, dead or alive, while simply fate we speak of those that gave the ultimate sacrifice as heroes whether they got shot in the back running away or not. Somehow, after being dead, none of that matters.

Who it may matter to however are those that survived and must live in the shadow of the dead. A common complaint of many who have lost a sibling, for example, is that suddenly in the eyes of their parents, they’ll never measure up to their dead sibling. This horrible weigh is too often hung around a surviving sibling’s neck who himself may be in mourning. And after the death of Gallagher, I found myself in the position of never being able to measure up to George.

While stating that I lived in the shadow of George may seem like a pathetic statement, the truth is I did, and for that matter still do. I have no argument with anyone whether George was a better corpsman than I --- such is simply an individual’s personal opinion anyway. It’s the common often heard words like, “If Dead X could have been here, things would have been came out better,” or, “If Dead X would have been here, he would have done things a different way,” or, “You’ll never be another Dead X, ” that over time begins to gnaw at the living’s self-image as it surely did mine. Such statements only pick away at the heart of the living, whether made purposely meant to harm or not.

More importantly, soldiers depend on the living, not the dead, to get them through. It would serve the survivors well to protect the self-image of their living comrades rather than comparing them to the dead. The dead are dead. Give them their burial and let them rest in peace. My advice to the troops: Support the living around you, even those abhorred, for your own life depends far more on the living than the dead.

The days that followed were mostly uneventful for Hotel Company. Other than a few booby traps, Hotel suffered no KIAs and received only a few WIAs during the month of September. About the largest event recorded in the month of September, Hotel 3 reacted to rockets being fired at the Da Nang Airbase. Searching the area a number rockets tubes, seven still armed, were found before they could be launched. Only light damage to two aircraft and one Air Force KIA was suffered at the airbase that evening. 020

By the beginning of September, Con Thien and the DMZ, by what little news we received, seemed to be the hot spots of the war, but between the 4th and 7th of September, one hundred and fourteen members of the 5th Marines were killed in the Queson Valley, the site of Operation Union where our Fox Company (2/1) took heavy casualties in April about twenty five miles to our south. 021 At the same time, Thieu was elected to a four year term as president of South Vietnam with only 35% of the vote. Two days before the election, Thieu, in spite his claim that he supported free speech and freedom of the press, suppressed two Saigon papers. Claims made by Thieu’s opposition parties suggested the vote was rigged
in favor of Thieu and by month’s end large protests against the election erupted in Saigon, Da Nang, and Hue.  

The rumor was out that the Vietcong would be out in force to disrupt the elections and that we would be called upon to defend the ballot boxes but the call never came. At the club and card games, the election was perhaps the last thing on the mind of the average Marine; but for me, it brought to mind all the reasons that I was led to believe I came here to defend; free elections, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble. If it turned out that the powers for which I fought did not honor these basic human rights, what was I doing there? What were we doing there? Does it really matter from which side totalitarianism comes?  

And did anyone care? No evidence existed of anyone caring at the club. Maybe members of the upper class in larger Vietnamese cities thought the elections were important but all I saw were the common people, the peasant farmers and villagers. No evidence existed to suggest that these little people we saw on a daily basis, planting rice, peddling make shift waterwheels like bikes for irrigation, and laboring behind their water buffalo, cared at all. It seemed all they cared about was raising their crops to provide substance for their families. Under which political system they performed this basic survival task mattered little. On September 17th I wrote two letters home. Two letters; two different messages. The letter to my brother was an attempt to be light hearted. I rehashed our battle at the bridge on August 29th but then add some light hearted writing:  

Last night we went out to an Arvin compound and talk about a blast. We got half looped on Tiger Beer, panther piss we call it, and ate rice with mixed with fish. The fish we ate whole, head, guts, bones and all. What a treat. I’ll have a gut ache for a week and probably worms till I die.  

It should be noted that although Hotel did not take any KIAs during the month of September and for the most part enjoyed reasonably comfortable living conditions, we operated in an area where just a few weeks before the security at our bridge had been breached and our unit overran. Only a short distance away was Indian Country where Vietcong battalions roamed unopposed. To our south, the 5th Marines had just taken heavy casualties in Queson Valley; hence we had no reason to believe that we were operating in a secure area. Even if we were, that could change at any time given Da Nang, only a few miles north, was one of North Vietnam’s primary objectives and we were positioned directly between them and Da Nang.
As many saw the war, it was as if us on the bottom, the grunts, were alone, fighting to safeguard our own existence against numerous foes. The war threatened our lives from both sides. On one side obviously was the Vietcong. On the other side was often some zealous US commanding officer asking us to perform life threatening missions for causes that were becoming more and more obscure. I truly believe that for combatants to give it their all, they must either be in immediate peril or believe strongly in what they are fighting for. We, rarely around Da Nang, found ourselves in immediate peril in the days to come but when we did, we were a force to be recognized with. A fully armed fire team of Marines had at their disposal an amazing amount of fire power and could dish it out. As for believing in what we were doing; what were we doing and for whom were we doing it for?

Although many felt exactly the same way I did, most never expressed their views. I was never much good at keeping my mouth shut and on occasion would get into a verbal exchange with those who fully supported the war effort, believed we were winning, or actually enjoyed the real game of cowboy and Indians. I did not believe, given the rules of engagement, that the war could be won and even if it could I wondered what kind of country we’d give back to the Vietnamese after the war was over. A bomb crater perhaps? What do you do with a bomb crater? Thousands of square miles of defoliated rain forest? A genetically deformed generation to care for their war mutilated parents? As for resources, maybe, if they could round up enough unexploded ordnance, they could make a living selling it for scrap medal.

Whether I won the argument or not, my opinion as viewed by gung ho, kill a commie for mommy, Marines (not all Marines fit into this category) were taken as cowardice. Often their rebuttal was accompanied with threats on my life. “If you (being me) do not respond to the call of Corpsman Up,” they would threaten “I’ll shoot you myself” is the threat I normally heard. To respond to the call of Corpsman Up” however, I did not have to believe in the war. A man was seriously hurt and whether ours or theirs, never did my feelings against the war prevent me from getting to a wounded man. It was not the support of the war I was responding to. In my mind, I was saving a human life. All those threats did was to strengthen my resolve against the war. If I had to keep one eye on those who were supposed to be covering my back, I did not want to be there at all.

In the coming years, speaking to other Corpsmen, it is not uncommon to hear the same complaint. Other corpsmen often operated under death threats from members of their unit. I doubt, however, that such threats were exclusively directed at Corpsmen. I suspect many Marines received the same threats by a handful of individuals, bullies for a lack of a better word, who assumed they were the only brave hearts fighting the war. Threats do nothing for morale and are, in my mind, completely counterproductive. I doubt any evidence would exist to support the idea
that threats in any way improve performance. On the other hand, all threats achieve is added stress, an ingredient those in combat carry enough of already. I would have no trouble coming up with reports on the negative effects of stress.

CHAPTER FIVE
Quang Tri, a Life Transformed

Quang Tri 101: Half our Company gone

On the 3\textsuperscript{rd} of October, Hotel and Fox Companies along with the Battalion Command Group were loaded on trucks and sent north to Quang Tri.\footnote{Our Hotel accommodations were about to be redefined. Gone would be the hot showers. Gone would be evenings at the club. Gone would be swimming at the bridge. Gone would be sleeping on cots with rubber ladies (air mattresses). Hotel (H) Company found itself checking out of the Hilton and checking into Hell.}

Our first night in Quang Tri was spent amongst the fallen bricks of abandoned brick buildings barely anything but a bullet riddled piles of stone. Rumor had it that these buildings were what remained of an overrun Arvin compound. Adding to the intensity was the constant rumbling of exploding ordinance within earshot to the north. Come night fall the northern horizon became flashing domes of light. Someone to our immediate north was being bombed or shelled constantly. Who was being bombed or shelled was left to the rumor mills and our imagination. Were we, US troops, bombing them? If so, there must be a bunch of them. Or were they shelling us? If the NVA (North Vietnamese Army) were shelling us, how far south could their guns reach? Were we in range? In either case, it was clear that our methods of conducting this war were about to change.

The following day found us moving west and setting up our new battalion area on Hill 25 just outside of Quang Tri. Unlike Da Nang where we slept in JP tents large enough for half a platoon, three shelter halves roofed by a foxhole cover became home for three (see picture last page). I shared my space with Wayne Baxter and Andy Baker. Baker, to help make light of our
situation, walked around half the time with an inflatable rubber leg, claiming he
 got some leg last night. The days of getting some leg however were over for the
 Marines. Slipping off in the night to a close village was no longer an option. No
 village or civilian here was to be considered friendly. Perhaps a few resourceful
 Marines slipped in a lady here or there but if they did, I did not know about it. To
 say the least, the problem of venereal disease declined.

 As for our operations around Quang Tri, command wasted no time in
 ordering us into the field. One village targeted as a Vietcong stronghold lied within
 clear view of our parameter. Every time we walked through that village, we ended
 up in a fire fight. No fire fight was ever sustained however. Whoever we were
 pursuing in that village did not want to engage the Marines when the Marines were
 setting the time and place. What the VC left to engage us however were booby
 traps. On October 7th at 1010 hours, Bob Hughes lost a leg to one. Bob in later
 years would be instrumental in forming a reunion that for the first time in decades
 would reunite numerous former Marines of Hotel Company.

 On October 11th Operation Medina began. We were loaded on
 choppers and flew off to some obscure position
 known as LZ Dove in the
 Hai Lang National Forest.
 There we bailed out into a
 clearing full of elephant
 grass. Once on the ground,
 we headed for the trees.
 What happened over the
 next few days was the
 greatest challenge I have
 faced during my life, both in
 terms of causalities and the
 beliefs I had come to this
 nation harboring. While the
 first few days winding our
 (Hotel 2/1) way through the jungle was largely uneventful, Charlie Company 1/1
 was not so lucky. One night we lay atop a hill within ear shot of shouts and
 screams of the Marines in Charlie 1/1 being overrun by NVA. All night we listened
to gunfire, explosions, and screams of pain and commands in both English and
 Vietnamese. Thinking we’d be summoned to saddle up to go help 1/1, we stared
 into the blackness of the jungle expecting the worst at any time. A very unsettling
night ensued, for even though Hotel Company to date had little if any contact, the events witnessed that evening proved to me that our lack of casualties was just dumb luck. So far we were simply in the right place at the right time.

Being lucky was to change however. On October 18th we found ourselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. We were moving back to battalion, single file along a narrow jungle trail when we were ambushed. In the few moments that followed, half our company laid along that trail dead or wounded. We never even had a chance to fight back. I was in the forward platoon of Hotel Company about ready to step out into the savannah when the shooting began. Two platoons and the command group of Hotel Company were behind me, the rear platoon being directly in the kill zone. As such, I found myself on the move, moving from the front of the company to the back, alone. No one followed me to offer assistance or cover. I soon found myself in the rear with nothing around me but the dead and dying.

The dead and critically wounded would have to wait for if we found ourselves in the position of having to fight it out, the dead and seriously wounded would be no help. The idea was those less seriously wounded, once cared for, could be returned to battle. Without the seriously wounded’s aid, all of us might die. One extra gun might be the difference in who walked out of here.

Well, that was the theory anyway. Likely derived in earlier wars where two armies stood face to face and battled it out until the last man remained standing, I am not convinced this protocol applied to battle in Vietnam. Never did two armies face off in such a manner. The Vietcong’s tactic was hit and run as we, the Americans, had every implement of war available to us in a short period time. The Vietcong did not. If the Vietcong chose to engage us for any substantial period of time giving us the time to muster all the fire power available, they’d lose --- and they knew it. Carbines, grenades, and small mortars were no match for jet fighters, Puff (a C130 with mini-guns), the Missouri, and long range artillery, not to mention the ability of helicopters to reinforce those on the ground with additional troops and supplies. All of this was usually available to us with only a radio call for help. The only advantage the Vietcong had was surprise and their only chance was hit and run. Hit undetected, hit hard, and then get the hell out of there or face the wrath of F104s loaded with napalm. The only time they did not retreat was when they were close enough to our forces that our armament could not be used against them without causing our own forces heavy losses.

After treating those who could be aided and returned to duty I turned my attention to the more seriously wounded. It was then that I returned to the legless Marine I had noticed earlier stuck like a yard dart upside down in the brush. I climbed down off the trail and pulled him from the entangling vegetation, only to have him amazingly come alive in my arms. As I turned him over, he immediately wanted to know what the hell had taken me so long to get to him. The guilt I felt
was crushing. Marines are told that should they ever become a casualty a corpsman would be right there by their side. I was not --- so what do I tell him? I was too busy? That everyone around us was in as bad shape, if not worse, than he was? So I did not say anything.

The after a few moments that seemed a lifetime of staring me down, his tone changed. He wanted to know how the rest of his platoon was. Did his friends make out OK? I didn’t want to tell him what really happened, so I lied. I told him his friends were doing just fine. He didn’t have to worry about them. He seemed relieved.

With that off his mind he laid suspended in my arms for a moment, as if reflecting on the events that had just occurred. Then he rotated his eyes up to meet mine and asked, “Why? Why did God let this happen to me?” God was supposed to protect him from harm. “Why, God? Why me?” he asked. I didn’t know. I had no answer, but suddenly the saying “There but for the grace of God, go I,” took on a whole different meaning. I had often heard it said that God watches over us in time of need, but never had I given any thought to the other side of the same coin. Not only was this boy dying, he was dying believing that God, whom he was taught loved and nurtured him, had now abandoned him. And that is how he died, held by me, abandoned by his God. Looking around at the seventeen dead, I had to wonder where god was for them. It is often said “God never gives you more than you can handle.” Here, however, god it seems gave many more than they could handle. God for whatever reason seemed to think they boys were not worth saving that day. What a horrible thought to die with.

For some time I just sat there holding him, daydreaming, hashing over in mind what, if anything, all this meant. All my life I believed a purpose existed for everything. “Everything is as it should be,” I believed, “or at least could be set straight.” For the first time in my life, however, that belief was in serious doubt. How could anything set this straight? And what could possibly be the purpose of this? Nothing made sense at that moment. What I believed were answers before this ambush weren’t working and in this absence of any answers I felt the very foundation of my beliefs tremble.

Then Hill appeared above me, yelling about cover for his Corpsmen. Spotting me below the trail, he jumped down, took a look at the Marine and together we, at his direction, tried some last ditch attempts to revive him, to no avail. Pronouncing him dead, Hill directed me to return to the trail that led out of the canopy. Together we began moving to the front of the column when we came upon the only dead NVA that I saw that day. He was lying face down on the trail, his head pointing to the front of our column. By the gaping hole directly in the back of his head, it could be surmised that he had been shot from the rear, perhaps by his own people, as he entered the trail. Regardless of who shot him, however,
few Marines passing by missed the opportunity to kick him, pump a few more rounds into his bullet-riddled body, or in a few cases to take a souvenir such as an ear or a finger. “Fucking gook!” many Marines shouted as they directed their frustrations at him.

I understood their anger, but looking at him lying motionless on the trail, I never saw a “fucking gook.” I saw a man, a man as any of us, dead like the rest. And if personal sacrifice, loyalty, devotion to duty were traits to be held in high regard, wasn’t his sacrifice as great as any of ours? Wasn’t his loyalty, to whatever he felt his purpose might be, as honorable, his dedication to service as great as any of ours? And if so, shouldn’t we be honoring him as someone who made the ultimate sacrifice regardless of his cause? Once again I didn’t have an answer. But I had the question and it kept coming upon me like a crushing weight.

That evening, sitting alone in the elephant grass at the edge of the canopy, I couldn’t put those questions out of my mind. Where was God? Why did He allow this to happen? What is purpose? What is honor? Why were we here? Why? Why? Why? The questions rattled directionless through my head as if lost in the abyss of my mind. I do not remember falling asleep, or even if I did. All I remember is suddenly it was morning, as if darkness had been chased away by flicking on a light. And just as remarkable, all the questions that seemed so important the day before lost their urgency. Not that those questions had been answered; in fact, a huge void now existed where answers once were. It was like someone took a huge eraser and wiped the slate clean, and for the moment I was content staring at an empty Blackboard. Now, at least, the board wasn’t all cluttered up with frivolous scratching and smudges that before I was led to believe were something important.

I left that hill with a whole new awareness of the world around me. I couldn’t explain it, but everything was different, new and unexplored. Walking down that hill, I found myself going to wherever this new awareness might take me. Where didn’t matter. I was just happy to be on my way--as
long as it was away from where I had been being what I used to believe. Little did I know how far the voyage was to be, but I was sure of one thing, I could never return to wherever it was I had been before.

Much has been written about the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) suffered by veterans that indicates we are suffering from some psychotic disorder brought on by the trauma of combat. As a PTSD impaired Veteran, I prefer to compare PTSD to a plate. Assume, for a moment, that the world, as it’s known to you, is a plate of fine china. Imagine that since “day one” you were told that plate was the most important thing you possessed. Everything that you ever imagined was true and everything that you valued was imprinted upon that plate. Also, everyone you knew had a plate just like yours. Thus, to you and everyone around you, reality, that which is believed as true in the world, was inscribed on those plates.

Now suppose a traumatic event occurred. Imagine someone passing by while you were examining your plate, your view of the world, bumped your arm and sent the plate crashing to the floor. You stand helplessly and watch in shock as your plate, everything you ever valued and accepted as fact, exploded into numerous little pieces. That would be bad enough for most people, but now comes the task of putting the plate back together again. In short order what you would also realize is no amount of glue will ever give you back the plate you once knew. To be exact, the very best that you could possibly hope for would be a cracked version of the plate that you once had. You might even be missing a piece or two. And you’d learn by dropping that plate, that’s normal. When plates smash, they don’t look like they did before, nor will they ever again. Therefore, you’d come to realize that a separate reality exists that wasn’t included in your original plate. Only by having your plate broken, however, would you come to realize this truth.

So, what problem does that present to the man with the broken plate? The problem comes when he shows his plate to the people whose plates haven’t been broken. To them the world still looks just like the plate he originally had, the plate that once looked like theirs. Their plate looks nothing like the plate he now has and since everything they ever imagined was true looks like their plate, obviously his plate has to be something less than the truth. So now the question becomes, how long can this man with the broken plate endure, when the truth he holds in his hand is treated by everyone else as something less? And so it goes when one’s life experiences force him to peer into his belief structure and he discovers that what he once thought was “truth” is only a figment of his imagination molded by the social sculptors of his time.

The day following Medina’s ambush, we walked from the edge of the forest back to battalion. The world, in particular the social world, was no longer as it had been up to this point in my life. The social forces shaping the human experience
were now all in question as to motive. Why, for example, do I believe what I do? Do my beliefs make sense when compared to what my experiences have been? Who put those beliefs in my head? For what reason? And who benefits by the beliefs I harbor? --- Really? --- Me? --- Or the person or individuals that put their wishes in my head to begin with? Having just lost half my company, numerous friends, soak in sweat and lugging ammo it was hard to see how any of those beliefs benefited me.

With my brain shredding my beliefs like a blender might ice, our walk back to battalion took us right by this huge Catholic Church which could be seen right out the main gate of our battalion area. Had this walk occurred prior to October 18th, this church would have existed merely as part of the landscape and given no thought. But this was October 19th. Someone built that church.

Obviously, judging by the natives wading around in the rice paddies with their bare feet and legs, planting rice, these people did not. They lacked the resources. So who did? And for what reason? And who really was the intended benefactor?

Obviously, the French built that church. So did the French build that church for the benefit of the Vietnamese or the French or the Church itself? Was France’s purpose for building that church to bring the Vietnamese salvation? Why should the French care after all if these people were saved or not? Was France being “Mister Nice Guy” here? Or was bringing the Vietnamese salvation just smoke? Did bringing these people salvation offer some benefit for the French? And if so what?

Those questions would go unanswered for now, which surprisingly was alright by me. Up to this point in my life every question had an answer. Prior to today, to not know the answer to a question was considered a lack of understanding, an admission of ignorance --- but now, stripped of my old world view, “I do not know” was an acceptable answer and carried with it no sense of shame for lack of intellectual achievement. Instead, I was to discover that admitting “I do not know” did two things; one good and one not so good. On the good side “I do not know” was a door, a passage into the unknown which then could be investigated. Until then believing I knew the answer kept that door closed. One of the thoughts to enter my mind was if an answer is thought to be already known, why go looking for it? Didn’t the thought that the world was flat and had
an edge to fall off inhibit early explorers from sailing west to get to the east? Only by rejecting that thought and admitting that they did not know what existed out there beyond the horizon, did sailors dare sail west. After all, nations had the means to sail to America long before Columbus finally did --- but what prevented them was myth, preconceived stories, falsehoods assumed true.

The second, the negative effect, “I do not know” was the challenge it presented to others. One of the titles that I have been ironically christened with is being a “know-it-all.” Odd --- I’ve always thought. If I admit that “I do not know” I get called a “know-it-all.” In fairness to others however, I probably did seem like a “know-it-all” in that if I did not know the answer to a question which in the past I thought I was sure was true, it follows that those who still retain the answer I once thought was correct, do not know either. The last thing people want to hear is they have no idea what they are talking about.

Anyway, sometime later, crossing these same trails, I would come across a life changing pamphlet. It was a Christmas card I thought a Marine lost. I reached down and picked it up thinking of returning it to whoever lost it. On the front was the manger scene including Mary, Jesus, the three kings, and star of Bethlehem. I opened it up expecting to a Christmas caption, a hand written note, and a name I might use to return it to its owner. As it turned out, the card contained none of that. In fact, it wasn’t even sent. It was placed there and meant for whoever picked it up, namely me. Opening the card, I was shocked to see the phrase in big bold print:

“Christianity is merely the rich imposing their will upon the poor.”

I was stunned! Up until this point in my life, I had always thought of the church as caring for, attending to, and assisting the needs of the poor. My instantaneous response was anger. “How could anyone make such a claim?” I thought crumpling up the card and discarding it. Now, however, I wish I would have kept that card for no other reason than it would have been a welcomed addition to this writing. Anyway, the card haunted me. Never in my wildest dream had I thought of Christianity as imposing the will of the most fortunate on those less fortunate --- but after being exposed to the thought and giving the matter some serious thought, the theory that Christianity might very well be the rich imposing their will upon the poor began seeming more true than not. Might the teachings of the church support French Imperialism?
In fact, today I believe exactly that having read the Bible twice since. Today when I asked how the French might benefit by building such a structure this verse jumps right off the pages.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

Romans 13:1-2:

Hmmmmmmm! What powerful individual, god or no god, would not like those beneath them to conform to those verses? Is this the alternative motive the French had for building that church? I felt the need to sort that question out in my head. I recalled those Buddhist Monks. Whether they believed their religion or not, their reward for accepting it and having others accept it was social position. By becoming priests and ministers nobodies are suddenly somebody of importance. Everyone would stop what they were doing and come to them anytime they walked onto the scene. Not only did they attain a social statue unlike those around them, those around them shared with them their profits, namely produce and rice.

Again I could not just leave it there. A line had been crossed, a line that once crossed there was no turning back. Everything I had thought about the Buddhist Monks also applied to my own church. My church after all did not go out and earn, like the labors to whom they preached, their own wage. Instead, my church asked its members for their monetary support, money for which those church members labored in the form of a tithe. If my memory serves me correctly, the amount asked for is about ten percent of whatever a laborer makes which would translate into a fair amount of money increasing with each member of the congregation --- with the real labor done to earn that money done by someone else. Hmmm...mmmmm!

In recent days, May 2007, I happened to pick up the Pulitzer Prize winning book “Vietnam, A History” by Standley Karnow. Since Vietnam up until looking at Karnow’s book, I had always suspected the Church and the French Military were interwoven, but I had never seen it in the words of anyone else until now. According to Standley Karnow, the French Navy and Church teamed up during the later 1700s to mid-1800s becoming common allies with the common goal to convert the Vietnamese to Christianity and bring them under French rule. By the end of the Nineteenth Century, Vietnam was governed by French Navy Officers. “By no coincidence,” Karnow writes, “the French high commissioner for Indochina as late as 1946, Admiral Georges Thierry d’Argenlieu, was a Carmelite monk who had exchanged his cassock for a uniform during World War II.”

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Karnow also notes that the Vietnamese emperors feared that this French form of Christianity might foreshadow European imperialism which, according to Karnon, is exactly what it did. In 1664, four years after his death (Alexandre de Rhodes, who once held a papal seat and is credited with opening Vietnam to French influence), French religious leaders and their business backers formed the Society of Foreign Missions to advance Christianity in Asia. In the same year, by no coincidence, French business leaders and their religious backers created the East India Company to increase trade. Their similar aspirations were apparent in their cooperation. A commercial firm established in Rouen at the time paid transportation for missionaries to Vietnam in exchange for their services there as sales agents and bookkeepers. According to Karnow, all this led to an English competitor to state, “we cannot make out whether they (the French) are here to seek trade or to conduct religious propaganda.”

Up until October 18th, 1967, I largely defined the world in terms of god or his will. I had never really given any thought to what it might mean for humanity if god did not exist. Now I was being twisted into asking that question, “What if god did not exist? What would that mean?” I really had no theory about what the non-existence of god might mean. If god did not exist it would be absurd to believe I was here in Vietnam doing god’s will by fighting ungodly Communists or the Antichrist, which is what I, from many different sources, was led to believe. And what of god’s will? If I was not doing god’s will, whose will was being done? Not mine. So --- why was I here? And what got me here?

My October 21st letter home was written only three days after the ambush on Medina but not one word is mentioned about our losses. Anguish over the future where we might be headed is there. The unsanitary conditions, the lack of personal cleanliness and the constant field maneuvers are all spoken of. What is missing however is any descriptive details, for example, Marines cramping up so bad from dysentery on the way to the John that they end up defecating on themselves. So suppose I throw in a few details I may not have mentioned at the risk of sounding melodramatic --- like the blood, fecal, and tissue stains from the wounded all over my clothes reminding me constantly of the trauma that I had just been through. Body odor, I found out, was not the worst thing clothes could smell like. Often my cloths smelled like someone died --- literally--- and no place existed to rectify the situation. Nowhere to wash. No change of clothing. As long as we were out, as often as a week at a time, we’d simply have to live in those same clothes, wearing parts of the dead and wounded like some patch. Gory, for sure, but that is the way it was and it represents some of the worst memories that linger from war.

I doubt Vietnam was special in regard to being sanguinary but the sanguinary reality of war is a reality withheld from anyone on his way to the
induction center. Basic training does not prepare any of its recruits for this horrifying reality of war. When you enter an induction center what you see posted on the walls is clean cut well-dressed military personnel in their dress uniforms. You see smiling crews preforming their duties or laughing with their comrades. You see thoughtful servicemen being trained for the future duties. And if there are pictures of battle, it is some propaganda picture or statue like the Marine Corps Memorial, the raising the American flag over Iwo Jima. Imagine the impact on recruiting if instead a set of clothes covered in fecal material and blood were handed to potential recruit and he had to wear them for a week before signing up. My guess is the military would get few takers.

War aside, the Hai Lang National Forest was one of the picturesque environments I have ever walked into.

The Quick and the Dead:
A Sergeant’s Prayer goes Unanswered

One particularly sad story of Operation Medina was printed in Newsweek magazine about Lawrence Churchill. The article, entitled “The Quick and the Dead” tells the story of First Sergeant Vernon Churchill who at the age of 44, having 26 years with the USMC, began to worry about his son Lawrence, age 19, serving with Hotel Company 2nd BN 1st MAR. Figuring a First Sergeant had a better chance of surviving Vietnam than did a lowly grunt, as his son, and using the principle that only one family member needed to serve in Vietnam at any one time, Vernon decided to exchange positions with his son thereby sending his son home out of harm’s way. Being a First Sergeant and able to pull a few strings, Vernon therefore volunteered for and received duty in Vietnam.

When Vernon arrived in Vietnam, he immediately put in for duty with Lawrence’s unit, Hotel Company 2nd BN 1st MAR. Vernon arrived at 2-1’s Battalion area in Quang Tri on October 18th. Naturally after traveling half way around the world, Vernon asked about his son Lawrence’s whereabouts. That is when he found out that Lawrence had just been killed in the ambush of Hotel Company earlier that same day. Lawrence was buried in Fairhaven Memorial Park in Tuskin, California with his father in attendance. The flag that covered Lawrence’s casket was given to his mother while Vernon, still on orders to Vietnam, had to return to Vietnam after the funeral leaving his wife at home alone.
Else Where the War goes on

On October 13, the outposts of Con Thien and GioLinh were pounded by 350 plus rounds of artillery. The following day, Con Thien is again hit by 130 rounds or mortar and artillery fire followed by an assault by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in an all-out effort to overrun the position. On October 17th Hanoi radio, to which those with radios often listened, announced that the National Liberation Front (NLF), being the Communists, were developing a new organization to stir up the antiwar protests in the United States. Regardless if part of the NLF’s strategy was stirring anti-Vietnam War sentiment or not back in world (the US), large demonstrations were breaking out in the streets of cities across the nation in hostile protest against the Vietnam War. From Oct 21-23 in Washington D.C., some 50,000 protesters held a protest in front of the Pentagon which in turn resulted in the deployment of 10,000 troops to defend the Department of Defense against its own people, the American People. The D.C. protests quickly become international in scope with demonstrations in Europe and Japan. From October 24-25 demonstrations were held by two college campuses against Dow Chemical, the maker of napalm used in Vietnam.

Not much, if any, of this news fell on deaf ears. What was happening in the DMZ was in effect just up the road. Furthermore, the rumor was out we were headed north once we were done with this Quang Tri stopover. Life Magazine, on October 27th, did a feature article on Con Thien entitled “Inside the Cone of Fire; Con Thien.” This article circulated from hand to hand among our ranks leaving each to his own thoughts on where we might be going next. Con Thien did not look like any place I wanted to visit, judging by photos taken by David Duncan. I could not imagine anywhere worse and given my pessimism, I figured we were on our way there for sure.

As far the protests went, they did nothing to help my state of mind about this war. These so called protestors, referred to by many U.S. troops as Commie sympathizers, draft card burners, and draft dodgers were not just some handful of radical reactionaries. They were my peers, my classmates, and my family. They were speaking my thoughts and echoing my feelings. Many were even willing to go to jail in defense of their views rather than submit to the pressures of the selective service and government. To defy the draft, I thought, took guts. To risk their future, to put aside all they had for a six by six jail cell and a criminal record for no other reason than being true to their political beliefs, I felt was commendable. I began to question who the real heroes in this war were; we in the military dying and bleeding, or those at home being beaten with night sticks, tear gassed, blasted by water cannons, and jailed for simply expressing their beliefs? Many were going as far as forsaking their homeland and moving to Canada. I
could not help but admire their devotion even if I was aware of the fact that the
protests were keeping North Vietnam’s hopes alive. I was caught between two
walls --- and the walls were moving towards each other.

With these antiwar sympathies roaring through my mind, it became more
and more difficult to keep at bay self-criticism and feelings that I did not have the
back bone to stand up for my own convictions. How did I allow myself to get into
this situation? What of those Vietnamese women and children I watched being
dragged from their safe havens often in pieces? Was I somehow, someway,
responsible? Even the thought that I might be somehow responsible was repugnant.

Quang Tri 201: Life and Death

After Medina, the war around Quang Tri went on much like Da Nang but with
many more short fire fights and incoming grenades that harassed us nightly. Booby
traps were less frequent, but those that some unsuspecting unfortunate Marine did
trip were usually far more damaging. No longer was tripping a booby trap
considered a Huss (a wound not life threatening but severe enough to return the
person to the states), rather these were large, usually box type mines, that ripped
limbs off victims, often blowing Marines apart like watermelons dropped from the
third floor of a high rise building onto concrete.

Such was the case of Martinez, Muraco, and Lt Runnels. It was close to midnight
and dark. We were moving up a trail when in front of me was a huge
flash of light followed instantly by a
thunderous roar. I could feel the
concussion against my chest
although I was some distance away.
It did not take long for the dreaded
“Corpsman Up” to rise above all
other sounds. I was on my way. As
stated before, it was dark and hence
for the most part I could not see
exactly what I was dealing with.
Whatever I was dealing with was
wet, sticky, and warm. Not much
was left, just pieces scattered wherever they happened to land. I wondered later
if we got all of them or if half of someone was left just lying on the side of that hill
along the trail for whatever type of scavenger might come along to claim what we
did not.
Sometime later in the same area, we were headed back to battalion along the same trail when we were broadsided by automatic weapons fire from a vegetated rise on the other side of a narrow rice paddy. We were on a ridge covered with trees. A browse line left open and clearly visible whatever happened to be on the ground below those trees, namely us. A number of Marines were immediately wounded hence again came those dreaded words “Corpsman Up!” In this case however I was already there and one of the wounded was directly behind me. I found myself trying to drag and push this wounded individual to cover behind a tree as pieces of bark flew from its trunks and leaves were ripped from their branches by automatic weapons. Leaves were falling like they were blown from their limbs by an autumn breeze. Bullets were sizzling past, kicking up dirt on either side of us, but somehow we came out unscathed other than those originally wounded. It did not seem possible that all those bullets landing around us and tarring the bark and leaves off the trees could miss us. I thought for sure I was going to die right there.

As strange as it may seem, how I’d be found if killed ran through my head as all those bullets zipped by. Would I be found to be a hero, sacrificing my body sheltering this wounded Marine with my body as I tried to push him out of harm’s way or would I be seen as a coward, being shot behind him, as if hiding under him, as I was attempting to pull him to cover? I did both, but why should I be pondering some philosophical question as how I might look dead? Why would how others might find me matter then?

Somewhere around mid-November things lightened up. The Marine Corps birthday, November 10th, something I could have cared less about, did offer some benefits like food other than C Rations. And beer! We have not had any beer to drink since we left Da Nang a good month earlier. By now, I would have savored even a Ballintine but for the Marine Corps Birthday, we got nothing but the best named brands. Thanksgiving was also spent at Quang Tri and although the Marines never went all out like they did for the Marine Corps birthday, the hot meal, one of very few we enjoyed since leaving Da Nang, was truly appreciated.

Having free time meant time to get into a few things that the Marine Corps disapproved of also. For example, the Black market operated right on the other side of our parameter where about anything shipped to Vietnam was for sale. The biggest item was perhaps soda. Rarely beer might be offered but beer was usually gone before ever getting to Quang Tri. What intoxicant was always available was marijuana. One of the stigmas we as Vietnam Veterans suffered was we were often portrayed by media as nothing a bunch of dope heads. Perhaps in some cases that may have been true, but speaking for myself, I remember experimenting with marijuana about four times my whole tour and all four of those times were at Quang Tri. And maybe I missed something but those around me did not seem
addicted or strung out either. Sure a few smoked a joint now and then but then so did those in the media who were accusing us of being drug addicts, not to mention the drug culture back home, many of whom were demonstrating against us. Marijuana’s use by the time I tried it was so wide spread that few existed anywhere isolated from it. Marijuana had become a cultural phenomenon, my generation’s drug of choice.

I had never attempted the drug before Vietnam, but when I finally did, I was surprised to how benign the drug was. I, after all, was from North Dakota where marijuana was still the killer weed; one toke and you’re hooked for life. I remember the day our high school called us all into the study hall to watch the movie, “Reefer Madness.” I just knew after watching that movie, there could be nothing worse than a marijuana addiction. What follows is the caption at the beginning of the movie:

The motion picture you are about to witness may startle you. It would not have been possible, otherwise, to sufficiently emphasize the frightful toll of the new drug menace which is destroying the youth of America in alarmingly increasing numbers. Marihuana is that drug – a violent narcotic – The Real Public Enemy Number One – Its first effect is sudden, violent, uncontrollable laughter; then come dangerous hallucinations – space expands, time slows down, almost stands still…fixed ideas come next, conjuring up monstrous extravagances – followed by emotional disturbances, the total inability to direct thoughts, the loss of all power to resist physical emotions…leading finally to acts of shocking violence…ending often in incurable insanity. In picturing its soul-destroying effects no attempt was made to equivocate. The scenes and incidences, while fictionalized for the purposes of this story, are based upon actual research into the results of Marihuana addiction. If their stark reality will make you think, will make you aware that something must be done to wipe out this ghastly menace, then the picture will have failed in its purpose….Because the dread Marihuana may be reaching forth next for your son or daughter …or yours….or yours! 015
After seeing that movie, this North Dakota boy was going to be damned if he was going to suck on the end of one those left handed cigarettes. Life was too precarious without adding insanity for the sake of a high.

Well, that was a boy from North Dakota, age 14-15, when I was a very naïve, impressionable, and gullible young man. But I was in Quang Tri now, twenty one, and beginning to question the propaganda placed before me as an adolescent. Others I knew were smoking marijuana and they did not seem to be having any real problems dealing with its effects. I might be dead tomorrow but for now I was relatively safe inside my tent --- so why not? Finally yielding to peer pressure “Pass me that smoke will ya?” And after a few puffs, and having “INHALED,” I found myself wondering when the affect was going to hit me. I did notice a few really neat patterns formed by the smoke of our candles on the insides of the tent that I had never noticed before but that was about it. Actually the pot was probably fairly good stuff. In Vietnam it usually was, or so I was told. I know now, I just did not know what being high was. I was expecting a numbing sensation like alcohol that never occurred.

The taste wasn’t that great either. It put me back in mind when as children; Jorgenson and I would roll Indian tobacco (curly dock) in newspaper and pretended we were smoking real cigarettes. We’d choke and gasp – burn our tongues, scorch our throats, and for what I never really understood. The stuff tasted like hell but we did it anyway. Maybe we thought we were getting away with something. That we did it together however seemed to make up for all those negatives. Companionship! Maybe that was it, the idea we’d do anything together and smoking that horrible stuff somehow proved to both of us that we would really do anything for each other. I wondered if there wasn’t a little of that in the pot I smoked. To sum up my new drug experience, I was unimpressed, actually disappointed. I would have preferred to forget where I was for a while but smoking pot just did not do it for me.

I woke the next day and to my surprise I really had no great craving for more pot. I had no hangover. I wasn’t shaking. I had no violent thoughts like homicide or suicide. I remember asking myself; just what my school tried pass off on me. My government, given that film, flat out lied and that bothered me. If I cannot trust my government to be honest, who can I trust? And not only did my government lie to me, they lied to their country --- and on such a grand scale, given that “Reefer Madness” was played in many schools across the nation.

I now know that marijuana was not outlawed for its addictive properties, to save the children, or prevent the violence that smoking marijuana allegedly caused, or the cost it might cause society taking care of those who go criminally insane smoking it. In fact when compared to alcohol or tobacco, I really do not know why marijuana was outlawed at all. A few rumors, floating around, suggested that
marijuana was outlawed to maintain a number of corporation’s bottom line. For example, one rumor is DuPont wanted hemp outlawed as the fiber derived from hemp competed with DuPont’s then newly acquired fiber, polyester. Another rumor has it that the decision to outlaw hemp in 1937 was based on testimony from newspaper articles owned by William Randolph Hearst. Hearst, it seems, had considerable amounts of money invested in the timber industry, the pulp from which was his source of his paper. So were these accusations true or false? I do not know. I do know however I can see no other reason for the degree which marijuana has been demonized by the government and bankrupting the legal system by jailing users.

For the record and to make this point perfectly clear, leaving nothing to speculation, the preceding discussion of marijuana is not as much about the drug as it is about propaganda. I personally do not use the drug and have not in decades. I really am not as concerned about some fairly benign drug affecting one’s mentality as I am about the lies and the length people and governments are willing to go to instill these lies in people’s heads. If as rumored Randolph Hearst truly was behind the current laws on marijuana, I am absolutely amazed that the government which claims to be of the people, by the people, and for the people, ignored the people and instead hooked their wagon to Randolph Hearst’s bottom line. I also know that far more money is being spent enforcing drug laws and incarcerating pot smokers than was ever spent treating and caring for those driven criminally insane by smoking it.

Laundry services were also offered by the Vietnamese that came to our perimeter. This however was not exactly your average state side laundry service. There was no assurance of clean clothes, as these uniforms were being washed in the same water that earlier that morning people were returning the rice they ate the day before. Even so, it beat wearing the blood of yesterday’s casualties, and the uniforms returned green which at least gave the illusion that the cloths were clean. Is it any wonder why dysentery was a problem? Little did anyone realize that Vietnam Veterans were to be plagued years later by a much more serious problem, hepatitis C as a result of these paddies and the activities carried out in them.
While at Quang Tri the monsoons were settling in. One day it clouded up and for a few months it rained continuously, creating some of the most miserable days I have ever spent alive. Everything was wet, all the time. Every bare spot was mud. The only hope of being dry even occasionally was if the bedding inside the tent could be kept dry. In that effort, clothes and shoes were left at the door soaked by the rain, but at least for that night you had a chance to stay dry. Being dry was cherished. If the bedding ever got wet, there was no drying it out in the humidity and cool weather. Out on night maneuvers, staying dry was impossible. We were wet from the time we left the gate until we got back, as chronicled in my December 1st letter.

With temperatures dropping into the low fifties at night, soaking wet, we laid on the ground numbed to the bone with literally nothing to cover us but our ponchos, often sleeping with each other to conserve body warmth. I especially remember one evening we were below the hill of battalion somewhere near the village where we nearly always ended up in a fire fight. We were set up in a graveyard as the grave mounds, existing like islands, were the only points above water. You could see your breath. For whatever reason a GP tent was set up outside our perimeter with a heater. Returning to it, after some time laying out in that graveyard freezing, that tent broke all the rules about staying alive in Vietnam. I do not know what form of security was offered to those inside that tent and at that time under those conditions did I care. I found myself huddled around that stove expecting incoming small arms fire and grenades at any time. To this boy from North Dakota, that is the coldest, most miserable, closest to hypothermia I had ever been. In fact, I was so cold that this would be the only time risking life and limb for some comfort took precedence over security.

Back at battalion sometime in November, the decision was apparently made to trade cash, piasters, for ordinance. One less grenade to convert to a booby trap was thought of as a life saving measure for a Marine in particular. The practice got to be fairly common, common enough in fact that I began to wonder where these Vietnamese, mostly children, were coming up with all that ordnance. For a Vietnamese child, four hundred piasters must have seemed like a fortune.

Then one day, at the back gate of 2/1’s perimeter, disaster struck. A dud 81 mortar round being carried by three Vietnamese children exploded killing two and
wounding the third.\textsuperscript{018} We know of that case and its tragic outcome, of course, but we have no idea how many children died attempting to retrieve this ordnance for the mere the pennies, by our standards, they were paid.

\textbf{Communist Chess Moves:}
\textbf{Despite huge Losses the North Fights on}

Before getting too far ahead, a word should be mentioned about the Tet Offensive. Officially the Tet Offensive began January 30, 1968, and ran through June 8th, although historians have debated exactly when the offensive truly began and how long it lasted. As early as the summer of 1967 Communists leaders were talking of a major offensive to throw the American and Saigon regimes into what the Communists termed the “utmost confusion.”\textsuperscript{019} Stanley Karnow places the actual beginning of Tet in September of 1967 when the Communists attempted to overrun the Northern Marine outpost of Con Thien. They failed, but not before U.S. planes dumped 22,000 tons (550 semi-truck loads) of bombs on the area,\textsuperscript{020} many of which were those flashing domes of light to our north at Quang Tri.

The Communists then shifted their attention to the south, the mountainous region above Pleiku, Dakto,\textsuperscript{021} and the northwest, Khe Sanh, where 6,000 Marines faced off against what was believed to be four NVA divisions supported by two artillery and armored regiments of 40,000 men.\textsuperscript{022} It was estimated that over the three months prior to the Official launching of the Tet Offensive, 90,000 Communist troops were killed, 10,000 around Khe Sanh alone. The Marines by comparison lost fewer than 500 Marines.\textsuperscript{023} Clearly if the numbers dead were any indication who was winning the war, the U.S. was giving the Communists a thrashing. By the numbers, it appeared we were winning hands down. That, of course, was assuming numbers meant anything.

Why, on the eve of their main Tet Offensive, did the Communists allow this type of slaughter of their own people to take place? According to Standley Karnow, every Communist official he asked claimed the whole idea behind those earlier battles was to pull American troops away from the populated areas, Hue, Da Nang, Quang Tri, Saigon, thereby leaving those cities susceptible to attack.\textsuperscript{024} While Westmoreland fell for this tactic hook line and sinker, other US officials, Major General Lowell English, the Marine commander at Khe Sanh declared the siege of Khe Sanh “a trap” to force an unreasonable amount of American troops and material into defending “a piece of terrain that wasn’t worth a damn.”\textsuperscript{025} And Khe Sanh must not have been worth a damn, other than Westmoreland’s vanity perhaps, as shortly after we, 2/1, relieved the Marines trapped at Khe Sanh since the siege began, the base was abandoned. All those men, all those dead, for what? Unable to see the tactics the Communists were setting up, the war for us on the
ground began taking a different tone as Dakto became the focal point of the war. For the first time in my memory, the real action seemed to be shifting south of us. Strange, as these major battles erupted, I actually felt like I should be there. It seemed as if the real battles were always somewhere else. When we were in Da Nang, the big battles were north of us in the DMZ. Now that we were in the north, the big battles were in the Central Highlands. As contradictory as it seems, as much as I wanted to avoid battles, I felt I should be where the action was.

At the same time for reasons beyond me, Catholic Relief, of all things, was known to be sending medical supplies to North Vietnam. I felt betrayed. The former Commandant of the Marine Corps, David M. Shoup shot down the Domino Theory as “pure unadulterated poppycock.” Again I felt my government lied to me. I was in Vietnam, I thought, to keep one nation after the other from falling to the Communists. In Oakland, California, 268 were arrested for blocking the military induction center. I felt twisted --- in fact I did not know what to think. I was beginning to think of myself as the enemy of my own people; the very people I thought were worth fighting for. And while all this is going on, Marines were still dying.

CHAPTER SIX
In the Cross Hairs of North Vietnamese Gunners

Yankee Station: Prisoners of Wilderness

Hotel Company was moved north from Quang Tri on Dec 23rd, two days short of Christmas 1967 via a truck convoy that took us up through Dong Ha and Charlie II, a northern Marine outpost between Con Thien and Dong Ha. Once past Charlie II, we were on our own. I had no idea what sort of cover was provided us. All I could think about was the tree line on either side of the trucks about 50 yards from the road where any amount of NVA might have been laying in ambush. We were also in easy range of artillery from North Vietnam. At any time the NVA could pound us for certainly a NVA
forward observer existed in the area somewhere, watching us. Why would the NVA gunners pass on a whole convoy full of Marines out in the open? But they did, and the trucks got through with no problems. All the way I imagined mass casualties, but none resulted. In my pessimistic thinking, we were done a favor.

Yankee Station was nothing more than a company size position set off from the main battalion on Con Thien. We, Hotel Company, were put out there for any variety of rumors. The most worrisome rumor was that if North Vietnam ever decided to overrun Con Thien from the west, the NVA would have to check into Hell’s Hotel first. Yankee Station was located about two clicks east of the Southern Demilitarized Zone. If the NVA came, we, Hotel Company, about a hundred men, were on our own.

For simplicity’s sake rather than jumping back and forth between Yankee Station and Con Thien as events unfolded, I believe it would serve history better if each position were treated independently. In short, I will first speak first of Yankee Station, then of Con Thien. The real difference in the two outposts, if any, was size. Yankee Station was a small company sized outpost whereas Con Thien consisted of the rest of the 2/1 battalion being three infantry companies, Echo, Fox, and Golf, plus the Headquarters and Supply Company (H&S). Con Thien was more strategically located, being the highest point anywhere around which gave its occupiers full surveillance over the land around it. Yankee Station therefore generated less waste, warehoused less armament and supplies, contributed less information of the area around it and therefore received less incoming fire. Con Thien was a much bigger prize to Northern gunners.

When we arrived at Yankee Station, I had my camera in hand. To the left I am pictured in front of my first poorly designed shelter. No door for protection against the mosquitoes. No barrier wall in front of the opening for protection against close detonating artillery and mortar shrapnel. A foxhole cover served as a roof offering no protection should artillery or a mortar land on this bunker. Also noticeable is an ammo box, the type used to support my stretcher, which doubled as my bed, a water bottle, and a metal grate to keep out of the ever present mud. I am dressed in my flak jacket and helmet. While at Yankee Station flak
jackets and helmets were required any time a person was outside his bunker. And of course mud, nothing but mud, no grass, just bulldozed dirt and water. This picture came to represent the living conditions during the entire monsoon season, dark day and wet everything.

I felt lucky to have had that stretcher for a bed. If not for that I would have had to sleep on the ground in the mud, cold and wet like many of the Marines on the perimeter. With the stretcher came a few unpleasant problems though, namely rodents. Rats did not like being wet and cold either. With every comfort came sacrifice and while at Yankee Station if sleeping somewhat warm and dry meant sharing the rack with an occasional rat, so be it. The rats after all were all well feed on discarded C-Rations. They did not have to gnaw on us for their livelihood.

Life at Yankee Station was much like I would imagine life in prison might be. I’ve never been in prison but I cannot imagine basic freedoms being limited more severely. We were nearly completely cut off from the world, limited in movement to only places within the razor wire unless on patrols or work details outside the perimeter. No club, no theater, no electricity, no library. If someone did receive a magazine in the mail, it was passed around like some sacred scroll. Nowhere existed to spend money. No communications of any kind. No phone or outside contact was possible other than letters that came infrequently. In fact, it could be argued that we were even more isolated than those incarcerated. Even if we did jump the wire, there was nowhere to go. It wasn’t like you could walk out to the highway and hitch a ride or steal a vehicle to aid in your escape. An escapee, not knowing the language and being of a different race, could not simply blend into the general population. Like Blacks attempting to escape landowners in the South prior to the Civil War, so it would have been for an American deserter --- only worse. Nothing like an under-ground railroad existed to provide shelter for those fleeing. There was only NVA in this area and the NVA had some very unpleasant ways to treat Americans or so I was told.

Being well within the range of North Vietnamese artillery, we tried to protect ourselves the best we could by building bunkers and digging trenches. Comparing it to prison as the metaphor above, call it breaking rocks. Building bunkers required filling sand bags and stacking them together like bricks to form a shelter with the finished product appearing not that different than any large dirt pile around it.

When we first began digging trenches, the labor was all by hand but shortly we received a mechanical powered trencher which accelerated our efforts twenty times over. Filling sand bags was simply holding them open while the trencher expelled the dirt extracted from the trench out the back. By the time we were finished Yankee Station ended up as a maze of narrow, nearly perfectly dug trenches and piles of thousands of sand bags to build bunkers. By the time the
trenches were dug and the new bunkers built, conditions at Yankee Station were not all that bad. Inside, the bunkers were dry, the racks were up off the floor, and the walls and ceilings were thick enough to absorb a direct hit from most the armament the NVA could throw at us. We even received heaters, a very welcomed comfort in the cold and rain of the monsoons. Keeping warm and dry was always a challenge.

At Yankee Station we also had a chapel alongside a shower. I do not remember anyone utilizing either all the time we were there. Water was always a problem and I have been told that Agent Orange took its name from the orange barrel in which it came. The barrel on top of shower, holding the water, just happened to be orange. We also had a wash rack and a clothes line, though very few ever used it. Being out in the open at Yankee Station was not something most Marines wanted to be. A mortar round could fall out of the sky at any time completely without warning.

As for the war at Yankee Station, action was far less than anything I had imagined before getting there, having been told to expect up to 2000 rounds of artillery per day. It was almost anti-climactic but no one complained. I expected to get pounded by artillery at least once a week, but instead, the incoming we experienced at Yankee Station could only be called sporadic at best. In fact, what we did receive could have been largely friendly short rounds as many of the rounds that hit us came from an unknown location to our south.

On January first units of Hotel came under fire and were quickly called back inside the CP. One KIA resulted. Mortars and grenades followed the night patrol made their way back to the CP. Figuring we may be under attack, Yankee Station was placed on full alert. Orders came down to open up with ten minutes of final protective fire on a tree line to the southeast. Tracers crisscrossed each other, mortars and grenades exploded, as the Marines opened up with all they had resulting in nothing more than a fireworks display. Maybe it prevented a NVA assault but who knows. All I could think was I would have liked to had the money that fire workers display cost.
Yankee Station on occasion did received incoming but never on any scale of Con Thien. When Con Thien was shelled, we largely just sat and watched the fireworks realizing full well all that enemy artillery was exploding within our eye and ear shot. A small adjustment of the sights by the gunners of North Vietnam was all that was needed to hammer Yankee Station the same way. On January 5th, Con Thien came under heavy fire. The call went out for Corpsmen but apparently all the Corpsmen on Con Thien were required in their own sector and could not be freed. I was doing my usual, observing Con Thien being shelled when Mike Hill came by sitting on a 106 mule. He was on his way to Con Thien. “They need Corpsmen up there,” Mike yelled. With that said, I was on that mule and on my way to the source of those explosions.

The mule driver never took us all the way to Con Thien, however, and instead stopped and turned around about half way. The driver of the mule claimed he had other things to do than to commit suicide, so Mike and I jumped off and proceeded on foot the rest of the way up the hill (Con Thien was called the hill), over the top, and across the Valley of Death to the COC bunker. All the time mortars were falling out of the sky all around us. Making it through that barrage made me feel almost invincible; a regular John Wayne. At the COC bunker Mike and I split up. He went into the bunker whereas I ran around outside looking for casualties. This is when I found Carl Hixson to the east of the COC bunker sitting on the shitter, dead. I never attempted to remove him as rockets and mortars were going off all around me. Realizing he was dead, I headed for whatever cover I could only to have a sandbagged wall right in front me vanish with a deafening roar. The wall opened like a door so I ran through it and continued to the COC bunker. By the time I had returned to the COC bunker, Mike had Col Parker, the Battalion Commanding Officer, ready to transport to BAS (Battalion Aid Station). At the BAS the Battalion Doctor, Dr. Lee awaited us.

My February 5th letter tells of two events worth mention. One was R&R. I was leaving for R&R the next day which was an event I had looked forward to for some time. The other was the tale of two caves. We were out pounding the bush where we ran into two caves. Those so called caves were straight down with flawless smooth round sides. They seemed like engineering marvels. How could Vietnamese or anyone with primitive equipment like shovels and picks make such perfect holes? As it turns out, they didn’t. I know today those so called tunnels were holes punched in the ground by dud 500 pound bombs. I’m not sure where I heard it (a reunion likely) but I remember another story about those holes. A Marine, thinking he might shake up or even kill a few NVA, spoke about throwing grenades down those holes. After finding out what caused those holes and what was at bottom, the Marine proclaimed “Who says god does not watch over dumb shits?”
A group of pictures I took shows us, Hotel Company, heading for the bush (meaning a patrol outside the perimeter of Yankee Station). That day we would be headed west toward the DMZ. A large area, that had been leveled and de-vegetated by caterpillars and agent-orange to give spotter planes an open area in which to report troop movements, existed between Yankee Station and any cover. For us while bunkered in behind the perimeter of Yankee Station, that clearing provided a free fire zone and hopefully made it difficult for the enemy to sneak up to our lines. The down side was this same de-vegetated area exposed us to any and all NVA that might be hiding in the trees and brush on the other side. Just one NVA FO could bring the wrath of North Vietnamese artillery down upon us. These were not comforting thoughts as we, completely in the open, often wandered across that opening.

Once in the bush, however, the objective became getting back. Be observant both to what is on the ground and what the surroundings are. Always have an escape route in mind, a hole to jump in, or a pile of wood or dirt to hide behind should a firefight or incoming artillery erupt. Know what the others are doing, where they are headed, and what is behind you. We could be attacked from the rear. Every detail was important. In today’s world, many veterans suffering from the adverse effects of war, normally referred to as Post Traumatic Stress, PTSD, still exhibit this behavior. Scanning, it’s called --- always looking around, positioning oneself where everything can be observed. Norman civilians, those never having experienced combat, often feel like they are being ignored by Veteran’s eyes that never focus on them during conversations, rather the Vets eyes are looking past them and roaming from place to place. Behavior that once your life depended is hard to overcome.

While on this trip to the field we came across a number of NVA fighting bunkers. The most recent and best kept bunkers looked like just another clump of
grass. No wonder we never saw any targets as well as the bunkers were hidden. Looking at those bunkers, I was put in mind of hunting pheasants. I often wondered just how many NVA, like pheasants, that we simply just walked by and never even knew they were there. Scary thought. We, like pheasant hunters, should have come armed with scout dogs leading our way. Lucky for us no NVA occupied those bunkers.

The greatest threat to my life found on this trip to the bush was a mine that existed in a shallow hole. I caught it out of the bottom of my eye just before setting my foot directly on top of it. To avoid landing my foot on it, I literally had to check my step and fall forward as I was too committed to the step to recover and still remain upright. The hole blown in the ground was about four feet deep and five feet across. Lesson learned: every detail about your surroundings was important.

**Joel R. Koester: The Death of an Unintentional Friend**

As war rolls along and bodies pile up, building protective mental barriers is a common method used by individuals to help them cope with the loss going on around them. The term loss is purposely used indiscriminately here as exactly what is lost is often vague and far more than just the deaths of friends and comrades. Thoughts are being rearranged, long held beliefs are being challenged, and the value of life is being redefined; purpose, self-image and worth are all on the chopping block.

Barriers to minimize the effects of events, beliefs, or individuals lost, could be heard to describe disastrous events in sayings like “It ain’t no big deal” or, “It don’t mean nothing.” These sayings were common among Marines and likely soldiers in general, having just lost a close comrade or experienced some other tragic event. It was his way of protecting himself from what otherwise would have normally resulted in an open emotional reaction, rage or crying.

Somehow the grief experienced had to be covered up to give an illusion that the loss could be dealt with. Grown men after all, do not cry. The worst thing a soldier could do however was to discredit his manhood in the military was to break down and cry. Crying was usually reserved until later, in solitude, if even then. In fact, over time it got to the point where you could not cry. In fact, it got to the point where it was hard to feel anything at all. In the years that followed back home, I had to be really careful how I reacted to the death of a loved one, for example. Even there, “It ain’t no big deal” was my reaction to death, much to the disgust of those around me. “What, don’t you have any feelings?” I’d be asked. “Don’t you care?” Some protective layers are hard to shed. Some may never be. It’s too easy for me to just think people die. What’s abnormal about that?
To reduce the trauma of people dying, people killed in action are not called by name by the officers recording their deaths into the command chronology. The dead are not listed as “Joe Citizen” but instead are referred to only as a KIA, their name recorded as a service number. It’s far less emotional to see KIA, service number X435788, rather than the name Joe Citizen. The moment a name is mentioned, the dead take on human form. Joe Citizen has a genealogy and perhaps could have been a husband and father. Maybe, had he lived, he would have made the world a better place for someone else, if not all of us. He might have been a teacher, a lawyer, a business owner, or a future president, but instead KIA SNX435788 is simply another statistic, a faceless number in a file.

The people who died in my arms were not numbers to me. Whenever a friend was lost, being wounded, killed, or simply rotated back to the States, I’d feel the emptiness hard to fill. The problem was, unlike life as I knew it before, these events occurred on a near daily basis. Hardly had the tears been sucked up from the loss of someone, in some cases they were not yet, when another would be lost. I recalled from high school when Kenny Kruger, a classmate, died at home due to what was believed to be a brain aneurism. Until now, Kruger was the only peer’s death I had to deal with. I found myself from time to time nearly crying over Kenny’s death years later. In this place, Vietnam however, one day the tears just dried up and never returned, replaced by rationalizations how fragile life is. It was good if anyone lived as long as they did, no matter how short.

Another method of self-emotional preservation is to isolate yourself by holding at bay anyone who might wish to get close. Do not get to know those around you. Avoid personal intercourse. The military realizes this. Officers are not supposed to fraternize with the enlisted because it is much easier to send a bunch of nameless faces to their grave than a friend. Hill was aware of this --- but like I stated before, Hill was too late for me. Marines, those I became attached to prior to Mike’s taking over as Hotel’s company Corpsman, were my friends.

Medina, however, changed much of that. Many of those killed or wounded in the October ambush were friends too. I had placed my hand on the stove and was burned. It hurt. Not wanting to experience that pain again, as FNGs (Fucking New Guy) filed in to replace those lost on Medina, I kept to myself. If I did not already know a Marine, I did not have the desire to get to know him. FNGs remained in my mind FNGs. No longer would I inquire where is Jack, instead it was likely I asked the FNG?

At times I even became hostile toward them, particularly if they thought they knew anything about war and the Vietcong. I remember challenging a few who believing themselves invincible and figured no one, without being noticed, could sneak up on them. “You sit right here,” I’d argue with them, “and I’ll tell you what. Sometime this month, I’ll come wake you up.” For Charlie, time was on his
side. He lived his entire life right there. Charlie slept when and where he wanted. Charlie was in no hurry. He could just wait for us to sleep --- and only then would Charlie come --- like a nightmare on Elm Street.

I did not know much about Joel. I did not know how long he’d been in country, where he was from, whether he was married or any of that getting to know you small talk. If I avoided small talk, I avoided the trauma of getting to know people on a personal level. Joel did not respect fences. It did not seem to bother him if I wished to talk to him or not, or whether I was interested in anything he might have to say. It was always, “Hey Doc” this and “Hey Doc” that every time he saw me --- and he saw me frequently given our bunkers were about ten yards apart. Whatever the reason, he was not about to allow me to isolate myself by just letting me slip into my bunker and go to bed without getting a greeting in somehow.

January 10th just happened to be an evening I was off - as if at Yankee Station anyone was ever “off.” Being off simply meant I was spending this evening inside the perimeter rather than crawling around outside the wire and I had a dry bunk to sleep in rather than some wet spot on the ground. The evening was overcast but fair, not raining. Joel, of course, was there with his “Hey Doc --- What’s happening?” Something must have been happening because we ended up spending a couple hours talking about Charlie II, a Marine outpost down the road to our south, popping off green and red flares along with a few illumination rounds. We speculated like arm chair generals whether they were just shooting fireworks off or if something might actually be occurring. Whatever was happening did not seem like anything that might affect us --- but the fireworks were cool and provided something to talk about.

I forgot all the small talk we talked about that evening. With Joel small talk could not be avoided. All I remember for sure is it had been a while since I talked to anyone about anything other than duty, war, or cards. The evening had gone by too quickly. For a brief period of time, being at Yankee Station wasn’t like being caged up. For a brief period of time, I did not feel alone. For a brief period of time, I felt my being there meant something to someone other than my being “Doc.” Joel almost made me feel human again. We broke off about 2100. He went to his bunker, I to mine. To prevent dragging a bunch of mud into my shelter, I did my usual and removed my boots at the door, climbed onto my stretcher and pulled my poncho liner over me, thinking all’s well --- just another day to cross off on my calendar. No more had I made myself comfortable when a large explosion about knocked me out of my rack. Lumps of mud came raining down on the top of bunker like hail. My first thought was, “Holy shit!” followed by the instinct to hit the floor and brace myself as I was sure more were on their way. But none came. Instead the dreaded call for “Corpsman Up!” broke an uncertain silence.
I grabbed my medical bag and backed out stocking footed. I did not even have to turn to see a Marine lying on the ground as others began gathering around. On hands and knees, I crawled over to the Marine. It was Joel. Body wise he looked intact, no missing limbs, no chunks of flesh dangling outside his uniform, no large pools of blood but he wasn’t moving. Maybe he was just knocked out. Maybe he was alright, just unconscious. The explosion I heard could have easily knocked anyone unconscious. I felt for a pulse. No pulse. I listened to his chest for breathing. He was not breathing.

“Be OK, Joel. Stay alive. Please be alive.” I begged of who knows who. I ran my hands over his legs and torso feeling for warm moist spots from bleeding but found nothing significant, until I came to his head. There I found what I was feeling for, something warm and moist. Oddly however the texture of what I was feeling seemed different than blood. I’d felt blood many times before and blood did not feel like this. This was greasier. I looked closer. It was grey matter --- his brains were running out in my hand. What do I do? All I could think was put them back --- maybe if I could just push his brains back in his head somehow his situation would correct itself.

I thought, “This can’t be happening. Joel! Wake up! Joel! Hang in there. You’re OK Joel. Get up!” I’d lost it. For a brief period it was like nothing was around me but funny little sparkly things floating in the air. What were they? Fire Flies maybe? Where is this place anyway? And why isn’t anyone else here? A feeling of incredible loneliness chilled me.

About then Hill tapped me on the shoulder and brought me back to reality. He ran up from CAS about 150 yards away. He did not take long to assess my loss of reality either. He ordered me aside and took over but there was nothing he could do other than to load Joel on a chopper and fly off with him as a medical escort.

Soon after Hill flew off with Joel, I found myself feeling incredibility guilty about not being able to do more for Joel. That fact that nothing could have been done for Joel did not even enter into my thinking. Somehow, if Joel died it was my fault. Me. If only I knew more. If only I knew as much as half these Marines seemed to think I know, maybe then Joel would be still alive. That guilt laden reasoning as unreasonable as it was, did not take long to become accusatory anger. How the Hell could the Navy send me out here and expect me to deal with this? I should have been better trained, more prepared, more knowledgeable --- and then maybe things would have come out different.

My reasoning fell into a loop, guilt, anger, guilt, anger and nowhere was my thinking ever interrupted. Some thirty years after the fact, I managed to take a square look at reality. Joel was dead --- and nothing I could have done nor could have any amount of training changed the outcome. Then however somehow, my lack of knowledge was responsible. I had to know more. But know what? And
where is the material? Not here. How can anyone know anything if nothing is available to learn from? How could the military send me out here without making that information available? I’d blame myself for not knowing. I’d blame the military for not providing me the material. Around and around it went and all that ever fell out of the centrifuge was depression, an immense feeling that nothing mattered. “It ain’t no big deal.” “It don’t mean nothing.” I’d try to convince myself --- but then the idea would return “It does matter” --- and the whole damn process would start all over again.

I have no idea how the rest of the night went. All I really remember is waking up the next morning feeling really sticky. I crawled outside to see why my pants were sticking to my legs. It was blood mixed with grey matter. It was all over my clothes, on my hands, and in my hair. And there was nowhere to clean it off --- so I ended up wearing it like a spilled lunch on my only shirt. “Maybe,” I thought, “if I was lucky, it would rain today.” Joel’s death, while not nearly as traumatic as Medina, served to reinforce all the negative feelings I was having about religion up to this point. While Medina got me to seriously question any religious beliefs, Joel’s death illuminated them. Between Medina and Joel’s death, any religious thoughts I may have had could be compared to a buoy anchored on bottom by a long rope. Anchored still by the hope that some aspects of religion might be true, religion, in my mind, was being blown around by the winds of reason. Joel’s death cut the rope. Asking, hoping, and pleading for Joel to be alright from whatever might be out there to listen went unanswered. Joel’s prayer, as simple as it was, was the last prayer I ever made.

**Dirt and Grime: Unimaginable Filth**

Personal hygiene was always a problem largely because of the water issue. While we had a shower, I never saw it ever used for a number of reasons. One, it put the user out in the open where little shelter existed; two, water had to be trucked in over mined and insecure roads, and three, assuming getting water was not a problem, getting the water to the top of barrel which sat on top of the shower was a real challenge. Most Marines, like I did, settled for sponge baths using helmets for water basins. While these baths may have removed some dirt from people’s hands and face, they did nothing to cleanse the body. The clothes worn before the bath were the same clothes worn after. Clothes, like skin, never came off. (Personal letter December 29th, 1967)
In my January 16th letter home, protesting the sanitary conditions we were forced to live in, I make the statement that I had never been so filthy in my life. Six days after losing Joel his brains were still clinging to my clothing. By January 21st after weeks with no shower and literally smelling like death, I had enough. I cut a fifty gallon oil barrel in half and made a bathtub. In the two months that I was at Yankee Station, I got to use it once. The bath, even with hot water headed by burning wood, was great other than having to feel guilty about using the water. This bath is likely the only sit down bath ever taken, even if in a make shift bathtub, by anyone at Yankee Station, Con Thien, or for that matter the entire DMZ. I wonder if Guinness knows anything of this bathtub. My guess is this bath set a world record.

Worth mention, in my February 5th letter home is this little note which would be important upon returning stateside:

“I’m also a member of the VFW now. I got a membership and everything from the VFW back home. They paid my dues and everything for 1968, wasn’t that nice. Now I’ve been encouraged by their magazine to write my congressman about the war in Vietnam but believe it or not I don’t even know his address or who he is.

The remainder, the never discussed portion of our stay at Yankee Station, could best be described as mundane. While numerous contacts were made outside the perimeter, no real battle ever ensued. An occasional incoming round or two always got everyone’s attention but never was the incoming sustained for any length of time or resulted in a large loss of personnel. When writing my parents I always attempted to minimize any concerns that we at Yankee Station might have had, either adding something humorous like being assaulted by wild pigs or talking about being shelled by our own artillery, as if being shelled by our artillery was less serious than being shelled by North Vietnam.
To my brother however, I often mentioned what was going on beneath the surface, boredom included. January 31st 1968 While on the surface everything seemed calm, perhaps a little choppy from time to time, under it all, unseen, was a riptide. While we were not coming under attack, we all knew that could change in a heartbeat. We knew North Vietnam was on the move and moving in large numbers --- but they seemed to be going right by us rather than engaging us. For those who did not want the blood and gore on their turf, like me, the NVA’s avoidance of us was good, sort of, until we realized that we were being surrounded. The threat of Migs, Communist jet fighters, hitting us was a very real possibility, given we were only a stone’s throw from North Vietnam. I could think of much more pleasant things to think about than being on the receiving end of napalm or large bombs. We even worried about poison gas.

Before leaving Yankee Station, needed added are all those days that we just sat and did nothing, much of the time in the rain. If it wasn’t for poker there would have been nothing to do, but even poker in time becomes blah. You can only clean weapons so many times a day before it becomes impossible to believe that cleaning them once more will make any kind of difference. As for filling sand bags, you know you’re bored when you look forward to filling them. No extracurricular activities existed; no basketball, soccer, or football. We existed largely isolated in our bunkers although we had the liberty of moving around -- as long as we stayed inside the razor wire. There was no intermingling with the opposite sex. We were totally isolated within our own little circle. Day after day followed the other, full of unfathomable boredom without much more to do than worry about what the day might bring or whether you’d still be alive at day’s end. In terms of the material world, the luxury of material goods that Americans have grown to expect and demand, we had little if any. Clothes were worn 24 hours a day for weeks at a time, muddy, bloody, torn, or in whatever condition they happened to be in. Personal items, tooth brushes, deodorant, soap, writing paper, were not replaceable on demand; and given we were at Yankee Station better than two months, most everyone ran out. No electric lights existed,
only candles - assuming you did not run out of them also. Meals were eaten out of cans, cold usually, with the same plastic spoon saved and protected for months.

Yet out of that isolation and lack of material pleasures came an unexpected realization. Life under those conditions was livable. If we did not want to sit around and become completely depressed, it was up to us to do something about it. If we wanted entertainment, we had to provide it. Not the stereo, the television, the radio – but us. The result was closeness and togetherness never experienced before or after. As for material goods, most of those material goods until that point I could not have imagined life without were not missed nearly as much as I figured they would be. Status wise, we were all equal. There was no keeping up with the Joneses at Yankee Station. Whether you liked everyone or not, you knew most everyone and where they lived, which is much more than I can say about most apartment dwellers in America. Half of America does not even know who lives across the hall. As to thinking travel is a necessity --- conditions proved it was not, although most would have went somewhere else had they had the freedom to do so. But we did not have that freedom --- so we made the best of what we had by bringing to this boring existence a little humor. Mike Hill, my friend, always had some off the wall thing going:

Say by the way, you’d never guess what we did?
We took a picture of our company aid station and sent it to Playboy as the Playboy Club of Con Thien. I wonder if it will make the pages? Ha! What a laugh if it does.

Personal letter to my brother, Bob,
January 9th, 1968

Given a choice between the kind of life we led at Yankee Station and the one I lead now --- well, I was given that choice and chose the life I live now. Like any other animal, I chose comfort after years of struggling with environmentalism and how I should live --- but my gut feelings are the world, if I can get by thinking of myself, would be much better off if everyone chose to do with MUCH less. And I know from experience that most people could tolerate it. In fact, MOST people do, given most people’s standard of living in the world is far below the enjoyment experienced by even the lowest waged Americans.

I often wrestle with what that says about me. I believe what I say when I say the world would be better off if everyone did with less, yet, I exist in a lifestyle seen as extravagant by most the people of the world. I do not believe if I chose to live with practically no modern luxuries that my doing so would change anything. For example, if I chose not to drive a car and burn fossil fuel, I doubt anything would change regarding the overall consumption of fossil fuels. The reality is that
fossil fuel would be burnt anyway by others and I would still have to live with whatever the results of burning that fuel might be, not to mention pumping, transporting, and manufacturing that oil. To believe the world would stand up and take notice of my sacrifice by not using fossil fuels and follow my example would be nothing but grandiose idealism.

I will return to this discussion in the section on environmentalism under Biological Fundamentalism.

**Con Thien:** “The Hill of Angels”:

*Yea Though I Walk Through the Valley of Death*

While I personally did not spend much time at Con Thien, Con Thien is worth mention for it did differ from Yankee Station in a number of ways. One: Con Thien reminded me more of a landfill than a military outpost. Comparatively Yankee Station was much cleaner and better kept. Not that we at Yankee Station were better housekeepers but as already mentioned, Con Thien had the trash of three companies and Headquarters to deal with as well as gun support. As such, Con Thien had much larger problem with rodents, flies, and insects than did Yankee Station, not to mention was the target of constant bombardment from Vietcong rockets, mortars, recoiless rifles, and artillery. To NVA gunners, Con Thien offered much more to hit than did Yankee Station. Hardly a day went by without Con Thien receiving income of some kind.

The living conditions by what I hear aren’t very good for battalions rotate in and out all the time so no one cares too much about their up keep. It’s just a maze of garbage, foxholes, bunkers, and with the constant shelling combined with the monsoon rains there is a new attraction, mud. The doctor, who just got back from there, said they had to use mules (106) at times to pull the Marines out of some of the trenches because of all the mud. Just like World War I all over again – just sit and shoot arty (artillery) back and forth.
My job as a Corpsman, being the up keep of the Marines, will bring my attention to first shrapnel wounds from mortars and artillery. The second is to diseases like upper respiratory infections, dysentery, and a new growing problem at Con Thien, Rabies. Being the garbage dump of Vietnam, the asshole of the world, Con Thien attracts rats and with the steady growth of rats comes rabies so I will have my hands full. I have the feeling the next month is going to be an experience I shall never forget as long as I live.

(Personal letter to my brother Bob, dated December 16th, 1967)

Con Thien also was the tactical position. “Take the high ground” is the conventional military wisdom. Con Thien was the high ground. Existing as a small elevation rise above a surrounding low lying plain, Con Thien offered full observation of the land around it. For that, Con Thien’s perimeter was always being probed, its perimeter wires cut, and mine fields investigated. The plaque pictured is a tribute to a Corpsman who lost his life coming to the aid of a wounded Marine who wandered out in the Marine’s own mine field. Rumors had it, the VC were sneaking into the mine field perimeter and altered the routes through them so Marines would end up walking out into their own mine fields.

0144: Spot report #1, Carousel CP at 1023458 at CT (Con Thien). Platoon blundered into fr. (assumed Friendly) mine field, resulting in one KIA, 1 WIA, and 1 WIA minor.004

Spot Report #2, Carousel CP at 162340H at Fr. 111703 at En same. While unit was moving through minefield in safe lane to scorpion site. One carousel man stepped on M-14 mine, causing fracture or partial amputation of left foot. Man was taken to BAS treated, and then med-evaced to hospital.005

(Translation: Carousel CP = 2/1Command Post. A carousel man = a 2/1 Marine. BAS = Battalion Aid Station)

I doubt, however, if the efforts of the enemy messing in the mine fields following the January 11th event were simply to lead Marines astray. Reading over the command chronologies for the days surrounding January 11th, it would appear that an assault was being prepared by the NVA. In the days to follow, numerous enemy sightings were reported as well as bunkers being found just outside of Con Thien. One enemy boot is found with part of a foot still in it.006 On 0130 January
14th an explosion was heard and turned out to be an NVA in the mine field. At 1445 boards are discovered laid over the barbed wire in a manner that made a good trail. At 0400 January 15th, a “large number of enemy” were believed to be in the area with dogs (time 1015). Why the dogs if not mine sniffing dogs? Later checking the perimeter at 1845, a six foot hole is found in the wire with a well-defined path leading right to Golf’s third platoon (G3’s) position. January 22nd numerous bunkers were spotted by spotter planes. Air strikes with 250 pound bombs and napalm were called against suspected enemy positions resulting in reports of bodies flying through the air. Later the same day, Fox Company ran into what was believed a company unit of NVA who initiated the fight, an act the NVA normally did not commit to unless they figured they had the upper hand. On January 23rd numerous holes in the perimeter wire are discovered, blown by what was believed to be a Bangalore torpedo. The final support to an impending assault came on January 25th at 1400, an entry in the Command Chronologies notes that the mines in the mine field were apparently being removed. If the NVA’s efforts were to divert Marines into their own mine field, why would the NVA remove the mines? I believe Con Thien bit the bullet here and avoided a major battle.

One event during this time worth mentioning at Con Thien was January 22, 1968. Incoming within the perimeter of Con Thien was noted as early as 0100 beginning with five 81 mortar rounds. At 0210 Con Thien received another twelve. At 0949 Fox Company, already mentioned, on patrol received heavy small arms, automatic rifle, and mortar fire. Con Thien received an additional incoming shortly after 1000. At 1410 Con Thien received 100 plus rounds of incoming from 81 mortars and artillery.

Fox Company’s contact was with what is believed to be about a company of NVA. A large firefight broke out. Golf, on maneuvers with Fox, came to Fox’s aid. Killed in the resulting action on the 22nd were four enlisted Marines. 40 were wounded. Fox ended up taking two KIAs, Pfc David Bingham and PFC A. Tom Simmons, outside the perimeter. The other two KIAs, Cpl Richard Byars and GySgt Nathaniel Weathers, came from Echo Company who died from incoming within Con Thien’s perimeter. The January 68 Command Chronology (2/1 CC) is unclear about how many wounded in action (WIA) Fox suffered. While the 2/1 CC claims 32 total Marines suffered wounds for the month of January, the S-1 report to Division lists 40 WIA for January 22 alone. Why this discrepancy? I’m not sure; however it is likely that I do not understand exactly what is being reported by either of these recordings which are part of the same of document. For example, perhaps the 32 WIA reported for the month of January were med-evaced while the 40 reported for January 22 included walking wounded who were returned to duty.
A Marine’s Recollection of January 22nd 1968:  
A Fire Fight as seen by a Combatant

The casualties suffered by Fox Company as reported in the Command Chronologies on January 22nd comes nowhere near what has been reported to me by a Marine with Golf Company, sent to aid Fox Company. This Marine remembers this event much differently. While I was in the process of contacting former members of 2/1, I was contacted by this Marine who spoke of an event that occurred outside the perimeter of Con Thien in January 68. According to him, Fox Company was obliterated. Twenty to thirty dead Marines were just left for buzzard pickings as Fox retreated to Con Thien, this Marine informed me. I could tell by his tone of voice that he was deeply distressed and believed his version of this event actually occurred.

Having some experience at researching Marine Corps records along with a few connections, I contacted the Navy Museum at Washington D.C. which at that time housed the Command Chronologies. There I found the Marine Corps’ account given in the January Command Chronology. So which version is correct, the Marine’s Corps version or a Marine’s? I’d strongly side with the Marines Corps’ version even having pointed out the Marine Corp’s record contradicts itself. I believe it nearly impossible that had the Marine’s version been true that we, Hotel Company sitting at Yankee Station, would have never known about it. If the Marines higher ups did cover up an event as this Marine described, the Marine Command was potentially far more dangerous and intelligent than I had ever given them credit for.

So is this a condemnation of this Marine? Absolutely not! If it’s a condemnation of anything, it is a condemnation of the Marine Corps. In the confusion of battle, given this event, I am absolutely sure that the level of confusion that existed as a Marine company battled it out with a NVA company sized unit was enormous. With mortars and artillery exploding within the ranks of the Marines, to an on looker, I have no doubt the casualties among the Marines appeared to him far more numerous than recorded by the USMC. I have no doubt that this Marine firmly believed his version of this event. Not only did he believe his version was correct, he was haunted by his remembrance of this event for better than two decades following his release from Vietnam. His resulting belief influenced his views of the military, society, politics, and life in general. For years he fought the demons of all those bodies he believed were left to just decompose.

If I were to make a moral out of this Marine’s story, I would advise the military to make it a policy to inform everyone involved in combat, as described above, exactly what happened. Command should have a sit down with the troops
and discuss these events. Officers, Brake rank --- Talk to your men. Damn it! Do not assume that those who survived the confusion and horror of such an event know what actually happened. In their mind, hearing screams, bullets whistling by, artillery exploding, seeing body parts flying around, my experience, as I have already mentioned, is these soldiers tend to think what happened around them was far worse than it actually was. Don’t send these young men home alone in their thoughts. Don’t let them go home believing what they believe they saw unless what they saw is fact. To leave such events to the imagination of individuals, formed in the confusion of battle, is nothing short of psychological torture.

The other alternative is how the military has dealt with their combat veteran’s mental anguish for centuries. They simply send them home, tortured over something that may not have even happened as in this case. To do so is not good for the man involved nor his family, the military, or society at large which likely will get stuck picking up the pieces of this individual as he begins to fall apart. If the goal is to prevent young men from going home with their heads full of doubts and haunted for years, dedicate the time to make sure everyone involved in combat knows exactly what happened. Treat these boys sent to do a man’s job like men. They earned it.

Elsewhere

As to the war at large, the month of January brought the names of never heard towns and villages names to the forefront, Khe Sanh, Kontum, Dalat, not to mention the old standbys such as Hue, Saigon, and Quang Tri. The village of Khe Sanh was overrun while the Marine base of Khe Sanh came under siege, pounded from Laos by long range NVA artillery. 1500 tons of explosives erupted into a huge ball of fire at the Khe Sanh ammo dump. We at Yankee Station and Con Thien become aware of why it seemed that the NVA were going around us rather than engaging us when Hue and Quang Tri were overrun at the kickoff of the TET offensive. 016

Meanwhile at home, with the American casualties for 1967 higher than all the previous casualties combined since the beginning of the Vietnam War, the USMC to sustain their numbers had to rely on the drafting and retaining qualified Marine officers and Non-commissioned officers was becoming increasingly difficult. 017 At fifty colleges and universities across the US, some 320 economists came out in opposition to the Johnson Administration’s fiscal policies and blamed the war for America’s economic problems. 018 A few weeks later, President Johnson asks for an additional $26.3 billion dollars for the war effort to be financed by a tax increase 019 and earned the Democrats the title by conservatives as of “Tax and spend” democrats.
Today, 2008, monetary lessons learned from Vietnam have been adopted by the Republicans. They now finance the war by borrowing and spending. In recent years, the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars are largely funded on borrowed money while at the same time, taxes to the rich, many making millions off the war, have been cut to the point of being nonexistent. Something is wrong about that picture --- Or, is it art, intentionally painted by a human hand for his own satisfaction?

CHAPTER SEVEN
The Calm before the Storm

Phu Bia
Out of the Bush or so I Hoped

Arriving back in Vietnam from R&R in February, I landed at Phu Bia, 2/1’s rear area. Unlike Da Nang where the headquarters and supply (H&S) portion of 2/1 was housed within the battalion perimeter of 2/1, 2/1’s rear and forward positions were split. 2/1’s rear was located at Phu Bia while its forward position was at Con Thien. Finally, I thought, I was out of the field. No more mines and booby traps, being sniped at, nearly drowning falling into rice paddies, sleeping in the rain in mosquito infested darkness, and weeks without showers or a change in clothing. Life now should be somewhat reasonable in terms of comfort and about the only real threat was an occasional volley of rockets to wake us up and remind us we were still in a war zone. Life was much better --- relatively.

My letters home from here clearly reveals my thoughts were turning toward home and the car I was planning on buying after arriving home. Our duty at Phu Bia, in effect, was nothing more than reserves, spare tires should one (another corpsman) out on the road go flat and needed replaced. At no time could the work load at Phu Bia justify the number of Corpsman housed there. Two Corpsmen could have easily taken care of BAS. On any given day, the most patients ever seen were about five.

Actually I served at Phu Bia twice. The first time around, we were housed in GP tents. The second time, we stayed in the hard back hooches like the one Gallagher was killed in at the bridge. At Phu Bia, those hooches were well protected and far removed from any contact with the perimeter however. Now and then, we’d be rocketed at night so we dug a number of foxholes in the back for cover. One evening diving in one of those pits after receiving a couple rockets, the mosquitoes were so bad that I got up and went back inside the tent in spite of the danger the rockets posed. I figured I had a chance against the rockets.
Hue: Forgotten Graves

While at Phu Bia the largest threat of ending up back in actual combat was Hue which was just up the road. The Battle for Hue was in full swing in February and we in the rear ran numerous convoys to Hue with supplies. One bridge lying in the water was blown by the NVA while Jim Clark, my friend from Enderlin, was still on it. My love for convoys had not improved either. Any Vietnamese milling around our trucks in the crowds documented in many of my pictures could flick a grenade, or worse a bomb, into the back of a truck at any time.

Worth mentioning is a Catholic Church again. One day a group of Corpsmen were loaded up and hauled out to inoculate a number of Catholic nuns against the plague, the medieval Black Death of all things. I could not help wondering while those inoculations were being administered if the church provided vaccinations for the poor of Vietnam or if the poor were instructed to rely on faith for their protection against the plague. If the church could not provide vaccinations for their own nuns and depended on the U.S. Military to do so, what was I to think? From where I sat it appeared that god’s healing powers were good enough for the Vietnamese but not the members of the church. Besides, what was the U.S. government doing subsidizing the Church? Where was the separation of church and state here?

On February 24th, the Imperial Palace of Hue was liberated from the North Vietnamese by South Vietnamese forces. Minor skirmishes continued for a number of weeks, however for all practical purposes, the battle for Hue was over. Missing were about 3500 Hue residents. What happened to these 3500 people came to a grim realization when on February 26th bodies were discovered buried in shallow graves immediately east of the Citadel. About 150 bodies were recovered from the first of numerous mass graves. Over the next couple of months nearly 24 sites would be found yielding 809 bodies. Many were found with their hands tied behind their backs with no noticeable wounds indicating that many of those found were literally buried alive. While the TET offensive, which included the Battle
for Hue, was statistically a military defeat for North Vietnam; it was a huge psychological and political triumph for North Vietnam. For a number of years, both the military and US policy makers had been reassuring the American People that we were winning in Vietnam. To make their point, they’d pull out the infamous, inflated, body counts attempting to make the point that North Vietnam could not possibly maintain their losses and remain an effective fighting force. The problem with that logic was while most Americans were led to believe the more Vietcong killed, the less their ability to fight would be, it followed that as the numbers of Vietcong killed mounted, the war should have tapered off. Instead, as the Vietcong casualties mounted, the more intense the war grew. As such, any mind capable of simple logic was questioning what was coming out of the mouths of their military leaders and politicians regarding the Vietnam War. This was far from a morale builder.

Then came TET to completely discredit every optimistic prediction our military leaders and politicians were making. Out of the swamps and jungles emerged this raging monster, after America had been repetitively informed that we were winning, devouring cities in the largest Communist military offensive yet seen in the war. To make matters worse, what did the military and politicians tell America? On 2 February President Johnson announces that the Vietcong have suffered complete military defeat, an appraisal which General Westmoreland parroted four days later in a statement declaring that allied forces have killed more enemy troops in the past seven days than the United States has lost in the entire war. 003

Politically interpreted, more of the same old same old. Any real thinking person with an IQ higher than his age had already rejected any correlation between who was winning the war to and the number of enemy dead.

**Back at Con Thien: Under Heavy Fire**

On February 21st the National Council of Churches, to which my former church belonged, called for an immediate stop to the bombing of North Vietnam to allow negotiations to begin. 004 For anyone still within range of artillery from
North Vietnam or Laos that bombing was seen as a life savior; our only defense against the shelling we suffered on a regular basis. I believed then that North Vietnam was not interested in negotiations. North Vietnam wanted the unification of their divided country and was not about to settle for anything less. Any attempt at negotiations, given that, was nothing more than lip service stalling for time.

Four days later, on February 25th, Con Thien came under heavy fire from North Vietnam. The shelling began at 1125. At 1320 Con Thien received between 200 and 215 rounds of heavy artillery of which 175 were considered to be 152s. The shelling continued intermittently for the rest of day reporting an additional 50 rounds as late as 2210. While I was not at Con Thien at the end of February, all it would have taken to get me back would have been for a couple of other Corpsmen to be hit, a couple of flat tires in need of a spare.

**Charlie II: Two Doctors attempt Suicide**

On the 9th of March, 2/1, under the command of the 3rd MARDIV, was pulled back from Con Thien to C2 just south of Con Thien. Doing the math that means 2-1 was at Con Thien for 77 days, 47 days longer than the thirty day rotation expected. C2 was a much less hostile base than Con Thien even if C2 was still well within the range of artillery from North Vietnam. From the 9th to the 23rd, C2 reported receiving only 15 rounds of artillery. Even at that I remember not being too happy with leaving Phu Bia for some outpost once again gazing down the barrel of North Vietnam artillery. The good news was C-2 had well-fortified bunkers and was much closer to a number of other outposts so we did not have to feel so alone. Unlike Con Thien, if C-2 did come under attack, help was just down the road in about any direction.

One of the most damaging bomb shells dropped on me when I arrived at C-2 was an incident where a couple of doctors allegedly attempted suicide by choking down a bottle of Seconal, a potent sedative. I was not there when the incident occurred nor can I any reference to it in the records; hence all I have to go on is what I was told and the fact that the two doctors who allegedly took the drugs were suddenly gone. I suspect the medical staff on duty took care of it and likely kept it off the record assuming, of course, the event happened. Even the remote suggestion that members of our own medical group may have attempted suicide, after having surviving two months at Con Thien, however, hit me hard. These guys were not some whacked out draftees who were given the choice between incarceration and the military. These were doctors, naval officers with a bright future ahead of them --- if, of course, they survived Vietnam.

Was getting out of Vietnam their goal? Did they actually attempted suicide or just want to give the illusion of suicide to avoid going to Khe Sanh which, I’m
sure, they had good reason to suspect they were? They were after all military officers who were kept abreast on what was expected in the near future. As for their attempt at suicide, being doctors, if suicide was their mission, they surely should have been able to come up with a more fool proof method. As far as I know, no charges ever came against these individuals, meaning they got away with a con-job, faking a suicide for a plane trip home. I did not know whether to be disappointed at their cowardice or envious of their methods. Given the chance, I would have gone home also.

In later years, I understand that one of these doctors enjoys the prestige of being identified as a heroic veteran. The source of this information however comes from one that over the years I’ve come to doubt. But --- I did not doubt him then and whether true or false, I spent many days wondering how I might be able to pull off something similar. I wanted to go home. A few moments later I felt guilty for have such cowardice thoughts. I didn’t know what to think. What I did have was plenty to wonder about --- like what the hell were we doing here? A war going nowhere, politicians seemed unable to understand the obvious, peace negotiators that were more interested in the shape of a table than the human lives being wasted of either side, conditions that drove well educated promising individuals to a suicide attempt, for a nation (Vietnam) that seems as repressive to its people as the enemy, and a bunch of peers (Americans) more concerned about what we were doing to the enemy than what the enemy was doing to us. Just what the hell were we doing here? And who was really benefiting from our being here?

Innocent Civilians
Are There Really Innocent Civilians?

Anti-war protesters were handed a huge whip when on the 16th of March Lieutenant William Calley ordered Charlie Company of the 1st BN of the 20th Infantry to charge into the Mylia-4 hamlet with their guns ablaze. When all was said and done between 200 and 500 unarmed Vietnamese, mostly women and children, were dead. Some were executed gangland style, shot in the back of the head while on their knees. At least one was raped. This whip would be felt by Vietnam Veterans for years to follow. This massacre would come to reinforce the views of numerous Americans, even beyond the protesters, that Vietnam Veterans were nothing but murderous villains, killers of woman and children, and drug addicted rapists.

At the risk of sounding as if I am attempting to defend the actions of Calley and Charlie Company, I will say while I believe Mylia was a monstrous act, I can understand it, being in similar situations. The area in which Charlie Company was operating was heavily booby trapped by a well-defended force of Vietcong that in
the months leading up to this event maimed and killed numerous members of Charlie Company. I witnessed firsthand what affects these booby traps and loosing friends had on my own troops. Day after day we would go out and day after day lose friends and comrades to these invisible enemies only to have the local villagers go about their business around us like nothing happened. Sooner or later, one of these adolescent Marines was going to snap, and when he did, armed with M-16s, M79s, and grenades, it was not going to be good a day for any Vietnamese in the immediate area if they were the only ones around to blame.

Writing about women and children being killed for being guilty of nothing other than being afraid of heavily armed foreigners rummaging through their village, screaming orders these women and children did not understand, pushing people around, and perhaps even shooting one or two is actually as hard as watching it. By writing about these actions I’m acknowledging that events such Mylia did happen but at least in my outfit this behavior never approached that reported at Mylia. The most children I ever witnessed drug from bunkers and hideouts and killed, either mistakenly or as an act of vengeance, was perhaps five. That of course opens the door for all the usual attacks I have grown so weary of over the years --- like what kind of man was I to stand by and let this happen? Isn’t five innocent children too many? To admit these things were happening just goes to confirm what anti-war protesters were accusing Vietnam Veterans of being --- baby killers.

But for sake of history --- these incidents need to be looked at in something other than purely emotional terms blurted out in the atmosphere of an unpopular war. Yes, women and children died in Vietnam but in what war haven’t they? These atrocities are at least as old as the Old Testament assuming you believe the fables of the Old Testament:

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.
Joshua 6:21

And that day Joshua took Makkedah, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof he utterly destroyed, them, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain: and he did to the king of Makkedah as he did unto the king of Jericho.
Joshua 10:28
And he took it, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof; and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining: as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir, and to the king thereof; as he had done also to Libnah, and to her king.

Joshua 10:39

Not only were these atrocities committed according to Biblical myths but they were carried out by people hailed by religious people as heroes, Moses, Joshua, and David to name a few. Furthermore these Old Testament atrocities were committed at the orders of the very god Christians attempt to label “a loving god.”

World War II ended with two explosions over Japan that each individually, in a split second, took the lives of more so called innocent women and children than killed during the entire Vietnam War. The argument for the use of these bombs was to save thousands of American lives had America invaded Japan, a theory previously debunked by this writing. It is quite likely that if a number of high dignitaries from Japan were invited to a location like Bikini to watch Baker explode (which can be viewed earlier in this writing), the war would have ended with no invasion of Japan and no bomb dropped upon their soil. This simple bit of diplomacy was never attempted however.

Dropping the bomb on Japan was not the only deliberate extermination of civilians either. The firebombing of Tokyo, claimed about 100,000 civilians, burnt to death by 1665 tons of “pure fire, referred to by James Carroll as “the most efficient and deliberate act of arson in history.” Interviewed by James Carroll, Robert McNamara remorsefully referred to his own involvement in the firebombing of Japan as “a war crime.” Carroll states that the vast majority of deaths due to fire bombing, despite constant reassurances by President Truman that the only targets were military in nature, were civilians, women, children, and the elderly. In Tokyo and sixty five other Japanese cities, 900,000 people were incinerated, 100,000 more than all Japanese combat deaths.

Germany, it has been said, was firebombed back into the Stone Age. The attack on Dresden, known as the culture capital of Germany, targeted nothing but civilians as Dresden knowingly had no military establishments to attack. Packed with refugees fleeing the Soviets advance, thousands of tons of incendiary bombs were dropped on this unjustifiable target killing an unknown number of civilians. The dead numbered anywhere between 35,000 and 130,000 in Dresden alone. Those numbers represent only those that died in Dresden and do not include the numerous other cities also firebombed. For those acts, the World War II generation and its veterans were hailed as “The Greatest Generation.”
Tens of thousands of innocent women and children are dead as the result of our invasion of Iraq, yet many of those who screamed “Baby Killers” at Vietnam Veterans now ordain their vehicles with “Support our Troops” magnetic ribbons and stand cheering their own son’s units return, proclaiming them as heroes. If you detect some bitterness in these words, I would hardly be surprised.

Beyond name calling and my struggle for justification for my participation in Vietnam, a much larger issue is going on here. On a national level, are there really innocent civilians? Take us in America, for example. How is it we Americans can so easily overlook all the human misery our demand for cheaper prices is placing on third world nations? Shouldn’t we, if innocent, be demanding fairer wages and better working conditions for those forced to produce our goods? Or is being forced to work next to slave labor alright by our standards as long as we are the benefactors? We would never stand to have our children working in sweat shops --- but it’s OK if Indian children do?

Where is the rationale here? People of America ask themselves the question, why do others in the world hate us so much when the answer to that question is in their local supermarket, bananas at 29-49 cents a pound. “Think” how is that possible? How is it possible that bananas, raised in Central America, can be harvested, transported via ship to America, off loaded onto trucks and shipped all over the nation and yet sell for 2949 cents a pound? Who is getting the money? Who is not? Rest assured the fruit companies, the ships, truckers, and supermarkets are getting their money --- companies almost exclusively owned by Americans. That leaves who to enjoy whatever falls off the truck? All those ingrates, I would guess, who think their work is worth more than American’s are willing to provide. They should happy we do not take it all.

If your child was forced to work nearly every one of his waking hours to produce tennis shoes for little or no personal gain so that some foreign child could afford the luxury of wearing brand named shoes endorsed by super sports stars, would you view those unarmed foreigners as innocent? While we might state that X thousand innocent people died in the World Trade Center, were not those people enjoying the benefits the World Trade Center’s strangle hold had on the economies of third world nations? If you were one of those suffering from such international economic barbarism would you see those enjoying its rewards as innocent?

CaLu: Staging for Khe Sanh

The 2nd BN 1st MAR’s stay at C-2 was not long. By Mar 23rd we, the 2nd BN 1st MAR, were on our way to CaLu, a staging area along highway 9 for Operation Pegasus’ thrust into Khe Sanh. Unlike Con Thien or C-2, CaLu was not an established base with bunkers, trenches, or sandbagged reinforced positions. We
were in effect just dumped out somewhere along Highway 9 to fend for ourselves. As the medical staff, we were given a GP tent set up about fifty feet behind what we believed were the front lines. I had no idea where or what kind of perimeter had been established or if any line existed forward of our position other than what I could see. All I was aware of was what I could see and by what I could see, we, the medical staff, were far too vulnerable if the line located just in front of that tall grass in my Medical Aid Station picture was all that separated us from the NVA.

A favorite Marine saying is “Marines always take care of their Corpsmen” but if I had any feelings at CaLu, being taken care of was not one of them. The rest of the medical staff felt the same way. Not only were we still within the range of enemy artillery, it seemed by what I could see that we were in range of ordinance as simple as a hand grenade. Should the line come under attack, our tent was the largest target. And we were in it. Important to notice here, whether or not the front lines existed where I have them in this photo, that is what we believed.

One evening we did receive incoming grenades and bursts of automatic weapons fire. All the old veterans jumped out of their racks and kissed the ground, waiting to see what would happen next. Was this the beginning of an assault, something to be concerned with, or just some VC out there harassing us? Then came another grenade, then another and a few moments later, another. To those of us who had been in combat for some time, what seemed to happening was some Vietcong out there was probing the lines, hoping to draw fire to pinpoint some Marine’s position, particularly a machine gun’s position, but all he got back was a dozen grenades. So the VC, likely one individual, backed off and went looking to see if he could get some other Marine along the line to take his bait.

As things seemed to calm down, the older vets began climbing back into their racks believing the excitement was over. The excitement however was just beginning --- but not from anything the Vietcong had to throw at us. Instead the excitement came from our chaplain. He was screaming at the top of his lungs for us to get the Hell out of the racks, get our guns, and get outside. The VC was coming and he knew it. At first everyone just rolled over and pulled their poncho over their head thinking “This is a joke right? A chaplain barking orders!”
But bark orders he did. He, by his standards, was the commissioned officer there and we, the enlisted, were to follow his orders. “Get your guns and asses outside!” he growled. “Anyone not outside in the next few seconds will be written up. Move! Move!” So I rolled out of the rack, grabbed my gun, and walked outside. Locked and loaded behind our lines, I sat and wondered who I was supposed to defend myself against? That Marine over there? In terms of Vietnam, for some VC to lob in a few grenades at the perimeter was almost an every night ordeal. If we reacted to every time a few grenades came in like this, we’d never get any sleep. Furthermore, the officer calling the orders was the same one telling us to trust in god and mouth the verses, “Yea thou I walk through the valley, I shall fear no evil,” regularly. I could not help but see hypocrisy here. Doesn’t god protect us? Doesn’t god have everything under control? Apparently god didn’t have it all under control --- tonight anyway. Tonight the all-powerful god needed our help, an irony that I’m reminded of each time I’m asked to support the Christian Children’s Fund.

Operation Pegasus kicked off on April 1st, 1968. The idea behind Pegasus was to liberate and relieve the Khe Sanh Base which had been under siege since the TET Offensive began. As early as April 5th units of 2-1 were discovering what military force the Khe Sanh Base had been up against. The NVA had been here in large numbers and although reduced in numbers still were. The sharks existed, out there somewhere. While we were well protected, we were not invulnerable, facing off with one of the largest enemy build ups of the war.

In spite of that NVA buildup while at CaLu, most casualties did not come from enemy encounters. The main medical problem came from the sun, with heat exhaustion, followed by rare cases of heatstroke. Stretcher of heat casualties were always surrounding the medical bunker. The heat at CaLu could only be described as horrific, but maneuvers in the field went on. Day after day Marines patrolled the area and day after day we received heat casualties. The more serious casualties, combat casualties missing limbs or shot, were flown directly to Dong Ha or Phu
Bia. We dealt largely with heat casualties or those who could be returned to the field after receiving some temporary intervention like saline solution, or infections and minor illness that could be treated with an injection, a dressing, or pills. While at CaLu, another option existed for dealing with the heat. It was a mountain stream just down from our encampment. The water was good quality, cool, and supported any number of water related activities; swimming, bathing, and laundry. Personal hygiene at least was far better than any forward position of 2-1 held in the last six months. The stream also offered a reasonable source of drinking water, something often hard to find. Don Dennis highlights the need for water in his diary published in “We Remember” a book memories of former 2/1 veterans.

April 9
Today we were supposed to move off this hill, but we didn't for some reasons. Today was hot, and what little water we got was dirty. Water so cheap and for us so hard to get.

April 10
Today was hot and we were out of water. It took them all day to get water to us. We slept when we could--the sun was so hot and them damn flies made it hard. –

April 11
Today we got helicoptered off the hill at 1430 down to Khe Ca LU. We took baths down to the river. Man does time like this make you feel good.----- We learn that the last helicopter was dropping its last load of the company that was replacing us and they get arty. One guy got a direct hit on his head and all they found was his dog tags and fingers. They had some WIA too. Man that’s some feeling knowing we just got off and bang, they hit the hill.

The importance of clean drinking water can be seen in a later diary entry of Don Dennis. The dashed lines represent portions left out length’s sake

May 11:
------ we moved out at 8:00 and had to climb a high hill. It took us hour & half and we had two heat casualties on the way up. We got them a medivac at 12:10, the gunners on the Ch34 had to get off because they couldn't get up,
but another copter got them off. We walked along the hill tops, we passed some friendly troops. At 0615 we took a break for an hour then moved on. We drank some of the dirty water on the way but didn't care. We got in at 1420 after 31-1/2 hours with out sleep or food & little water. We were dead on our feet. We got chow and hit the racks -------.

May 15
Had a road sweep from 0630-0800. Went on a convoy to ca lu from 1015 to 1830. The Gook body we saw long side the road wasn't anything but bone. His head sat on a stick thanks to some Marine. We took a bath while at ca lu. ---

May 16
Cowboy went to PLT radioman. We were on a day long working party. we tore down buildings and burned up the woods. We got some incoming, nothing close. I got a letter from carol. we got SP's & bread. I'm at low spirits, I don't care anymore. In fact everyone seems this way. I’m thinking of going to guns. I don’t feel too good. I’ve got the shits. 017

If no clean drinking water is available, people will drink whatever is available if thirsty enough. In Don Dennis’s case “Dirty water” was all that was available, so he drank it. The result, after five to ten days of incubation, was “Ho’s Revenge,” dysentery. With proper medical treatment, dysentery is not usually a life threatening disease however left untreated, life threatening dehydration can occur in a short time, particularly in the heat of CaLu.

Digging through all the literature I have collected over the years while forming the Vietnam Veterans of the 2nd Battalion 1st Marines, I picked up the Diary of Ivan Ellis that he sent to me some time before. Reading through it I came across another dirty water story as written about by Don Dennis. Here’s how Ivan’s Diary reads: Notice the time line between water and disease:

30 AUGUST 1968 – FRIDAY
------- When we arrived at the bridge my tail was dragging.
I did fill up one canteen at the house. Raw water, but was good through.

7 SEPTEMBER 1968 – SATURDAY

All day long I didn't eat anything since we have had nothing to eat. I really didn't feel like eating. At the compound, I started getting diarrhea, and as Beatile and Sgt. Holland started building us a shelter, I started running a temperature and getting chills. I started taking my temperature and it went from 100.6 to 104 degrees in less than two hours. So he called in for a chopper and since it was around 1930 or 2000, it would be an emergency. I also vomited a good deal of fluids, and that seemed to drop my temperature a little and I told Glen to call it off and I will go in the a.m, but he said no. The chopper came around 2030, I think, and it took me to NSA. Not long after I got to Ward 4A, and my doctor is Dr. Cunningham, he checked me over and I showered and shaved. I left all my gear with the platoon except my rifle, flak jacket and helmet. I had to throw away all my clothes too. Slept good, temperature down to 102 degrees.

(Military time is a 24 hour clock: 0800=8am; 1400=2pm (12+2=14)

Before going on with the war, I should like to mention my rate advance as it will become an important issue after returning to the States. I made HN, E-3, on January 21, 1967. That should have made me eligible, or so I was led to believe, for Hm3 when, or shortly after, I entered Vietnam. Part of my reason for going to Vietnam was to obtain HM3. I was nominated for HM3 in August 1967 but for whatever reason was not given HM3 until April 16, 1968, nine months later. No entry in my service record up until that point should have prevented from obtaining HM3 so whether by design or things just happened that way, I do not know. All I do know is this will come back to haunt me after returning to the States.

Meanwhile back in the world, America’s President Johnson on March 31st in a televised address to the nation, called for a unilateral halt to the bombing of North Vietnam as well as an increase in defense spending of 5.1 billion dollars for 1968 and 69. At the end of his speech, Johnson surprisingly acknowledged that his administration had become a casualty of the Vietnam War and assertively stated that he would not accept the nomination of his party for the president of the United
States. Four days later on April 4th, Martin Luther King, a harsh critic of the Vietnam War, was assassinated in Memphis Tennessee. Vietnam, it seemed to me, was tearing the fabric of our flag.

CHAPTER EIGHT
Khe Sanh

From my April 21st letter, on the 18th of April we were herded onto trucks for a trip up Highway 9. Another convoy! I with my phobia for trucks was now aboard a truck headed to the most dreaded area in Vietnam with only two months yet to go in Vietnam. Once again, I began to feel like I wasn’t going to make it home standing up.

Reports coming in from the field were horrific. Hotel, early on, made a ghastly discovery while on patrol outside the perimeter. One report listed a boot with the foot still in it, a right hand severed at the wrist, pieces of intestine, a hat with bits of brains and scalp still in it, and what was called other unidentified pieces of meat.

Echo Company was making even worse discoveries. On April 22nd, at 0900 while searching a number of bunkers, some with human parts scattered throughout, two USMC bodies, two to three days old, were discovered tied together. The bodies were believed to have been placed in the bunkers after the two were dead. Discovering the remains of what was believed to be Americans was not an isolated case either. Golf Company on a mine sweep the morning of April 26th found portions of an American serviceman’s head.

“Whatever happened to “Leave no man behind?” I asked myself. I always wrestled with the question of what could be worse than being sent home in a pine box. Well, not being sent home ever was the answer. Up until this point in the war, we did send quite a few people home in what was not much more than a sandwich bag but we’d always sent our KIAs, at least some part of them, home. Now we were discovering pieces of our own troops just left. I could not help but recall Martinez, Muraco, and Lt Runnels. I wondered if another American unit found a few parts of them we may have left.
I do not remember much about getting to Khe Sanh other than how the area looked. I was completely memorized and froze in time what I saw on 35mm slides. If what I have been told was true, orange barrels contained the herbicide “Agent Orange,” I recorded hundreds of orange barrels just lying around inside Khe Sanh. Many of these barrels were filled with dirt for bunker construction. They were used for storing items like cloths, to hold water for showers, cut in half for grills, or any number of uses that could be found for 50 gallon drums. Years later Agent Orange was blamed for the high percentage of cancers found in Vietnam Veterans, not to mention the birth defects suffered by a substantial number of their offspring. We, Vietnam veterans, were told that we had nothing to fear from Agent Orange. In fact, it has been said that those promoting Agent Orange actually mixed it with water and drank it just to prove it offered no harmful effects.

Imagine my reaction in a weed control class years later when the instructor claimed that the herbicides agriculture currently are using offer no threat to the public. He even made the statement these herbicides were so benign they could be drank without any harmful effects. I walked out of class that day and overall did poorly in that class. Given the promise that I made myself watching women and children pulled from their bunkers, I could not allow myself to parrot back this instructors statements even if only for a test. I simply did not believe him nor trust him to tell us the truth given that he was obviously pro-herbicide and agriculture.
Anyway, the letter to my brother at the beginning of the Khe Sanh section represents fairly well the first day I spent at Khe Sanh. We received incoming artillery all night from what we called the Roc, a gun placement to the west in Laos. The incoming was slow but constant, a round here, a round there, just enough that by evening my nerves were all nerved out but the incoming just kept coming. If anything it picked up during the night. All night I lay in a trench listening as one round after another whistled overhead. Some landed close enough that the dirt walls of the trench would cave in, half burying me. It never really occurred to me how little dirt it would take to bury me alive. I learned how little dirt it would take to be fatal some twenty years later during a soil science safety class. Should have any of those banks caved in, with me or anyone else lying at the bottom, that is where we would have been found. At the time all that mattered was getting as low as possible and staying there – and maybe getting some sleep.

As I laid there in that trench, I could hear what sounded like digging. Was the NVA digging under us? I had heard of Vietnamese digging under the perimeter to emerge inside the lines to reap havoc on unsuspecting defenders. I could imagine how this could happen given that those on the inside of the perimeter would be caught totally off guard by assuming those within the perimeter were all friendlies. Just one NVA with a satchel full of grenades could have a field day launching grenades into bunkers, not to mention what a fully armed platoon or company of NVA might do. And given how dark the nights were, a NVA in the perimeter would have no problem running around largely undetected until it became obvious what was happening. Then the result would be unadulterated chaos. No one would know who was who, who was friendly or who was foe. The digging continued --- as did the worry.

Later that evening however I was to discover what was causing that digging sound. It came with the pitter patter of little feet. I could hear them coming,
brushing up against the wall, leaping over each other, squeaking and squealing. I lifted my head to see what the clatter was only to be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of rats. They were everywhere, running over me, getting stuck between me and the sides of the trench, squealing and struggling to get free, and slithering under me. “Get out of here! Get out! Get out!” was my instinctive response just as another artillery shell sizzled over, followed by an explosion which rained dirt down on me. “OK” I thought “Maybe, I’ll hang out here for a while.”

Charlie Med: Khe Sanh’s Medical Center

The following day, as written about in my April 23rd letter, I flew out of Khe Sanh to CaLu but it was not long and I was right back at Khe Sanh. The second time my home was a bunker called Charlie Med. From the outside, C-Med looked something like a cave reinforced by sand bags but on the inside, compared to where I spent the first night, it was a resort Condo. The bunker could and did withstand a direct hit by artillery. The threat of the sides caving in was gone and although an occasional rat was seen, never was I going to experience rats again as I did in the frontline trenches of Khe Sanh.

I do not remember if I was assigned the position of managing sick call twenty four hours a day or if I volunteered. In either case, I ended sleeping in the sick call room of C Med, on stretchers supported from ropes from the ceiling. Many of the remaining Corpsmen slept in a narrow bunker near the supply tent. This meant that at any time anyone walked in requiring treatment, I was there to check him in. I had to make the determination whether more skilled treatment than I could provide was required and if so, summon a doctor and additional staff.

Recorded in the Command Chronologies, Part II Narrative Summary, Item #20 Medical is 910 sick call patients. Divide 910 by 31 days and what you get is roughly 30 patients a day, most of which were minor bumps and bruises. That, however, does not include the 99 WIsAs, usually seriously wounded as a result of artillery or the 28 KIAs for which you could do nothing but “Bag and Tag em!” and stash them in Graves Registration and wait for a non-emergency med-evac.
Waiting for a chopper to become available for a non-emergency med-evac in the DMZ and around Khe Sanh however was often like waiting for the Publisher’s Clearing House Prize Patrol to knock on your door. By the time many KIAs were removed from Graves, their presence was evidenced simply by smell. That is not intended to put down those who risked their lives flying in to remove our KIAs. Those boys had plenty emergencies to respond to and put their lives on the line daily to assist the wounded and reinforce units in harm’s way. I had great admiration for chopper pilots and crews.

At the sick call side of the bunker the sick kept coming. Sore throats, colds, minor cuts and bruises, shrapnel wounds, amputees that could not be immediately med-evaced, heat casualties, and an occasional case of gonorrhea was our usual case load. We did vaccinations when required mostly for FNGs. On occasion, however, some smart mouth’s shot record would just happen to mysteriously disappear and the poor guy would have to get all those shots over again. Strange how the shot records lost always seemed to be those that gave us at C-Med the most grief.

One thing we did have, not common to any other sick call that I ever ran, was the real threat of rabies. We gave many rabies shots. At times, a line would form outside C-Med by those waiting their turn to be called in. Rat bites, as might be expected from what I experienced my only evening on the lines, were common. And with rats as numerous as they were, plague was no longer thought in terms of “of all things.” I could see where plague was a real concern for any unvaccinated population. For the benefit of those totally uneducated about plague, plague is spread from the host, a rat, to a person via the bite of a flea, the rat flea, very similar to how malaria is spread from host to victim via mosquito. The Black Death that crawled out of Constantinople during the Middle Ages claiming millions of lives in Europe still reached epidemic proportions in Vietnam. Plague, contrary to most people’s thinking, is not a disease of the past. While plague is currently treatable with antibiotics, in those places where rodent numbers are high and sanitation is major problem, if a strain of
plague should develop resistant to antibiotics, the world could see another large population die off as a result of this disease. In fact, plague is one of the bacteria being cultured as a biological weapon.

FLASH: 25 March 1968:
South Vietnam An outbreak of bubonic plague in Tayninh province has reached epidemic proportions and is beginning to spread toward Saigon.

Speaking generally about C-Med, we had nearly everything we needed for emergency medical attention. We had the medical staff. We had equipment like surgical sets, oxygen, and IVs for about anything that required immediate medical attention. We had generators for electricity, one of a few places in Khe Sanh that did. We were prepared for patching a person up and passing him on to the next location. What we did not have was long term holding capabilities such as hospitals. Our mission was to stop the bleeding, protect the airways, replenish vital fluids, and get the victim to the nearest facility that offered long term care or surgery. By what I saw, we were good at what we did given the training we had and conditions in which we worked.

One of the television shows that went to the top of the ratings after I returned to the States was “Mash.” A favorite among the students I shared a house with at St Cloud, I could not watch it --- and when I did I often got angry and hostile, or at the very least, unable to sleep. While I shared many of the same views of war as Hawkeye, to hear him come straight out with his slanderous sarcastic comments always left my head going over and over my war experiences. I suspect my war experiences were worse than his. My experience was not scripted. I was the first person on the scene, the first to look into the eyes of a kid who at about the same moment realized he’d never walk again, or worse. I remember those eyes, those dimming eyes that knew I would be the last person those eyes would ever see. I wondered at those times if he knew I was going to tell him the standard lie, like I always did, that he was going to be OK. You know that lie, like being told at the doctor’s office; “Now this ain’t going to hurt a bit.” I have never felt good about telling those lies.

Of course, knowing I was the last person these dying would ever see, many told me their inner most secrets they’d tell no one else for fear of reprisal. It was here these dying would tell me what they thought of the war, the military, and their country. It was here these dying would express their disappointment that no god had stepped in on their behalf. It was here they would tell me their prayers went unanswered. Christians often state that they have never seen an atheist on his death bed. I have never seen anyone on their death bed anxious or ready to meet their
maker, as the saying goes, to describe the dying. I’ve never heard one of them say “Well --- thank god for taking me now. At least, I will be safe in god’s hands now.” Those words are always left to their survivors and those who have something to gain by speaking for the dead. But most of them do not know what the dying thought. They were not there. I was.

Graves Registration: Bags of Heroes

Enter here and you’re on sacred ground. Graves’s registration was where we warehoused the dead all dressed up in their Army tank green body bags. Here lay the remains of what were and still are today referred to as “heroes” by the promoters of war --- but I did not see anything particularly heroic about any of those laying there. Most were exactly as I, only dead. I was just lucky enough to be where I was rather than where they were at the time their short life’s experience came to an end. I see nothing heroic about stepping on a land mine --- or to be where a random artillery shell just happened to impact the ground --- or being shot either by a sniper, a Vietcong, an overzealous Marine, an accidental discharge, or even a suicide.

As I piled them here waiting for a non-emergency med-evac, all I saw were dead, decomposed remains of someone who, but a short time ago, was a high school football star, a boyfriend, a loved son, sibling, a father, or best friend. While those within these walls were covered so those passing by would not have to look on, they remained only as temporary holdovers. Their presence however left a permanent etching in my mind to review every time war would be glamorized in the future. If anything was glamorous about this place, I’d like to know what it was. If those decaying there could talk, I wonder if they’d say the reward, the bag that contained what remains we could recover was worth its cost? I wonder if they would think the war that denied them raising a family and achieving whatever they may have after returning to the States, was worth the price they paid. And to those families whose son’s remains lies within these hallowed grounds, I wonder if they
felt properly compensated for their loss? I wonder if the children who grew up never knowing their father’s felt the war was worth his absence. I did not know. All I know for sure was I did not feel that honored to be in their presence nor did I have any desire to share their glory.

While we will never know the true thoughts of those who gave their all, plenty of people exist who claim they do. Politicians, priests, and war hawks talk for the dead all the time perhaps because, as I remember reading from somewhere long ago, none of the dead can stand up and refute anything which is said about them. I believe most those who have went off to war, went there believing they’d be coming home alive. They went feeling invincible. It was the other guy, the enemy in particular, that was going die. But war teaches those who have spent any time in it, death is random and the more death one sees, the more fragile life, their life, appears. I knew very few short timers who were as ecstatic about jumping into battle as some (not all) of the gung ho FNGs. In fact, the shorter (closer to going to home) most I knew became; the less likely they were willing to expose themselves to any danger.

You’d think that if dying was some desired end, just the opposite would be true. Having only a few more days to die, these short times should have been volunteering for everything, the more dangerous the better. My guess is, however, given the true behavior of most short timers, they favored living to being spoken of as a hero.

Dalton Trumbo once wrote:

Nobody but the dead knows whether all these things people talk about are worth dying for or not. And the dead can’t talk. So the words about noble deaths and sacred blood and Honor and such are all put into dead lips by grave robbers and fakes who have no right to speak for the dead. If a man says death before dishonor he is either a fool or a liar because He doesn’t know what death is. He isn’t able to judge. He only knows about living.  

A Word about Fear: No Where to Hide

Being at Khe Sanh was far more than running a dispensary. Not only were the rumors flying around terrifying, the artillery being shot at us was demoralizing. The NVA was estimated to have shot 600 medium to heavy artillery, rockets, and mortars at Khe Sanh in the month of May or about 20 rounds per day. Compared to Con Thien, I always thought Con Thien to be the worse of the two; averaging 30
rounds per day over a span of 22 January days. Con Thien was considerably smaller in area than Khe Sanh. To the Marines who defended Khe Sanh during the siege, 20 rounds of incoming a day perhaps seemed like a day off, but to me, with less than two months left in country, 20 rounds of artillery was 20 more than I wanted. Every day I was within the boundaries of Khe Sanh receiving fire, it seemed the shells got larger and larger, closer and closer. Every shell that went off reminded me exactly how far I had to go to get home.

One day I remember I panicked. I was working in the sick call room of C Med. That day was not unlike any other day that I had spent under the fire of the enemy guns. The rounds were not any larger or were there any more than usual. But they just kept coming. One here - a pause - then one there - a pause - then another --- pause --- then another. If you listened closely, the guns from Laos could be heard firing followed by a warning via the radio “Khe Sanh – you have incoming” followed by the scream of artillery overhead, followed by an explosion. This played out over and over again like some broken record until I just could not take it anymore.

Anger first surfaced “Shut that Damn thing (the radio) off!” And when the incoming would not quit and the radio broadcasting “Khe Sanh – you have incoming” finally I just fell apart. My first thoughts were to get into the safest spot I could and stay there. But I could not just stay there. “What if someone outside gets hit?” I thought “That would mean I (being the Corpsman) would have to leave this spot of relative safety and run out and expose myself to that fire. I was too close to going home for that --- so quit.” I just wanted that incoming fire to just quit.

But the shooting continued. Soon my reasoning went from “Don’t let anyone get hit” to “Don’t get hit” and suddenly no place I could hide or corner I could crouch in seemed safe enough. All I could think was I wanted it to stop but it just kept coming. I felt for sure I was going to die even though I was in perhaps the safest place on the base. Every shell seemed as if it were made for me. I guess after 4 to 5 months of this shelling, I’d had enough. I just wanted to go home --- in one piece --- and every time a round hissed past or exploded it just panicked me all the more. I was going to die --- I knew it. I just hoped it would be painless.

I’m not sure what pulled me out of it. Somehow I came back to my senses. I envisioned myself as being stronger than to allow myself to fall into a Black hole of fear --- but I did? So what does that say about me? Am I less of a man? Or am I normal? Is this something anyone exposed to this type of stress may at one time or another go through? If so, I’m sure no one ever talked about it. I never did. Instead I hid it. I suppressed these feelings anyway I could. I locked them away in my subconscious where those feelings lingered like some caged wild beast waiting for the opportunity to escape --- and escape they would in the strangest places; for
example bars, shopping centers, theaters, traffic --- anywhere, after returning home, that enough stress would drive old demons to the surface.

And the war continued --- and the dead kept piling up as a constant reminder that their fate may yet be mine. With every day that passed my thoughts were becoming more and more selfish. Me --- Me --- save me! Get me out of here! Let me go home. Just let me go home. And all the time I wondered --- what does this say about me? Am I really a coward or have I been just here too long? Am I crazy or are these feelings normal? Am I completely selfish or is it time to begin thinking more about self-preservation? I never received any answers as these feelings were never talked about. And they really needed processing then, not thirty years after carrying them around.

Exactly when I returned to Phu Bia is not exactly clear. In my May 10th letter I state that I was still in Khe Sanh, not doing much but working on casualties. A May 21st letter though states that I was back in Phu Bia in a manner that suggests that I had been there at least a couple of days. In any event I missed Fox Company’s infamous mine sweep just outside Khe Sanh on Highway 9 on May 19th. I first heard of Fox’s plight back at the club in Phu Bia. Killed were eighteen members of Fox Company just outside the wire at Khe Sanh.

CHAPTER NINE
Welcome Home Again --- or Not

On Looking down on the California Coastline
From my Plane returning from Vietnam
By David L Johnson, 1968

Oh Lord, my year’s prayer have now you blessed
Upon my doleful eyes shedding the same
Melancholy mist weeping to the breast
Of this longed-for shore below this plane I came
Winging back the day. Look upon its peers,
Sad Heart, as alone they brave the wave rolls;
Likewise you’re alone for you know not where
Fall your tears, just these that burn your soul.
The left-behind fire still rages uncontrolled,
   The leeches still grow fat feasting
Off the land. The dead, still dead, the young, the old.
The child still weeps, his father still deceasing.
So mourn, Sad Heart, this shore ends not your search,
As Ares’ Vulture glides back upon his perch.  

A Not so Welcome Home

I waited all year to be aboard this plane, often worried I’d be returning in the cargo section. Instead there I was in the cabin section surrounded by others laughing and carrying on, displaying pictures of children and wives. Myself, however, I found I was not looking as forward to getting home nearly as much as I thought I would be. Instead my mind seemed to be more on what I was leaving behind, a job undone. What was accomplished by all that pain and suffering? What did all those dead die for? It all seemed for nothing. I saw no reason to celebrate. The war was still being fought and those still dying were not all unknown faces. Many were people that I either knew or were at the very least members of my unit. And I was leaving them. I felt like I was running away.

What an irony. Here I was on my way home feeling guilty about leaving when the entire time I was in Vietnam I maintained that if given a chance to go home, I would. Why now should I feel bad about what I thought would make me feel happy for the past year? Strange thing, this mind of ours that one should have to feel bad about achieving what once was thought would bring happiness.

I also had a very bad taste in my mouth for exactly why we were in Vietnam in the first place. Not having anything else to blame or having any good explanation as to why we were in Vietnam, I, like numerous other Veterans, came home with the idea that the only reason we were in Vietnam was for the interests of big business, the munitions manufactures, chemical manufacturers like the maker of Agent Orange, oil, and/or their stock holders. The idea that all those close to me died just so Colt and its stock holders could increase their bottom line was outrageous --- but then America was warned against the military industrial complex and war profiteering.

“Until the latest of our world conflicts, the United States had no armaments industry. American makers of plowshares could, with time and as required, make swords as well. But now we can no longer risk emergency improvisation of national defense; we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry of vast proportions. Added to this, three and a half million men and women are directly engaged in the defense establishment. We annually spend on military security more than the net income of all United States corporations. This conjunction of an immense military
establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence -- economic, political, even spiritual -- is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

Had America forgotten the words of Dwight D. Eisenhower, America’s true warrior? Was his worst fear becoming reality? Given the law of supply and demand, with three and a half million men and women directly engaged in the defense establishment, it would stand to reason the only way to create demand is to use the surplus. What better way to lower inventory, in this case armaments, than to create a war --- and not just any war either, but an unbeatable war, a war that might last for ten thousand days or more. And Vietnam would not have ended there if not for the American protesters who began dying on our campuses opposing this war.

Our plane, as I remember, flew nonstop from Da Nang to Travis Air Force Base in California. What seemed odd about crossing the International Date Line was we landed in California an hour before we took off in Da Nang on the same day? It seemed as stated in my poem that literally we “winged back the day” and in a sense, we did. If only I could have received the year back --- or better, my four years of military service time back as I was to discover down the road that those who never served in the military, college students or laborers, all had four seniority on me at about anything I decided to do.
I was not sure what to expect exiting that plane. By what I was told, I would have to fight my way to the terminal, dodging spit and flowers but no protesters were seen there to greet us. In fact, no one greeted us at all, not so much as a small color guard, a salute, or handshake. Nothing. A home coming high school football player might have expected more of a reception. Even landing on a military base, likely the reason there were no protestors, we received not so much as a welcome home banner.

What I remember the most about the terminal was the restroom. Flush toilets! If you ever witnessed a cat watch the water swirl around a toilet bowl and then disappear down the hole, that was me, eyes wide open and simply amazed. I had to flush the toilet a dozen times in near disbelief that the thing actually worked. I was amazed that such things still existed in the world. I had not seen anything like one of those for a year.

Now on the ground, the race was on to get to the San Francisco airport was on. A group of us, not wishing to wait for a shuttle, jumped into a cab. Splitting the cost of the taxi fare we barreled down the highway, across the Golden Gate Bridge which spreading its arms from shore to shore, as magnificent as ever imagined, the true yellow brick road directing us home.

As the plane taxied up to the terminal at Hector Airport in Fargo, North Dakota, I could see Mom, Dad, and Hank, my high school best friend, waiting for me at the gate. The terminal at that time was not much more than a single story block house with a lounge. As I neared, clearly they must have spent some money and time while waiting for me in that lounge. Mom was drunk. My first family duty arriving home was to escort my mother to the car so she would not fall down like I had so many other casualties of war.

It was a quiet trip home. About all that got said was Mom crying about the shape her son came home in. “It looks like you have been sick a very long time,” she would say. I had in fact lost weight eating those C-Rats but otherwise I felt fine. “Everyone in town thought I should go over and comfort the Groths (Jim Groth’s Parents)” Mom blubbered, “but I couldn’t. Not with my son still there! Oh --- David, I worried so much.” I really did not want to hear that, not now. I just wanted to get home.

The following morning, Dad came up and told me we had to talk. With everyone else still in bed or gone from the house, Dad began telling me about the year and what my year in Vietnam had put my family through. The most effected, of course, was Mom. She hadn’t quit drinking since the day I left. “I just did not know what to do” Dad said “I know this; however, we need to do something about your mother. I’ve made an appointment up at Jamestown (the state hospital) with the alcohol ward. Would you consider going with?”
As I saw it, I wasn’t left much choice. When Mom got up, Dad had a drink waiting for her. A drink to help Mom wake up in the morning had over the year become something of a staple I was told. By the time we arrived at Jamestown, about a two hour drive, Mom already had a good buzz going. For two hours, of course, I had to listen to how sick I looked and how she could not deal with the death of Jim Groth. When we dropped her off at the State Hospital, I was remorsefully relieved.

**Enderlin 1968: My Hometown and Veterans**

With Mom in the hospital, Dad at work, Helen and Leroy in Fargo, and a slight animosity toward Hank, not much existed in Enderlin that summer of 1968 to keep a young man just returning from war busy. The place to be in my mind would have been Fargo but given the fact that I had not yet acquired a vehicle and the family car was being kept busy with Dad working and running back and forth to Jamestown, I was for the short time fairly limited to what was going on in Enderlin. Having set aside childhood things such as catching turtles and building forts, all that was happening in Enderlin was bars or churches. So downtown I went. Given the choice between patronizing a church that which I had come to believe was at least partially responsible for the war, or the bar, I’d choose the bar.

It was good to reminisce about my childhood walking the streets of Enderlin. The old tree fort down below the water plant still existed where as young teenagers we would swing out over the terrain like Spiderman attached to a fifty foot rope that kept us from being launched out into space at the other end. While Enderlin was not the spot to be for a returning warrior eager to get on with life, it would be hard to deny that Enderlin was just the place to rise up from childhood. The community was safe. Everyone knew everyone --- sometimes too well. Enderlin was as much of a large extended family as it was a city.

Walking around downtown, I had to wonder about where much of the old town went. Sam Bass’s popcorn stand still stood on Railway Street between the White Tavern and what used to be Welch’s Grocery. Gone however was Sam Bass himself, a short, stocky Greek (I believed) who made his living selling popcorn, homemade wine, and fireworks. Cherry Bombs were illegal but any kid with a friendly smile and a few bucks could likely convince Sam that they could be trusted with his secret --- as if everyone in town did not know Sam had a stash of Cherry Bombs below his counter. Sam loved kids and what kid did not know what followed the words “Hey --- Kid! Commeer. I give ya good deal.” It was a grocery bag full of free popcorn and great popcorn it was, homegrown and popped by the resident popcorn expert.
And then there was Inga’s Café, the Hilton House. The hotel served as the out of town residence of numerous railroad crewmen laid over until the next day when they would catch a train back to their home town and families. What Inga’s Café always offered was a pinochle game with either laid over railroad employees or Inga herself. During high school, this was one of my favorite hangouts. Inga served as my second mother, always cheerful, loved to play cards and converse with anyone at any time. I often wondered if she ever slept. She was there serving breakfast to the early risers. She was there at any time we showed up after a night of prowling around. She just was --- always there. Living in the building no doubt had something to do with it but even then, when did she sleep?

But that was childhood, a time past when Enderlin was a booming little railroad community with a large switch yard and full switching crew, a round house with laborers and machinists, and a passenger train that we as a family would take to Minneapolis each Christmas to shop at Dayton’s Department Store. By the time I returned from Vietnam, Enderlin was not much more than a stopover, a quick replacement point for a train crew, and down the tracks the train would go. No switching, no repairs, no passenger train, no depot, all of which moved to courtesy Glenwood Minnesota. And as the railroad went, so did many families of Enderlin, including the Sperstad’s, Gary and Stuart being a couple of my best friends.

Replacing all that which was lost to Glenwood from the railroad were empty stores no longer able to carry on. For as long as I could remember, Ken’s shoe store changed heels and replaced worn out soles but no more. The store now stood vacant, its window’s shoeless. The Grand Theater motion picture house stood motionless. The Pure Gas Station, one of Enderlin’s central landmarks, was now
largely a parking lot for the VFW. The adjoining café was incorporated into the VFW on the opposite side. Cut off from the railroad’s life blood, the town was slowly dying.

But the exit of the railroad did not seem to effect the bar business much. Minus a few patrons, plenty remained to keep the doors open. There was the Friendly Bar that in my view was anything but friendly. Family owned an unusual patron was often treated like an alien, an uninvited guest at their table. I never got along with the owner anyway even before entering the service. The White System had largely only booths and stools. It just did not have what I liked in a bar. The Trio Bar was a likeable bar but its clientele was largely all none veterans. That’s not to say the Trio Bar was anti-veteran. The bar was largely a homogeneous composite of the town itself which was not anti-veteran either. What both had, the bar and town, in the eyes of this veteran, was ambiguity and apathy toward returning veterans. If you mentioned that just a few days ago you happened to be in war zone, the answer you could expect was “So!” So --- where does a returning veteran go if he feels the need to talk to other veterans or the war? The VFW of course.

The VFW: Hell, You should have been in the Real War

Remembering the membership to the VFW mailed to me while still in Vietnam by Kenny Bommersbock, a longtime family friend and my old railroad boss, I found myself headed for the VFW looking for a, “How ya doing, Dave” or just something of a welcome home, at the least an acknowledgement that I had just returned from a foreign war. That is not what I received however. What I received was “Do you have an ID?” by the manager in charge. So I dug into my billfold and pulled out my military ID and placed it before him. Picking it up, he studied it for a moment, looked at me as if comparing my face to the picture, and then replied “What will you have, Kid? You’re Sookie’s kid aren’t you?” No comment was made about my military ID card.

I could see atop the back bar Bill Gilbertson’s crossbow that he, a green beret, had sent home from Vietnam. Below that I could see my stamps from North Vietnam with their picture of North Vietnamese gunners shooting at American airplanes that I had sent home from Vietnam, yet not a word. I’m not sure what exactly I was expecting but it was not complete vacuity. It was unlikely the person did not know me, guessing me to be Sookie’s kid. With my stamps right there in full view, it was hard to believe that he had no idea that I was in Vietnam. Hell, he probably posted those stamps up there himself and yet not a word. I left there that evening pretending and telling myself that what had just transpired really meant nothing. Perhaps I was expecting too much. Yet in reality, the lack of any interest
in what I had just endured bothered me. This was my home town wasn’t it? Where everyone knew everyone else’s business? As I remember it, I could not walk downtown without everyone knowing but I could get shot at for a year and no one cared? And here --- in the VFW? Were not veterans what the VFW was all about?

Was a simple welcome home to much to ask for? Better still; the bar could have bought me a beer. Would that have been too much to ask?

It did occur to me after thinking about it, or attempting to rationalize that just occurred, the bar was not necessarily the VFW. It, like any other bar in town, was a bar. The VFW was an organization of veterans brought together by the common thread of serving under hostile fire in a foreign war. Its purpose is to aid fellow veterans or so I thought. Perhaps, given my free membership, I thought, I should show my appreciation and show up at one of their meetings. So I did.

Again, my expectations were not what I received. The meeting was called to order with the colors and the Pledge of Allegiance. I did not care much for the words “under god” having noticed how absent god was in Vietnam but I mouthed the words anyway. I was not prepared for the prayer and benediction that followed however? While I saw the colors and pledge as forthcoming, I felt violated by being asked to stand to respect a god that I had come to believe was one of the main reasons all those young men were dying in Vietnam over. As for prayer, too many prayers had gone answered to believe prayer would change anything here. Besides, I reasoned, why should religion be any concern of this group anyway? Did not we all fight a war to defend everyone’s right to believe whatever they want? What if I was a Buddhist, a Moslem, or Jain? Would I be asked to forsake my own religious beliefs to belong to this group? Didn’t the freedom of religion claim that everyone has the right to believe in his own religion? So what was a Christian minister doing here? Is the VFW’s true purpose to defend the constitution of the Unites States or is it some pseudo-religious arm of Christianity?

I brought these questions up at the end of the meeting only to be ignored. Those who did answer claimed that no one was required to believe in god to be a member of the VFW. The application card, however, on which an individual applies for VFW membership, insists that those joining the VFW believe in god.

I attest that I am a citizen of the United States, that my U.S. Military Service was honorable, that I have never subsequently been discharged under other than honorable conditions, and that I believe in God.

The answer I received was, “So! If it bothers you, just ignore it!” But why should I have to ignore it? I wasn’t exactly sure why I felt so uncomfortable with
this at the time. All I knew was religion in practice took me right back to those Catholic churches built by the French.

**Side Note:**

Up until only a few years ago the requirements to enter the VFW contained the words “I believe in God” on both the application form and the national VFW website. One day I called the national office and asked when they were going to allow someone of my beliefs (atheist) to be admitted to the VFW. I was informed that they already were allowing anyone of any belief in so I referred them to their own website which still contained the words “I believe in God.” That requirement for membership on their site was promptly removed. Some days speaking out works.

End of Side Note

What really cast me aside from the VFW was the treatment I was to receive from a number of the members themselves. While Kenny, a WWII veteran who sent me the membership, supported Vietnam Veterans, many WWII vets did not. It went back to the definition of war. Was Vietnam even a war? Many WWII vets did not think so and displayed outright hostility about the fact we, Vietnam Veterans, were not able to wrap up that small skirmish in Southeast Asia long ago. They after all had fought and won a real war, the Big One, WWII. We, Vietnam Veterans, were a disgrace to veterans in general and had the nation depended on us, Vietnam Veterans, to free the world some twenty five years before, America, according to a number of these WWII vets, would have been speaking German. I did not need that treatment. I left and never looked back as did many other Vietnam Veterans.

MCAS Yuma AZ: On July 1968, I reported for shore duty at the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) in Yuma Arizona. When I pulled up to the dispensary I immediately reported to administration for check in. I had one thing in mind at that time and that was E5, HM2. Upon asking about E5 however, the first question put to me was “Where were your (being mine) practical factors?” Practical factors? I did not have access to Navy material such as practical factors while I was with the Marine Corps. None of my senior officers or petty officers offered us practical factors while in Vietnam. In fact, I was led to believe that while with the Fleet Marine Force (FMF), we were exempt from those practical factors, which amounted to basically a take home test to prime anyone for rate advance. And maybe those practical factors were not required as long as we were FMF. I was not
sure. What I was sure about however was surprise, surprise, a technicality now existed. Now that I was back state side, never mind how long (two weeks), I was no longer FMF. Now I was under the command of the Navy and subject to State side rules and regulations. I therefore was technically required to have in my possession those practical factors --- or no rate advance would be offered. Over the years that have transpired I have forgotten what exactly transpired in the discussion about my future rate increase. I do remember however that because I did not have those practical factors to turn in at check-in, I could not go up for E-5 until the next round of rate advances. That would have meant I could not be eligible for E-5 until about November or December. But that too came with a hitch. To receive the rate of E-5 required at least a year and half left of military duty, hence, to qualify to E-5; I would have had to extend for about six months. A six month extension would have placed me in the predicament of having enough time left in the service to be returned to Vietnam for a second tour.

I was not going back to Vietnam and in fact if forced to return to Vietnam, I told myself that I would have went to jail. Had the choice between jail and Vietnam been placed before me, however, it’s hard to say exactly what would have transpired. I had learned not to theorize about if this happened, I’d do that having surprised myself by failing to live up to my own expectations many times in Vietnam. I am glad I never had to make that choice. I did know that for the possibility of a few more dollars and a little prestige over my last year in the service, E-5 even then would not be a guarantee, was not worth the risk. So, I turned down any chance of ever obtaining E-5 and told them I just wanted out. Once again I felt lied to by my government; a government which I thought once was worth giving my life for. My views of my country and the value of nationalism were clearly in transition at this point in my life.

In the days that followed I learned numerous medical procedures, lab tests, X-rays, casting broken limbs, and minor surgery at the dispensary. By winter I was able to perform most laboratory tests done at our dispensary: complete blood counts, white cells counts, examine urinary discharges for gonorrhea, grow bacteria cultures, and test the cultures for antibiotic resistance. I could perform most X-Ray procedures. From Vietnam I brought with me suturing and a good knowledge of trauma procedures. Working directly under physicians, I emerged as the resident Physician’s assistant.

While the medical end of my tour at Yuma was challenging and rewarding, the military end of my duty was pure monotony. I had not lined up in formation for well over a year and thought of it largely as a return to the harassment of boot camp. It could be argued that I was being unreasonable and arrogant but I did not have to look very far to a number of other
Corpsmen stationed at Yuma that felt the same way. As it turned out, the others who groaned the most were all Vietnam Veterans. With the respect and treatment we received with the Marines, Yuma was a clear step backward into the realm of being treated like an invalid. I did not feel like I required inspected to conform to military rules. I was a man --- not some grade school child in constant need of supervision. I wanted to be treated like a man. As a seasoned veteran, I believed I earned man status.

I then set about attempting college at Arizona Western College at Yuma. I began college by taking an evening English composition class, writing essays. I did manage to a young lady to date but as it turned out she just mysteriously cut off our relationship for reasons only imagined. I think the words I heard uttered one evening to describe me while visiting her dorm was “Service Trash.” It seems anyone with a white sidewall military type short hair cut was someone to be avoided. Perhaps the only reason I got the date in the first place was that I was a student --- but I can only guess her reaction when she found out where I lived.

That hurt! But rather than drive me away from the school, I wanted even more to remove myself from the military scene. I’d favor sleeping with nearly any young lady than with some rubber lady. As a young man I naturally wanted to appear attractive to the opposite sex and having a military hair cut clearly was not attracting them. I wanted hair like the song “Hair” shouts “Long as God can grow it”.

I never really thought much about hair until returning from Vietnam and the hair explosion. I did know that the first thing the military does when you get to boot camp is to shave your head bald. I made the error of thinking having my head shaved bald was harassment, however. I’ve since learned the reason for those haircuts is twofold, cleanliness and defense. The cleanliness portion is obvious of course given the close quarters of a military barracks and head lice but the defense portion required some thought. You see, in Biblical times if you had no hair in a battle, your opponent had nothing to grab unto. I suspect that primitive military rulers knew that also, particularly since most their battles were hand to hand, when having or not having hair would give one or the other an advantage over his adversary. It began to occur to me that if the Bible was written by the ruling class with the idea of getting subordinates to defend its authors, it follows that something like the length of one’s hair should be important enough to be Biblical:

Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him. 1 Corinthians 11:14

If god wrote the Bible, you’d think if god wanted short hair, he would have simply created hair short and permanent, unable to grow. Or he could create men
without hair. But he didn’t. Instead he created a perfect head of hair that grew and that he himself described it as good. It would seem therefore, that by cutting god’s perfect head of hair, which he in all his infinite wisdom made grow, that god would see cutting his perfect hair as a challenge to his will? Besides, if long hair was seen as a shame by god, why did he himself (Jesus) decide to let his own grow? Well anyway, I’m used to seeing Jesus with long hair. I’ve never seen Jesus with a butch cut. In addition, since Jesus, the Prince of Peace, chose to grow his hair long, peace advocates using him as a role model and singing “My hair like Jesus wore it” did the same. Should these people be damn by following Jesus’ example?

The night corpsman at Yuma was an individual by the name of Day. His duty was from 2100 to 0700 every night, seven days a week. What made his position attractable to me, knowing he was rotating out of the service late in the fall, was he attended Arizona Western during the morning. He also bragged that he did not have to put up with the military BS during the day --- and he had hair. After I found out he was leaving, to get myself out of the military’s eye, I decided to volunteer for night duty. I got it as no one else wanted night duty and by January of 1969, I found myself in college during the day carrying a full load of credits --- and growing hair.

My dream began playing out in Yuma. I was in college and loved it even if I had duty every night, seven days a week. My cholesterol must have been through the roof eating powdered eggs twice a day as breakfast was all the mess hall served during the night. To this day, I hate powdered and scrambled eggs. Aside from that I did not have much to complain about. I was out of the military fundamentalist’s eye. I was largely my own boss, having no one to answer to as long as I maintained the functions I was responsible for. The doctors that had to spend the night on duty inside the dispensary loved me for I was able to handle just about any medical problem that came in during the night without having to wake them. One evening I put about fifty sutures into a Marine that got into a fight with someone armed with a box cutter. Marines falling off motorcycles were also a constant problem.

**Arizona Western College: An Influential Professor**

As for college, I really had not given much thought to exactly what I wanted to become. Actually my going to college by now had become some vague search for meaning. I had this brain --- empty --- that needed to be refilled, only this time I would be more selective with what was going to go in it. Unlike childhood, I was going to have something to say about what was placed in my head. My head was not going to be a haven for whatever someone else, a puppet master, wanted to stuff it with. English was a basic college requirement; hence English was deemed a
class that would benefit me no matter what I decided to go into later. Not wanting to waste time or money, I decided to get English out of the way.

The English Literature class being offered that quarter was “Major British Writers.” I had no idea how much influence the class was to have on me in the long run. The instructor was a small framed man, well-conditioned for his age somewhere around forty. His hair, his dress, his demeanor, all indicated that he was quite conservative yet he had this remarkable liberal quality to his thinking. As for his enthusiasm for his subject, the man was obsessed. For him, poetry was the music of gods. Unlike any other instructor I’ve had since, what mattered to him was what the author meant, not what he or I or some other student believed the poem meant. He had a firm belief that these writers did not write just to see their words in print. They wrote to change the world from what it was to what they believed it was capable of being. He never assigned homework to be discussed the next day in class, instead he read each and every line, stopping either to relate a given verse back to a previous one, to point out the symbolism being used, or to throw in a bit of history or some other vital information to bring the poems meaning into clearer focus.

The poems I remember best from his class were the ones that either took me back to Vietnam, creating flashbacks like “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink” To anyone else these words would have nothing to do with war but then --- I was there. Water was everywhere and none of it was drinkable.

I also liked poems that spoke to my feelings of the world. “Dover Beach” by Matthew Arnold was one such poem. After building up this beautiful image of the world around him, Arnold goes on to say that all this beauty was now in a stage of retreating like the tide. He ends with his poem with the lines that the world was “Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies clash by night.” I had everything I could do to remain in my chair. “Ignorant Armies --- Yes! ---- That is exactly what they are.” I nearly screamed but found myself too self-conscious to allow these emotions to come blurring out.

The writer with the largest influence on me however was William Wordsworth. According to this instructor, Wordsworth largely equated nature with god. I’d never thought of nature and god as being equal before. In fact, Christianity separates man from nature and puts before man the mission of subduing and conquering nature. I had no idea what a revelation the following words from Wordsworth’s poem “The World Is Too Much with Us, Late and Soon” were to become to me. According to Wordsworth, people rush around accumulating wealth and material goods while overlooking nature’s value --- and we certainly have. Truly “We have given our hearts away” and only time will be the true measure of the cost.
Antimilitary Sentiments: Give Me Hair

Having completed my first quarter of college successfully, my hope was to remain on night duty and perhaps get a year of college out of the way before being released from the service. Apparently however the chief had a different agenda. His task was to keep me military personnel. His duty was not to allow me to skirt my obligation to the military by attending a civilian college. When the chief informed me that I would be going back on days at the end of the quarter, intellectually I knew that decision would be coming. I did not like it but I understood it and offered no resistance.

Coming off night duty back onto days cast me back into the watchful eyes of the military fundamentalists. The first fundamentalist item to surface was the length of my hair, having had about six months of interrupted growth. The chief caught me in the hallway about my first day back on days and informed me that I “WOULD” get my hair cut. I told him I did not have any money (I did but he did not need to know) so he dug into his own pocket and pulled out a buck and said “Here, go get that mop cut off.” So I went over to the barber and asked to have some cut off the sides and around the ears but to leave the top as it was. Returning to the dispensary, the chief did not seem to think my hair measured up to military regulation so after giving me this somewhat lengthy lecture about what a Navy cut should look like, the chief dug back into his pocket again, pulled out a buck, and sent me back to the barber. Again I spared the top, not wanting to look like “Service Trash.”

When I returned to the dispensary this time the chief was waiting at the door for me to walk in. He took one look at the top of my head and blew his cork. He dug into his pocket once again and told me in no uncertain terms that he did not want to see any hair longer than two inches on my head when I got back.

So off I went, angry about the military appearance code being rammed down my throat. Instead of going to the barber however I went to the pub, downed a number of good stiff drinks with my own money, then went back to my room where I got out the razor and shaved my head bald. Returning to the dispensary, I thought the Chief was going to come apart. He ranted and raved loud enough that everyone in the dispensary could hear him --- but no matter what he said, it would take a couple of months for my protest not to be noticed.

While my little social protest did nothing for my standing with my superiors, it did gather some recognition from those with whom I shared the rate of HM3, namely the Vietnam Vets. It was unknown largely to me than just coming off nights but the time for rate advance had come and gone. Everyone, other than one Latino straight out of corps school, were now E-5s; everyone that is except the Vietnam Veterans. You could tell every Vietnam Combat Veteran at the MCAS
dispensary just looking at their rate. Every single Vietnam Combat Veteran, five if I remember correctly, were E-4 being told now by E-5s with no combat experience and less time in the military than the veterans. It was like we, the combat veterans, were being punished again for going to war but this time by our own military. The hostility that broke out over this injustice, as we veterans saw it, resulted in open fist fights in the dispensary and a number of Vietnam Veterans being brought up on charges of insubordination, disobeying the orders of E-5s. Life within the dispensary was nothing short of hostile between the Vietnam Veterans and what we, the Vietnam Veterans, saw as our subordinate E-5s.

Without actually being cognizant of it at the time, the military was not all I wanted to separate myself from. I wanted out of society and life as I knew it. College was not my only reason for volunteering for night duty where I’d spend most my days alone and out of the eye of watchful military personnel. I wanted to be alone where I was in command, where I was not just another vehicle on the road of life, controlled by traffic jams, street lights, and rules of the road. I sought to be free.

The desert offered the illusion of being free. I remember spending many evenings just sitting on a summit of a hill, viewing an entire landscape without so much as a fence to suggest someone might have control over who or what chose to be there. Better still was the quiet. No horns. No planes. No one murmuring in the background. In fact, no background noise existed at all. Nothing but the wind, birds, and an occasional horn toad. And there I sat, considering the two worlds surrounding me. In front of me was the desert, where mother nature ruled all that entered, where all that mattered was shelter, food, and water, where purpose simply came down to surviving one more day. Behind me was a road that like a funnel gathered all and deposited it one spot, where property boundaries separated everyone into tiny compartments; compartments which often people separated by a mere six inches of wall were unfamiliar with each other, where people rushed to get where they just left, where civil rules directed your every move, and life had to have some purpose other than living. What a mess people have made of their world --- and for what? Purpose? Possessions? A yearning to be free? To be in control? I have all that right here, on this summit, if not for all time, at least the moment --- before the developers come.

Those were all good thoughts, I reasoned, but looking back on it all, I wonder if those thoughts were not all part of a rationalization scheme I concocted to blanket my paranoiac subconscious? In front of me, I could see all --- the rocks, the cactus, the sage brush, an occasional predator after his lunch, nothing offered any threat to me. And in that view was no one; no one to lead me down the wrong path, no one toting guns. Was this in spite of all my intellectualizing the real comfort I found here on this spot? Or maybe it was the drug, marijuana. Left
handed cigarettes nearly always accompanied me to spots as this sometime after coming off nights. Unlike alcohol, marijuana was more like I have always imagined a religious experience might be. It had this power to take this dreary landscape and reform it to a surreal landscape painted and sculptured as if by an artist’s hand. Colors were enhanced, highs elevated, depressions deepened, and distances lengthened. Flowers were the desert’s cologne and birds its flute. Sunsets were a collage of shades and colors, each different and unique. Each sunset was spectacular, awe inspiring, as if its beauty was being viewed for the first time. Who could have ever imagined euphoria could be found in this barren land, on this spot?

Was marijuana an escape? Of course it was but then it was probably better than its alternative; suicide. I was growing weary of life. Everything seemed for nothing. I remember the long hours I spent on nights memorizing Beatle Lyrics, reading books such as the “Art of Loving” by Eric Fromm, working out with my weights, and growing my hair as not to appear as “Service Trash.”

I also remember however the narcotics locker that stood facing me at the other end of the room. Occasionally it talked to me, “I’m here to calm all your pain. Come in. Come in” It wasn’t the high I was looking for. A high could be found on any shelf of the pharmacy open to me, barbiturates, stimulants, pain relievers, sedatives were all there for taking --- but I did not. I was looking for a painless release from life --- and there it was, inviting me in on nights I felt particularly lonely. Most evenings the locker was silent but from time to time I’d begin thinking back to the year past, the war, those I left behind, all those dead, and when I did, it would tempt me, offering comfort. For whatever reason, I never accepted its offer.

Glenwood Minnesota
Pot, Mad Dog, and the Death of a Life Long Friend

I was released from active duty on January 23rd, 1970. About the same time my parents had moved down to Glenwood from Enderlin. Dad’s job finally moved him like the Sperstads before. My parents found themselves a nice little lake side house on Lake Minnewaska about seven miles outside of Glenwood. For me, that was good, no neighbors to speak of and a whole lake, being public land, on which to bide my time. Dad and I spent numerous hours fishing yellow perch, a small but good edible fish that Dad liked to throw in the smoker and dry. Even if dad was busy, somewhere on the ice was where I could usually be found.

Gary Sperstad, having only a two year hitch with the Marines, was home by now and often came out to see me. Gary was a lifelong friend going back to our childhood in Enderlin. He never made it to Vietnam however and remained the same old Gary that I knew before we entered the service. The problem was I
wasn’t the same old Dave. I couldn’t quite put my finger on it. All I was sure of was we, Gary and I (as I would true with many of my previous friends), no longer saw life the same. The things we thought were important before, they, my previous friends, still did. Myself, however, I was uninterested. Cars, dances, group parties, rock and roll oldies, country music, hunting, guns, stylish clothing, just did not matter to me anymore and Gary just happened to be the first old friend that brought my new desires, or lack of old, to the surface.

I had not been home long when I landed a job as a railroad switchman. The pay was, at that time, the highest in the area. The problem was I did not get to work all the time. I was on the extra board, meaning that I filled in for someone else if he could not make it to work or wanted the night off. These conditions were explained to me when I signed on and at the time they did not seem all that bad. Having been on nights for six months seven days a week before, I thought I could handle nights but I was not quite prepared for the unpredictable nature of the job. About the time I figured I had the night off, I’d get called in meaning that I always had to be prepared to go to work. I was tied down all the time whether working or not. For someone yearning to be free, being tied down by the probability of being called to work was not a good thing. Being jailed to your own house was a way to describe the job. I could never leave. Worse, if I took a nap in the afternoon to prepare for the possibility of work that evening, I’d end up at home, not tired and up half the night by myself. If however I stayed up all day, I’d end up getting called to work at the last moment and have to stay up all night hardly able to stay awake. Switching was a dangerous job. A sharp mind was a necessity. Being half asleep walking amongst moving boxcars was not a good thing.

The other problem that surfaced after being around for a while and getting to know the personnel, those I was working under and covering for, were nearly all younger than me. None were veterans. Most managed to skirt the military and came to this job through their fathers or some close relative who also worked on the railroad. The problem this presented for me was these younger people got to choose their days and times to work, leaving me the task of filling in for them whenever they did not feel like showing up like holidays or important local celebrations such as Glenwood’s Waterama. Furthermore if I were to wait for things to improve, I was not looking at waiting for a few older ones to retire so I could move up. I likely, being the oldest, would retire before any of them assuming we all worked to retirement hence it appeared that I would be on nights and the extra board as long as I was on the job.

The old ghosts soon returned. Just like the dispensary where everyone made E-5 other than the combat veterans, I found myself in the same place, subordinate to those younger than myself who evaded the military. Once again, it was like being punished for joining the military. Granted some companies, even the
railroad, credits military time as seniority on the job but that assumes you had the job before joining the military. Nothing existed or currently exists to help equalize the time lost to the military by those who defend their country. In life’s time line, I found military time spent as largely time lost if one wishes to return to civilian life.

As it turned out, I ended up losing this switching job. Stuart Sperstad returned from service in Vietnam and together we decided to go out and celebrate. Checking with the railroad, I was told there was very little chance I’d be called that evening so we headed out to the American Legion to share a couple (dozen) drinks. Two hours later, the railroad called. Not one to lie about such things, I told them that I could not make it to work because I had been drinking. So much for that job.

Stuart (in blue on the last page picture), another lifelong friend, Gary’s brother and one of the charter members of our Great Outdoors group from back in Enderlin, quickly became the person I spent most my time with. Not only did we have our childhood in common but we also shared the experience of Vietnam. We never talked Vietnam. We just understood the effect Vietnam had on each other and let it go at that. We also found some solace in the fact that we both made it --- and were making it (at least we let ourselves believe). In reality, other than being friends in the first place, our relationship was probably as much to do with “Misery Loves Company” as anything else. While we entertained the thought that we were having a great time, what we were doing in fact was getting intoxicated or stoned.

Stuart returned home with a sizable amount of marijuana that he shipped home in a television set. He had bought the TV set just for the occasion, removed all the insides, and packed the empty frame full of pot.

Our house with Mom, Dad, my two brothers, and me was located on a small bluff that rose about 50 feet above the lake directly below. At the water’s edge was the boathouse, a small rectangular box building with a standard A-frame roof. At the end away from the lake on the left side was an average rectangular door but in the front facing the lake, the whole wall swung open to allow a boat to be winched in. We did not have a boat but this entrance offered a wonderful place to sit just up off the water and watch the sun set over the lake. Watching the sun set was Stuart’s
favorite activity. He returned home with about a hundred pictures of Vietnam and half of those were sunsets. Down at the boathouse, he added a few more sunsets to his picture collection. Pot and sunsets go well together.

Reflecting back, I must wonder what the crime was that Stuart and I were committing. Watching sunsets? Listening to waves lap up on the shore? Who were our victims? When I think that our prisons are overcrowded with people whose only crime is smoking a joint, I am amazed at the legal system’s failed effort to suppress the use of marijuana and the amount of taxpayer’s money the legal system has spent in an attempt to do so --- but then if you stop to think of it, the legal system is something of an entity unto itself. When the legal system spends money, lawyers make money. Anyway, aside from making sure lawyers make money, to date, I have not heard one good reason why marijuana should not be decriminalized at the very least. Those who are going to smoke pot can always do it and if allowed to grow enough for their own personal use, the money generated by the drug trade would drop off considerably. Myself --- one day I just quit. No withdrawals. I never killed anyone. I never ended up in some psycho ward. I just got tired of being stoned.

Over time, the boat house became a social hang out. Jim, my youngest brother, still in high school, was one of the instigators in making it so. Stuart and I were perfectly happy to sit down there by ourselves enjoying Stuart’s pot, but Jim; he began to drag his school friends down there also. And they all smoked pot, a sign of the times, and had been doing so for some time. Stuart and I kept our pot to ourselves but these 15-17 old adolescents had no trouble their own. As they moved in however with their music and love for excitement in whatever way excitement might establish itself, Stuart and I began being slowly pushed out of our sanctuary of solace. These teens world was far too euphoric for ours to fit in.

I called these young idealistic people, the perfect people. They subscribed to “Prevention” Magazine, drank chamomile tea which they collected from the wild, and loved everything although this spurious claim was discredited by their atrocious gossip they spewed about others that did not share their views. They wore patched clothing, tie dyed shirts, and old fashion dresses that made them look at times like they just arrived from the nineteenth century. They burnt hand crafted candles and the more innovative played acoustic guitar or attempted painting. They lived with a group of friends they referred to as family and claimed to be non-materialist in spite of the fact they all lived in houses with flush toilets, electric lighting, and possessed a rack of albums that they spun on their multi-hundred dollar stereos.

The music they played was almost exclusively songs of peace, love, and antiwar. While much of this music I happened to like a great deal, Cat Stevens, Crosby Still Nash and Young, the Moody Blues, the Beatles, and CCR, much of it
both Stuart and I found very distressing. One such artist was Johnny Prine with his song “There’s a Hole in Daddies Arm Where all the Money Goes” about a cowardly, drug addicted, unable to take care of his family, Vietnam Veteran that died pumping his arm full of heroin. Another would be Country Joe McDonald. While he does not outright attack veterans in his famous “I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ To Die Rag” he opens the wound of why the Vietnam War was fought in the first place. According to this song, Wall Street was getting fat “By supplying the Army with the tolls of the trade.” Just the thought of Americans making money off killing other Americans made me fighting mad, an anger that would always deteriorate into self-destructing behavior like drinking me into oblivion. True or not --- I did not want to hear about it. I did not want to think about it. And, I sure as Hell did not it something to sing about.

Before leaving these perfect people, worth mention at this point was their seemly outward tolerance, if not tendency toward, homosexuality. The argument coming from these perfect people that I frequently heard regarding homosexuality was homosexuals tended toward the arts, were more understanding and compassionate than their heterosexual counter parts, and were less violent as a group. Furthermore, homosexuals were not, at least much less, likely to be veterans as if being a veteran was something to be ashamed of. Homosexuality, argumentatively, could also be viewed as an alternative to the world’s population explosion which was a good thing to a population concerned generation. I often felt, “Wow --- Veterans are thoughtless of than homosexuals by these people.”

As Stuart and I struggled to some meaning to life, over time, although we remained best friends, we began to drift apart. Stuart was more of society’s child, a member of the American Legion, a faithful Methodist, and railroad car man. I was none of these. I questioned the values of patriotism plastered all over Legion Club walls and their publications. I did not believe in a supernatural god nor did I belong to any church. I had been fired from the railroad. I doubt Stuart ever questioned his right to own a car, his belief in god, what the word “free” truly meant, or how he may have been manipulated into becoming the soldier that he became.

Stuart, however, was just plain angry, angry about what happened in Vietnam; angry about the way he was treated at home, and angry about the world around him that did not conform to his expectations. I am not sure what he was expecting and I doubt he did either.

Stuart used to show up at my place with his usual quart bottle of Mad Dog (Mogan David 20-20) on the days we decided to spend together, usually fishing in the ice house or at Torgy’s, Stuart’s favorite bar. Before we ever got to the bar, his jug MD20-20 would be gone with no help from me. His favorite saying was, “I’m off to see the wizard,” and he sure enough was. Yes, I got drunk now and again,
flat out obliterated from time to time, but to Stuart, anything less than a stupor wasn’t worth going to the bar to get.

Stuart drank himself to death. In his later years, his first act in the morning was to take the cap off one of his quart bottles of peppermint schnapps, 80 proof, and his final act at the end of the day was to put it back on. The bottle the cap came off in the morning however was never the same bottle that the cap was returned to in the evening. More likely than not at least a third bottle existed between the two. Stuart died of a failed liver in the VA hospital at St. Cloud, Minnesota June 2001, still angry, another casualty of war.

In fairness to Stuart, despite his threatening, often over baring persona, Stuart was one of the most compassionate people I had ever known. He’d do anything for a friend and had a soft spot in his chest that went all the way to his heart. Speaking to others of Stuart, I’d often describe Stuart as a “Hard Shelled Marshmallow” weathered tough on the outside by his life experiences but nothing but mush in the middle. No one could have asked for a better Friend. Stuart will be woefully missed. Did Stuart take his own life? It certainly could be argued that he did.

It seems suicide is a real issue in the lives of veteran’s and has recently came to the surface in a recent CBS investigation. Under the Freedom of Information Act, CBS requested from the Department of Defense all suicides known for the past 12 years. Four months later, CBS received a document that claimed nearly 2,200 soldiers had committed suicide. That rate however was limited only to active duty personnel. So CBS went further and requested suicide data from death records dating back to 1995 from 50 states. What CBS found in the 45 states that responded was at least 6,256 suicides by veterans were reported in the year 2005 alone. The largest number of suicides was between the ages of 20-24 of those who had served in the war on terror. Compared to their civilian counter parts of the same age, suicides among veterans were two to four time higher.

The really sad thing about veterans and suicide is this knowledge is nothing new. A preliminary study conducted by the Washington University School of Medicine in St Louis showed Vietnam Veterans who used drugs in Vietnam were nine times more likely than their civilian counter parts to have died by their mid-fourties. Those veterans with no confirmed additional problems were three times more likely to be dead than their civilian counterparts. Another study from the University of California in 1986 concluded that suicide among Vietnam Veterans was 87 percent higher than their civilian counterparts. The suicide rate among Vietnam Veterans has been the subject of speculation over the years. It has been estimated that three times as many Vietnam Veterans committed suicide as died in the war although that figure has been disputed by Federal sources, which of course could be expected. When CBS asked the Veterans Administration about the
possibility of a suicide epidemic among veterans, the VA claimed that no such epidemic had occurred. Myself personally, I am familiar with at least ten suicides committed by veterans from my old battalion in Vietnam, the most famous being Lewis Puller, the son of Chesty Puller and author of the Pulitzer prize winning book, “Fortunate Son.”

**Yearning for Freedom**

*Yearning for Freedom*

*Yearning for Freedom*

*Yearning for Freedom*

*Yearning for Freedom*

*Yearning for Freedom*

*Yearning for Freedom*

*Yearning for Freedom*

*Yearning for Freedom*

Miles from nowhere, not a soul in sight
Oh yeah, but it’s alright.

Cat Stevens, 1970

Many stories could be written about the summers of 1970 and 1971 after I was discharged but for the purpose of this writing they’d all come to symbolize what was going on in my head. I wanted to be free, really free, unrestrained by any social structure around me. The only place that offered anything even relatively close to that type of freedom was the lakes and public land. Once entered, any spot was open for exploration. I spent many a summer just drifting around lakes with my canoe that I chose over boats which required gas. I was becoming environmentally conscientious. In fact, I was thought of as extreme according to most people I knew.

Public lands and lakes only served as a pacifier however. What I really wanted was freedom from society and governments. I wanted to get lost and never found. I wanted to simply disappear in the woods and never come out again. This yearning led a few friends and me on a number of misadventures into the wilderness as I pondered and explored my escape. One of these misadventures took us to Lake Kabetogama in Voyageurs National Park. Five friends and I spent about a week on one of the many islands that dotted the lake. Another excursion took us to Glacial Park Montana where we spent about ten days attempting to live off the land. All we brought on this trip was an axe which was left somewhere along the trail, a small amount of food, cooking utensils, and bedding. The idea was to test
our ability to get by on what we could catch (fish), trap (small animals) or plants we could forage for food. We nearly starved.

One trip to the Beltrami National Forest in north central Minnesota took Steve, my brother Robert, and I to Lost Lake in the dead of winter when the temperature was well below zero. In the middle of a huge bog, an area completely unattainable in the summer, among the cedars, spruce, tamaracks, and pitcher plants, we stayed warm digging into snow banks where we slept at night. Our effort to some seclusion from civilization was lost to a group of snowmobiles, however, who encroached into our domain. Instead of seeing snow buntings, Great Snowy Owls, and hearing the howls of wolves, all we got was the tight shrill wail of snowmobile engines and questions about how the hell we got in there and if we needed a ride out.

Mark and I headed out the northeast angle of Minnesota once, running up the Gun Flint Trail to its end where we dropped a canoe in the waters of Saganaga Lake and headed out around American Point to Red Rock Lake. In terms of food, we did quite well, catching fish and gathering berries to supplement the 25 pound sack of dried beans we had brought with. The only mistake we made was to mistake false morels for the real thing. They were good alright, downright tasty, but they sure cleaned out the plumbing. Mark thought he was going to die of defecation. Mark and I still laugh today about the poor suckers that moved into our camp just as we were moving out.

“Say” Mark pointed out “You guys see those mushrooms? Man, are they ever good.” We left them picking mushrooms but never hung around to see how things came out. I suspect things came out quite fluidly. And I suspect they are still looking for us wanting to get even.

**Music Then**

**Be a Working Class Hero and Love it or Leave it**

The seventies had arrived to the pop music culture. By this time in my life, I had fairly well given up on the songs of my past. “Getting Around” was no longer as important as it had been in the sixties. Drag racing and hot cars no longer mattered to me. In fact I could care less. As for my 45 collection, most were loaned out and never returned while I was in Vietnam. 45s were now out however and albums were in, beginning with the Beatles who in the seventies, unlike the albums of the past, were creating whole albums of original music artistically laced together to drive home a political point. Those that spoke of freedom, peace, and discontentment with society were the ones that caught my attention. Cat Stevens, in my mind, was a phenomenon. Clearly here was a young man, like me, discontented with society and searching for a meaning to life. Songs like “*But I*
Might Die Tonight" spoke directly to me, echoing my thoughts of the world around me. I had no interest in working my life away, doing what everyone thought I should do. I did not want to end up on the railroad like my father or work in some plant like that foundry in Milwaukee doing the same thing all day long. That’s not what I put myself in Harms-way for.

All my friends before Vietnam put jobs high on their priority list and it could be said over time, their jobs fairly much defined who they became. Leroy, my brother in law, worked the sign department for the North Dakota Highway Department. I could figure anytime that I spent with Leroy; the topic of signs would arise. Bob, my brother, got into manufacturing as a tool and die maker for Stieger Tractors, later purchased by J.I.Case. Whenever any amount of time was spent with Bob, I could figure the topic of tractors and machinery would be hit upon. Hank landed a grocery job working in a warehouse. I could figure that any time I spent with Hank, the topic of grocery distribution would come into the conversation. Gary Sperstad landed a job with the railroad as a carman as did both his two brothers, Sherman and Stuart. Railroading was often the topic whenever I was with them. I do not wish to imply that by the social norms of the time these people did anything wrong. Indeed they did what most people do. Most people grow up; some sort of labor that becomes their life. With their earned money they buy a house, raise a family, and live out what they perceive as their American Dream. For me, however, returning from Vietnam, none of that mattered. In fact, I saw the so called “American Dream” as more of a self-imposed incarceration.

I had played the servitude game, serving who knows who for who knows what for too long. I wanted no part of this mindless servitude anymore. At best, after losing my Christian upbringing and its so called “Work Ethic,” I viewed work as merely a necessary evil. While work kept food on the table, I thought it far too often reduced humanity to that of Skinner’s pigeons, peck the button (punch in) and receive your reward (a pay check). I valued my intellect --- and wanted to culture it. Physical labor as I saw it was not a means to that end. I became a real pompous ass in effect.

Also my friends of the past, rather than concerning themselves with the type of music expressed above, were turning to Country Western, if that is what it could be called. Merle Haggart was singing songs like “Okie from Muskogee”, or "The Fightin' Side of Me" (see Chapter Title) which was more than I could handle. In my mind, given the destruction we were causing in Vietnam with for what and for who unknown, I really was not certain that I loved my country. I was certain however I did not need some X-con telling me, a combat veteran who laid his life on the line for that country, “to love it or leave it.” Any respect I had for my country, or lack thereof, I earned. Music, in my mind, was taking a bad turn. Instead of singing about hope, peace, and a better world for all, music was
beginning to be replaced by glorifying violence and nationalist propaganda. And it continues today in songs such as Tody Keith’s "American Soldier."

Atrocities in the News: On my Mind

Reports of war crimes were in the news during the early 70s. In March 1970, the US Army accused 14 officers of suppressing and falsifying information regarding a March 1968 incident that alleged soldiers committed acts of murder (200-500), rape, maimed, and sodomized civilians at Songmy. The report stated that the higher the official report went up the US Chain of Command, the more watered down and fabricated the report became. By the time it reached Americal Division Headquarters, the report contained no mention of the crimes committed by soldiers and claimed that only 20-28 civilians were killed.012

On April 1st 1970, Captain Ernest Medina was formally charged with the murder of civilians at Songmy. Speaking at a news conference, Medina revealed that he was being charged with the murder of no less than 175 civilians. Medina denied any involvement.013 Captain Medina was Lieutenant William Cally’s superior officer when Cally assaulted the hamlet of Mylia-4 in Songmy Village.014

As I stated before, the murder of civilians I could understand to “some” degree. For some soldier to just lose it after watching his buddies being maimed or killed and emotionally react by killing those he perceives as involved, real or imagined, I can understand and sympathize with --- but the murder of 175 civilians and the rape of any goes beyond anything I feel is defendable. These acts, committed by those to whom I might be associated with (in this case veterans in general), made me want to hide, to stick my head in the sand and deny I ever was in Vietnam. These acts defamed me, in the eyes others and in the eyes of myself. If a thousand reasons existed to feel good about my service in Vietnam, just one incident such as this, even though I was not involved, removed them all and left me scratching to some reason, any reason to justify my involvement in Vietnam. Try as I did, however, I could not come up with any justification that could not be shot full of holes by the simplest of minds. Any simple mind could ask “Just how many kids is it OK to kill?” and I’d be trapped.

At about the same time, South Vietnamese and US troops entered Cambodia. Both Vietnamese and US commands denied any knowledge of the operation015 resulting in a cover up that further discredits any information offered by US command. The public’s approval rate of Nixon’s policy in Vietnam dropped by 20 percent016 as hundreds of ethnic Vietnamese, living within Cambodia, were murdered by Cambodian troops.017 World opinion blamed the Cambodian murders as retaliation for the Vietnamese and US troops invasion of Cambodia. On April 30th in a televised speech, Nixon finally owns up to the invasion of Cambodia,
declaring that he is sending troops into the Fishhook area of Cambodia some 50 miles northwest of Siagon.

On The Home Front
Four Dead in Ohio, the War comes Home

Protests over Nixon’s Cambodian Policy erupted nationwide with one memorable historical event occurring at Kent State University. On May 2nd 1970, National Guard troops and police intervened as rioting students attacked the ROTC building at Kent State burning it to the ground. Two days later, 100 National Guardsmen fired into a crowd of students. The result was four dead in Ohio. Violent protests spread like fire, shutting down more than 100 colleges across the United States. California Governor Ronald Reagan shut down the entire California college system until May 11th and the Pennsylvania State system of eighteen colleges closed indefinitely.

In all, the National Student Association claimed that 300 plus campuses were closed nationwide. On May 9th somewhere near 90,000, plus or minus 10,000, students demonstrated peaceful in Washington DC with only a small segment of protesters getting out of line and threatened with tear gas. On May 14th, Allied forces report that 863 South Vietnam forces, Arvins, died, the second highest death count for South Vietnam troops since the war began. On May 20th antiwar demonstrations were countered attacked by approximately 100,000 construction, dock, and office workers in New York who supported Nixon and the Vietnam War.

The war in my mind was entering a new and dangerous paradoxical phase. For many of us, we went to Vietnam believing someone had to keep the war off our soil. With each passing day, it seemed the war was coming closer and closer to our door but surprisingly, the aggressors weren’t the Communists. They were our own troops, armed in the name of our protection, and pitted against their own people. In fact, figuring in Kent State, they were killing their own people.

“I must be going mad” I’d tell myself. Now we have four dead and 11 wounded in Ohio. If that is not our soil, someone needed to explain to me what was. Masses of opposing views were rattling sabers at each other however genteelly. One lunatic or person truly bent by his cause could toss a match in this powder keg with the resulting explosion, not beyond comprehension, having the potential of creating a war in our streets. Was that damn war, Vietnam, going to take us, America, into another Civil War? I was afraid of it but if a Civil War did break out, I wanted no part in it. Then on March 1, 1971 a bomb exploded at the Capital building in Washington DC. A group that called themselves the Weather
Underground claimed credit for the action in retaliation for the US involvement in Laos. The wilderness was looking more like more of a safe haven every day.

St. Cloud VA Hospital
We don’t need any Medics

Shortly before entering St Cloud State, I thought I might look into some part time employment to back up the G.I. Bill that I intended to use to get through college. While still at Yuma, I often referred to the G.I. bill as “Blood Money” and considered not accepting it as some sacrificial protest to the war. To do so, however, meant no college. College was something I would have to get through on my own, and I needed all the help I could muster. By the time I entered school at St Cloud State, my views on the G.I. Bill had mellowed but from time to time the thought that I was spending blood money for my own benefit would resurface usually brought on by statements of students or faculty. My usual response to such demeaning insults was to spend the evening at the Grand Mantel Bar listening to the piano or some amateur (often quite good) strum out tunes on his guitar. Usually music and a few dozen drinks could put aside such thoughts.

Remembering what that Navy interviewer in boot camp told me about employment opportunities in the medical field with my experience as a corpsman, it seemed to me that I should qualify for a number of jobs at about any hospital and a VA hospital in particular. If my medical training was good enough for those in the military, it would seem it should be good enough for those released from the service. But that was not to be. It turns out I could have qualified for scrubbing bed pans, mopping floors, or planting flower pots in the spring but as far as medical experience went, nothing. Another lie!

So I figured, well if I do not qualify for any work at the hospital, lab work, X-ray, suturing, Pharmacy, or assisting with sick call, all of which I have been doing for two years or better, perhaps I could get on ambulance duty. That did not work either. To qualify for ambulance duty I would have to take numerous classes in emergency first aid, crisis intervention, and emergency procedures that in the last two years I put into practice on a daily basis. “Hell,” I thought, “I should be teaching those classes, not taking them.” I left angry and frustrated, asking myself how the hell I benefited at all, aside from the GI Bill, by my four years of military service. It seemed more and more that I just threw away four years of my life. None of the work I did on a daily basis while in the service transferred to civilian life. Everyone who did not join the service had four years seniority on me and those my age that went to college instead of the service were now graduating, locking up an ever increasing tightening job market strained by defense spending.
So where was my reward? How did military service benefit me? Is this what Art Beyer found? Nothing? Is this what led to Art’s demise? Was Art’s work on the farm of his own choosing or did the problems he developed during the war allow him no other choice? Was I on the same course as Art?

CHAPTER TEN
Refilling the Void

St. Cloud State University: A lesson in “Mental Isometrics”

In the fall of 1970 I entered St Cloud State with no real goal in mind other than sort out all the conflicting thoughts going through my mind. I remembered from Yuma my poetry class, the instructor’s infatuation for writing, and a few quotable quotes which I had collected since high school such as “The pen is mightier than the sword.” “Maybe,” I thought “I should consider writing.” Given all the chaos in the world, I figured if the world ever needed a writer, now was the time. More than a writer, however, what the world needed was the “Truth.” Not someone’s version of truth --- but “The Truth” however the truth worked out. So, I bestow upon myself the grandiose mission of finding the truth. “What was this thing called “Truth.” How should my expedition to the truth be conducted and how should the Truth be identified once found? Maybe, I thought, this institute of higher learning could help me sort all that out.”

So with the thought of discovering “Truth” on my mind, what classes should I take? I wasn’t sure. The required courses, Geography and Art, were no-brainers. To graduate, I needed to take these courses so it might as well be now while I was still looking around for the guidelines to direct my search. I can’t remember if I learned anything in Geography worth taking home, but in Art, I learned an important inadvertent point. I learned that an argument could be made for calling anything art. Paint splattered on a wall by a blindfolded chimpanzee, people wrapped in cellophane, a junk pile that might spark a conversation about what the pile might look like, graffiti, a Campbell’s soup can, even a cigarette butt lying beside the walkway could be considered be art.

I did learn something while sitting in on the argument whether or not everything/anything/notthing is or could be considered art. I learned where not to waste my time if my goal is to understand truth. In time, I came to call such arguments, whether something is or might be art, Mental Isometrics. I borrowed the concept of mental isometrics from physics class and its concept of work. Work, to a physic major, states that you can push on a mountain until you collapse physically exhausted but if the mountain did not move, no work was done. Since
no definitive definition to art exists, at least no single definition that everyone can agree, no conclusion can ever be reached. The “What is or can be Art,” argument, I therefore concluded, was absurd. I could devote my whole life arguing whether or not something may or may not be art but nothing conclusive could ever be reached. Given that, if I devoted my whole life attempting to prove anything can be, or everything is, or nothing is art, in the end how much could I expect the mountain to move? What after would be called be Art tomorrow? I could end in the same place as when I started. I still would not know what is Art as Art is different in the mind of each individual and therefore still be open to debate? Nothing therefore has moved. Nothing therefore has been learned.

This was the beginning of my learning, learning what not to learn. It occurred to me somewhere in all these so called intellectual debates that nothing intelligent was in fact being transferred from one mind to another. For example, what is love? Ask a hundred people and what you might get is a hundred different answers. If I do not know exactly what a person’s definition of love is, I really have no idea what it is that he is attempting to tell me. I may think I do and believe that I really learned something but in actually I learned nothing, taking away only what I thought he meant whether what I thought he meant is really what he meant or not. Taken further, if I do not know exactly what he is attempting to convey to me, what did I learn? Was any knowledge being passed from him to me? All I really learned is nothing but a mirage, being merely what I think I learned. Unfortunately what most people think they learn in reality is too often not much of anything. But these people who have just learned a great deal of nothing can sure talk like they really learned something.

In one of my classes we studied the poem “The Force That through the Green Fuse” by Dylan Thomas. Libraries are full of critics and theorists as to what the meaning of this poem, or in particular, what the “Force” might be. From what I have been able to ascertain from the critics I have read this force ranges from everything from sexuality to all physical forces controlling the universe.

Again --- the question begs to asked, whose version is the correct one? More importantly, what reasons exist to believe any particular version? If we assume that poets write for what each individual might take home from reading any given poem, as is the current thought promoted by many literature instructors, then what this poem might mean is really unimportant as it can mean anything (an illusion really) to anyone. All we could hope to learn by such thinking is what this person, the kid in the third row back, second from the end, or that person, the girl with the hair braids, thinks the poem means to them. If however we assume that the author had a precise meaning in mind, as did my AWC professor, what other people think this poem might mean actually inhibits learning, particularly if what some thought the poem might mean is taken to mean what the author meant.
It occurred to me that to know what Thomas was writing about, I first had to know something about Thomas himself, an important element not usually even considered in any literature classes I have taken other than, of course, AWC. What I learned about Thomas, looking into his life, was Thomas loved to riddle things. Think of him as the original “Riddler,” the Batman character who used riddles as clues as to what his next crime might be.

Next I learned that Dylan’s publisher was a bisexual. He, the publisher, had an affair with a woman whose last name was Deforest. As it turns out, Deforest ends up blowing herself away over their relationship leaving Dylan’s publisher a broken man. Dylan’s publisher ended up considered by most those around him as a homosexual.

So --- given what we know about Thomas’ life above, suppose we try plugging events going on around his life into this poem. Ask any botanist exactly what “the force that drives the flower” is and he’ll tell you the flower’s function is reproduction. The flower is the plant’s sex organs. And what about the words “that blasts the roots of trees is my destroyer?” Is it a coincidence that the words trees and destroyer seems to parallel the life of Thomas’s publisher given his life was destroyed by a Deforest who shot (blasted) herself?

What Thomas’ meaning was when he wrote these lines no one can say for sure and unless we have Thomas here to inform us exactly what he meant, we may never know. Thomas is dead and gone however and even if he were still alive, an unspoken rule of literature is never to discredit yourself by telling others what you meant to say. I do know this; however, none of Thomas’ history was ever discussed in that class. My interpretation, at least, comes with some supporting evidence. Even if my guess is in error, at least I have transferred what I believe the central concept of this poem is to my audience in a manner that cannot be construed to mean anything beyond what I have described. This poem, considering the evidence, is not about some all-encompassing power of the universe. It tells about the life of one man written in the first person by a third party which any writer is at liberty to do. But then, you might disagree --- and if so, what did either of us learn?

So you, the reader, might ask --- “So what?” What has this to do with Vietnam? Whether right or wrong, logical or ridiculous, what is beginning to form is a new method of thinking, something I did little of before. Up until this point in time, if I read an article by someone with a PhD hooked to his name or those who took the time to put some book together, I largely considered that article or book unquestionable. No more. Anyone can make up a story and many have the ability to hang on it all sorts of blinking lights, beautiful colors, and all those delightful things that prove nothing. Does a blinking nose on Rudolph prove a flying reindeer? Of course not. Does what has been dubbed “thee” number one selling
recording of all times “Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer” by Gene Autry prove flying reindeer? Of course not. Does that fact that nearly everyone knows and can sing “Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer” prove flying reindeer? No. So maybe everyone should consider that the next time they stick out a Manger scene or sing “Away in a Manger.” Regardless how many manger scenes are placed in people’s yards or how many people can sing “Away in a Manger” proves nothing.

**English Class: Never Mind the Truth**

**Sell --- Sell --- Sell**

Taking the lead from Arizona Western, at St Cloud State, I, thinking of writing, thought English might be an interesting major so I signed up for a number of English classes. Two worth mention were “Mass Media” and the other “Modern European Writers.” The Mass Media class was designed for journalists. I was very disillusioned however to that “Mass Media” was a methods class, not a class on how to assess “Truth.” Rather than teaching a method to discover the “Truth,” the class was more geared toward how to entice a reader into an article to get people to buy it. First you begin with an eye catching headline followed immediately by a strong topic sentence. Then you build your case using all the supporting material you can gather, being careful not to include any serious challenges to your basic theme. Reporting the “Truth,” that is what actually happened, was not ever a consideration.

The second class I signed up for was “Modern European Writers.” One of the books I thoroughly enjoyed from that class was Günter Grass’ “The Tin Drum” and to this day I consider it one of the best books I have ever read. It tells the story of this individual born to the world with a full adult consciousness. At the age of three he decides he does not want to live in the adult’s world so he jumps down into a basement purposely to injure himself so he would never have to grow up. Based in Europe prior to and during World War II, Oscar (this child) then runs around with his little tin drum, painted in Poland’s national colors, drumming, challenging religion, the Nazis, and fascism. Great book and worth the read.

Where I ran into difficulty with this class was the introduction of existentialism. What I got out of the discussions on existentialism was the idea that man is basically free and ultimately responsible for “HIS” own destiny. Anything a man does is done out of freedom of choice, his own free will, and therefore, he alone is responsible for whatever results from his action. Buffy Sainte Marie’s lyrics were coming into focus.

“He’s the one how gives his body as a weapon of the war, And without him all this killing can’t go on.”

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Was I that **Universal Soldier** responsible for war? Me! Not my government. I after all went to war of my own free will. Never mind the argument that I went because I was forced to choose one of two options by my government, the military or jail. That argument does not get it in this arena because even having only two choices, the military or jail, I chose the military. I could have chosen jail. But I did not. Instead I chose the military and as such according to this thinking, I was responsible for any atrocities committed in that war that I might have been able to stop because I let them happen. It was not my social conditioning or peer pressure that brought me to Vietnam. I had the freedom to ignore them all. But yielding to consequences, I chose not to. Even when in Vietnam, if I did not want to be a part of children drug from their bunkers, I could have simply laid down my weapon and refused to partake anymore in what was being done in front of me. But --- I did not. What I did do was participate in the war effort and therefore whatever happened while on my watch was no one’s responsibility but my own.

The instructor considered existentialism nearly sacred and did not refrain from asserting his views. The “perfect people” in his class lapped up every word, never having done any wrong themselves. One day, while sitting there, I made the statement that if I believed what I was being taught in that class that I’d jump off the fire escape outside that third floor window that very day. All I got was this blank look. I could see the amazement in their eyes --- like where did that come from? I found no reason to enlighten them. I got up and walked out of class and did not stop until I reached the closest bar. I must have made it back somehow for I managed to finish the class. The cloud cast over me by this class nevertheless has never truly dissipated.

I have never been able to put the existential argument aside as complete nonsense. After all, look at Mohammed Ali. Did not he risk everything he had? Was not he willing to accept the threat of being locked in jail by standing up for what he believed in? And by doing so, did not he, rather than losing everything, gain favor in the eyes of the world. In fact, on November 9th, 2005 Mohammad Ali was rewarded the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom in a ceremony at the White House by President George W Bush.

Had I done what Ali did, there is no doubt in my mind that I would have spent years in prison. The irony in all this has not escaped me; a prize fighter, one who earned his fame and fortune battering others and having his brains battered for cash, one who defied his country’s call to fight being awarded one of America’s most covenanted medals by the worst war hawk (that evaded Vietnam himself) ever to be elected to the White House. Something is insane about this.

It might be worth mention also that given many African American’s resentment of what they often called “The White Man’s War” it is likely that a
number of these African Americans did go to jail rather than fight. Those Blacks, not to mention a number of Whites, were locked up and the key thrown away for the crime of not being a public celebrity. They after all were only African Americans, not some world famous professional prize fighter who made his living battering people. Is that “liberty and justice for all?” Or is liberty and justice just for the few who make it to the top? Or really seen backwards, is not owning up to one’s legal responsibility worthy of a medal? Is that justice?

At any rate, the question what kind of man does this make me again nags at my mind? Was it I did not have the guts to stand up for what I believed in or was it I didn’t want to accept the responsibility for what I participated in? I stayed drunk over this for some time, and in fact still do --- but being drunk is better than dead. Suicide now and then crosses my mind. No exit exists to this argument that I, as a veteran, can ever hope to come out a winner.

**Biology: Life through Different Lens**

One class that did raise my eyebrows was Biology as taught by David Grether. High school biology was taught largely as a taxonomy class or anatomy class, learning little but Latin names for each family, class, phylum, and order. In the years to follow I was to that diminishing biology to learning nothing but Latin names may have been design. After all, teaching what is believed by the large majority of biologists, that man evolved from the same organic soup as anything else, dogs, mice, snakes, slugs, earthworms, contradicts theology. The religious establishment would not like that aspect of biology taught nor would the elite, the wealthy, businessmen, or industry, I was to learn. That would mean man was not made special by a perfect god who bestowed on man the mission of controlling all other life forms on earth. After all, without such a belief, the human race might not be able to justify normally taken for granted ideas such as agriculture.

Grether’s class stressed field biology and how the environment impacts all life on Earth. While we were required to know which conifer tree a given conifer was, a pine, a spruce, a cedar, or a tamarack, learning the Latin name for each was unimportant. What was more important is whether you could tell a pine from a spruce if given the needles or which was which if viewed at a distance. Stressed was the ecological niche in which each could be found.

Where certain trees grew was not just some random event. They, like any other living thing on earth, grew in areas that most favored their growth or limited the growth of competitors. To dry, trees do not grow. Deciduous trees require warmer temperatures than conifers. This means if you wish to northern conifers look in areas wet enough to support tree growth and cool enough to limit competition from deciduous trees. In short, if you want northern conifers, go north
or higher in altitude if deciduous trees is the dominate species at your present location.

This niche concept was something I’d never really considered before and after experimenting with the concept what began emerging was one of those basic “Truths” I was looking for. All creatures have their own niche, including man, that to go beyond requires the ability to overcome the conditions offered by the new niche. In other words, if a given species does not have the ability to conserve or produce heat, it will be limited to live in warm environments. As such, cold blooded animals, crocodiles or rattlesnakes, will not be found in artic environments. Humans can exist in artic environments only because they have adopted methods that allow them to manufacture clothing capable of withstanding the cold. Left naked at any location where temperature drops below freezing, any person would survive only a short time. Not only can these statements be proven, but they made sense. As I was searching for “Truth,” I soon found myself as an unofficial biology major, taking as many biology classes as I could fit into a quarter.

It should be noted that “Truth” is a conceptual term itself. Truth for example to a Fundamentalist is god’s word, theoretically what is written in the Bible. To me however, the Bible is a book a myth --- so --- which is it? Is the Bible myth or truth? Since “Truth” can mean different things to different people, the proper way to address this problem would be to create two different words --- one being “Truth” as defined by the Bible; the other being “Truth” as found through investigation, namely scientific investigation. The problem with the development of a two word system however is it would not be long until someone would come up with a method to stretch the meaning of either these words to overlap each other. Then we’d back to exactly where we are today, the same word being able to fit over either barrel. Therefore, I will stay with the system given me. Since this is my book, I’ll go with my version, namely truth found through investigation and should a reader have a problem with that --- I would like to refer this individual to any university in or around his location and advise him to take a philosophy class where, from where I sit, all learning stops in the never ending ever expanding cycle of Mental Isometrics. For those however who wish to “Truth” read on.

First off I shall disregard all other definitions of truth, when I speak of “Truth.” I then would limit the meaning of “Truth” to only that which can be proven. It can, for example, be proven that the earth orbits the sun using measurements of shadows, their length and angles, and plotting the position of heavenly bodies over time. If that fails, a probe can be sent off into space to record this event. Failing this type of evidence, truth is simply reduced to mean about anything anybody wants truth to mean, which far too often is anything but truth as defined by me.
Once the “Truth” is known, truth then can be applied. Once it can be shown that the earth revolves around the sun is true, any theory that disagrees can be put aside. There is no need to study those which disagree any longer. In fact, the only reason to study those contradictory theories would be perhaps for history’s sake --- to help understand how we got to where we are.

**Truth: So what is “Truth”**

And how should “Truth be identified? Avoiding a lengthy explanation, the best way to truth is through a process known as the Scientific Method which can be found in any basic science book and hence I will be not repeat the scientific method of investigation here. I believe anyone reading this should have a basic knowledge of the Scientific Method but I understand some people who might read this book will not. For those not educated in science, science may seem like a mystery. In reality however these people use science every day. Take a cookbook for example. I mix a little of this with a little of that, throw it in the oven and bake at a given temperature for a given amount of time and I should get whatever the recipe claimed I would get. That is science. I did this and received that. If science, in this case a recipe, is true, if you follow what I did, you should get the same result. If you did not, say instead of casserole the recipe you followed called for, you received a plastic toy, you probably would not use that recipe again. Just to be sure you followed everything as suggested however you might try that recipe one more time just to make sure nothing you did was different from what I did. If that recipe does not work the second time, everything then being equal, you should throw the recipe away. That too is science. Science is open for reinvestigation over and over again. Good science will yield the same product over and over again. If it does not, scientists throw it out. Then --- this is important --- there is no need to return to it. Proven true is that the recipe is false. Anyway, if you, the reader, do not understand the Scientific Method, I suggest you a good science book and out what the Scientific Method consists of. Life on earth depends on it.

Other methods exist for finding the truth other than the scientific method which can often lead into lengthy investigations. To make this point, suppose we begin with the color white. To evade all the lip service that might go into describing white, spectrum analysis, color tones, and whatever other mental isometries someone might wish to throw into this discussion, let’s just start with a white, any white, and title that white.

White is therefore by definition our white, the white we began with. Now suppose we add any color, including another tone of white and what we will end up with is something other than our original white. Our white does not exist with
shades of this or that. Our white was the white we started with. White is either white (as we originally defined it) or it is something else. There is no degree of truth in this case. An old proverb has it, either a woman is pregnant or she is not. She is not somewhat pregnant or slightly pregnant. She is either pregnant or she is not.

Another example might be dead. A person is either dead or alive. No one exists in some altered state in between the living and the dead. Some speak of miracles, people coming back to life after being declared dead, which in effect has happened. The problem however has more to do the definition of dead than the miracle returning to life has been proclaimed to be. The word dead to one person may not mean dead to another. For example, one person might say someone is dead if the alleged dead person’s heart stops. In that case, many people have risen from the dead. In fact, so many have raised from dead, given that definition, that rising from the dead would be seen as no big deal. A doctor can legally pronounce someone dead but then doctors are human and do make mistakes. Mistakes are not miracles. I might also add that legally dead and physically dead are not synonymous. In fact, someone can be legally dead (brain dead for example) and still have a beating heart which can be kept beating on life support for years.

I, on the other hand, pull my definition of dead from my training as a medic. A person can be considered dead if the person in question is decapitated, shows signs of decomposition, is well into rigor mortis, or can be shown to exhibit lavidity, the settling of bodily fluids into the lower portions of the body resulting in distinct discoloration. Then and only then is a person truly dead. To rise after being decapitated or noticeably in the process of decomposition would truly be a miracle. Not only is a person in either one of these states legally dead, he is also physically dead --- or to put in it in other words, the truth is that person is dead. No person dead as described here has ever returned to life unless in legends and myths. Important to know is some truths may never be known. For example, is there life on Venus? Given the atmosphere of Venus, most would be inclined to conclude no. The more that is found about life however the more unsure science is about what is required for life to exist. For example, life is known to exist in volcanic vents once thought far too hot and acidic to support life. Life is known to exist at sea a depth that once was believed to be uninhabitable due to pressure and the lack of sunlight. The phenomenon of life is beginning to appear more of the norm rather than the extraordinary. So let me ask again --- does life exist on Venus? Short of going to Venus, we may never know.

But suppose we go to Venus, look around, and do not discover any life. Does life on Venus exist? Maybe. Life may still exist if none is found. Perhaps we simply looked in the wrong spot. Maybe life exists under some unmovable rock. Did we check? Probably not since we are unable to move that rock. Maybe life
exists a hundred feet under the surface thereby able to avoid all the radiation and heat it would be exposed to at the surface. Did we check? Probably not. To do so would likely require far more equipment than we currently have. Or could it be life exists in a form unrecognizable to earthlings? Maybe. So what’s the point? It is extremely difficult to prove the negative as to do so would require knowing everything. And where might this bit of knowledge apply in this writing? Does some god exist? Maybe his thrown exists in the Andromeda Galaxy. Can you say for sure that it is not? Probably not --- since you have not been there and checked under ever rock. The point being made is to prove the negative is next to impossible and therefore is a wasted mental exercise. In these cases, the words “I do not know” is as close to the truth as we can get --- and is the best answer that can be given.

Rather than attempting to prove the negative therefore and for the sake of learning anything, we should concentrate only on the positive. The positive can be found and is almost always available to those who seek it. What do I mean by the positive? A tree (something positive) exists in my backyard. This statement is either true or it is false. The truth of this statement can be found out by anyone. They simply have to go to my back yard and check it out. In the negative realm on the other hand I might say there is a ghost (a negative --- something that cannot be seen or measured) in my backyard. No one can go into my backyard and prove or disprove a negative, in this case a ghost (something that cannot be seen, weighed or measured). All they will is nothing --- and nothing does not prove anything. From a mathematical perspective, two negatives becomes a positive which is to say they found anything. And that’s where we end up, with anything. We went here and got this (strange smells), that (cold drafts), these (unfamiliar noises), and those (strange lights), none of which can be verified as being a ghost. Hence being scientifically minded, we toss it out as inconclusive. We really do not know what we found. All we know is whatever we found could be anything. So how can we apply this bit of positive negative knowledge? Myth cannot be found either. Myth must be passed from one person to another person via some means, word of mouth, a book, the media, or whatever the means may be. Consider Homer’s “The Iliad,” which I am hoping most everyone could agree is myth. Without this book or another’s word of mouth, what do you suppose your chances would be of discovering that Achilles died as a result of being shot by an arrow in his only vulnerable (he was super human) spot, his heal?

I would say the probability of you, without knowing the story to begin with, coming up with the same story would be zero (nothing or in another word, negative).

Knowing the tale of Achilles, however does offer some advantages when seeking the Truth. Knowing that Achilles was created via the pen of men means
other heroes may have been created the same way. We can therefore look for similarities with other myths. Consider for example: Samson. Is the tale of Samson true or myth? Can any evidence be found anywhere other than the Bible (word of mouth) for the existence of Samson? Bones? Documents? Is anything about Samson similar to Achilles? Samson also was super human like Achilles and had a vulnerable body part, namely his hair. Is this simply coincidence or was one story plagiarizing the other? Now what do you suppose your chances of coming up with the story of Samson on your own, never exposed to the story yourself, would be? My guess would be about zero (nothing or in another word, negative).

When attempting to determine if something is true or false, it may be worth mention that if two or more theories, alibis, observations, and documents exist to the same event and these theories, alibis, observations, or documents contradict each other, all that means is one or the other or they both are wrong. Also as important, simply because one of these theories, alibis, observations, or documents may be proven false does not make the other(s) correct. For example, suppose I roll out a pair of dice and I notice that they do not add to seven. That does not prove that either of the dice are a three or that taken collectively they add up to ten. Many other possibilities exist. Christian writers are great at finding a loop hole in the theory of evolution, and there are many as scientist simply do not know everything to date, then casting evolution aside by stating this loop hole proves god created the world. Not true. Even if evolution could be proven totally false would not prove god created life.

A Word on Theory:
Only as Good as the Evidence

Theory is exactly that, theory; a guess rendered based upon what is known or thought to be known. Theory is worth no more than the evidence it is built upon. In today’s world, the meaning of theory takes on no grandeur connotation that the conflict between evolution and creation. Christians are constantly claiming that evolution is taught in schools as fact. I, as a biology student, however, have never heard evolution referred to as fact or as the “Law of Evolution.” I have always heard it called the “Theory of Evolution” and as long it is, the theory is no better than the evidence supporting it. I should like to add the “Theory of Evolution” just happens to have much better logical evidence supporting it than does the “Theory of Creation.” For example, given what I know about plants, chlorophyll, and photosynthesis, it defies logic to suggest that plants existed before the sun.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his
kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Genesis 1:11-19

Unless I accept the standard Christian apology that with god all things are possible, these verses would be extremely hard to accept as fact knowing what I know about biological processes.

**My God:**

**Time is Greater than I**

To know what the strings are that make people dance would be nearly impossible without knowing something about their core beliefs. These core beliefs for most people are normally formed by the religion under which a given person is raised. Richard Dawkins offers an obvious but often over looked insight into what rules and norms people will adopt in their life time. Dawkins points out that nearly all people adopt the same religious beliefs as their parents:

Out of all of the sects in the world, we notice an uncanny coincidence: the overwhelming majority just happen to choose the one that their parents belong to. Not the sect that has the best evidence in its favour, the best miracles, the best moral code, the best cathedral, the best stained glass, the best music: when it comes to choosing from the smorgasbord of available religions, their potential virtues
seem to count for nothing, compared to the matter of heredity.

I request now that you reconsider the words or Robert Welch “We are fast coming to a point, Gentlemen where we’ve got to offer something that people are willing to die for.”

Granted, some people are able to escape the puppet masters that pull their strings but, truer than not, most people remain bound and shackled for life to the religion and its puppet masters under whose authority they are raised. The idea of capturing children young has always been a priority of the Church as once beliefs are instilled in a child’s mind, rarely do they change. The Old Testament reminds us:

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs:22:6,

And the people who have a political agenda and want to get their agenda into your kid’s head know this also. I got that verse directly off the JBS website at: http://www.jbs.org/node/1340 hence they know the importance of getting children into the church early, not to mention stuff their heads with their idealisms. Get them early is important enough to be repeated in the New Testament.

But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein Mark 10:14-15:

So suppose I back up some? Since nearly every religion assumes a god --- the question that needs asked is then “Do gods exist?” And if so --- which ones (the plural, ones, is no mistake)? Important to this discussion is what is meant by the word “god,” a word that without an agreed conscience means very little. It is therefore necessary to spell out exactly what I mean when I refer to a god. Webster’s New World Dictionary defines god as:

1: any of various beings conceived of as supernatural, immortal, and having special powers over the lives and affairs of people and the course of nature; deity, esp. a male deity: typically considered objects of worship
2: an image that is worshiped; idol
3: a person or thing deified or excessively honored and admired
4: [G-] in monotheistic religions, the creator and ruler of the universe, regarded as eternal, infinite, all-powerful, and all-knowing; Supreme Being; the Almighty

Adopting Webster’s definition, therefore, when I speak of god, I am referring to a supernatural, normally anthropomorphic, immortal being accredited with creating the universe or ruling over some other natural phenomena, the weather, the sea, fertility, death. Normally, these gods, particularly those in authority, are male --- as in most cultures males, being the stronger sex, are the authority figure. Female gods usually represent fertility like harvest for example. As to the god of the Bible, I can see no other reason why a god, particularly a one and only god, would require a gender.

These gods, it is often alleged, can protect its believers from enemies, often hear and answer prayer, reward our good deeds by bringing bumper crops to the faithful while punishing backsliders and heretics with natural disasters. These gods often exist beside the powers that be (the puppet masters) and help in establishing and enforcing the laws of the land. Stone statues, immortalized by artists’ whose sculptures and paintings of these human formed gods ordain the halls of government and/or public squares stand guard over the public sector. The gods, themselves however, are never seen which begs the question “From where did these artists get their model to reproduce these gods if not human beings themselves?”

So --- given the above definition of god, does god exist? I’m going to be bold and come right out and say “No.” No god of this nature exists nor can any evidence other than lip service, poppycock, and hearsay be offered for proof of their/its existence. Most religious people, who believe in the type of god described in the first definition, quickly reject all the other gods which do not suit their purpose that also fit into this definition of god as myth. For whatever reason, they seem to lack the ability to see the correlation between the hundreds of gods they claim do not exist and the one or few they just hand pick from the enormous pool of mythological gods.

The third definition of god above does allow the reader some latitude to define god, however those gods that fall into this category most people reject. Included in this definition would be Confucius, Hirohito, The Reverend Moon, Adolph Hitler, Charles Manson, Jim Jones, David Koresh, or Jesus Christ for that matter although unlike the others, even Christ’s physical existence has never been conclusively proven. In these cases, god does indeed exist. However to say that any of them (excluding Christ who many believe) controls the weather, formed the
universe, rules over the harvest or seas would be considered by most people as absurd. There is a message in this however. People have been shown to see other people as god. Perhaps that is why most gods were created in the image of man.

At any rate --- I can undeniably say, I do not believe in god, any god, not even your god. I do not believe in ghosts, witches, Black magic, or any other thing associated with the supernatural, paranormal, or spiritual worlds. That however should not be taken as I do not believe in some form of “Higher Power.”

So what do I mean by a “Higher Power”? Nearly every person from every civilization has a belief in what could be called a “Higher Power. Left to most people if they had the power to control the world around them, they would. They would not age, fall ill, become victims of natural disasters, experience crop failures, suffer pain, or die. Since they do age, fall ill, become victims of natural disasters, experience crop failures, suffer pain, and die, however, these people obviously (and correctly) realize that they don’t have any significant control over these events. Something, they theorize, therefore must be a power greater than they. I believe everyone realizes this, even the most hardened atheists.

The idea of a Higher Power has also occurred to me. I grow old whether I want to or not. As much as I might like I cannot soar with eagles or dive to the depths of whales. Winter comes as much as I wish summers (during which I must put up mosquitoes, those damned insects that if left to me would not exist) would last forever. A force, surely greater than myself, prevents he solar system from just flying apart. A force, greater than myself, can shake the earth with such violence that whole cities may be turned to rubble in seconds. Those things however have never been shown as being caused by any anthropomorphic god. The earth does not rest on the shoulders of some giant strong man who shrugs from time to time.

Gods (including the Christian god) do not exist until the story tellers and myth spinners attempt to explain these uncontrollable and powerful natural events and exploit them to their advantage. Then are born the gods just as and with no more evidence to justify their existence than Hairy Potter was created. I might also point out, people like Harry Potter, myth or not, and are willing to spend millions of dollars to read about and watch his escapades. Given the choice between watching Harry Potter and Al Gore’s “An Inconvenient Truth” most people would throw their money at Harry Potter. And that’s too bad. Unfortunately people like to hear, read, and repeat fables, myths, and stories far more than they would like to know about the world in which they live.

I, unlike other story tellers, do not depend on myth and legend to uphold my belief. I have no idea what set the universe in motion; I only recognize that it was. I do not know exactly how life came to be; I only recognize that it did. How my conscience came to be, how it can analyze what the two holes in my forehead perceive, my hands hold, what touches my tongue, and makes my head ache, is
unknown. I only know it did and can. I do not know why I age; I only know I do. Time, to me, is a complete mystery. I wonder how there was a yesterday? I do not know. I only know there was.

If these unknowns are god then, I suppose, god exists, the old god of gaps theory. This/These gods, I am certain beyond any reasonable doubt however did not write a book. I am certain beyond any reasonable doubt that the time god, using time metaphorically as an example, does not care about my sex life. In fact, time does not care at all. Time, unlike anything living, lacks the ability to feel (that is I have not seen any evidence to suggest time feels) and as such time cannot experience emotions such as anger. Nothing about my behavior will bring time’s wrath down upon me. Time does not grant social status nor does it make exceptions for it. Time does not ask of me my time for either military or civilian duty. Time does not ask me for tithes. Time does not ask me to sacrifice. No alters require being built to time. Time will go on, however, and whatever consequences time’s continuance means to me, I have no recourse but to accept it. I cannot stop it. Time, whatever it is, is greater than I.

**Christianity verses Science:**

**Are They Compatible?**

We normally do not think of science as prehistoric however the manufacture of tools, the use of fire, and hunting techniques are all scientifically derived. Science says “Here is what I did and this is what happened. It worked for me and if true it should work again for you. If it doesn’t work for you, then we have to wonder if it is true or not.

Science is not some mystery hidden in the libraries of universities or in an obscure lab where some mad man is attempting to restore life to an executed criminal by implanting a new brain. That’s not say science has not created a monster. Indeed, Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” is as much prophecy as a fictional tale. Automobiles, the great wolf in sheep’s clothing, kills tens of thousands per year and pours out tons of exhaust, obstructing our horizons and choking the masses. Chemical factories crank out tons of poisons lethal to all life forms. Modern armament has reduced killing each other in mass numbers to simply pulling a trigger or pressing a button. If Shelley’s monster is seen as a metaphor, rather than a literal figure, the true horror of Shelley’s book may be some day fully realized, if it has not been already. Those monsters are however applied science; technology quite frankly (pun intended).

When most people think of science and its beginnings, they normally equate science with civilization, and indeed, if we knew no science, or very little, we’d still be sleeping on the ground in the cold with a watchful eye out for whatever
passes by in the night. Nearly every comfort afforded us is the result of
applications of science and where ever civilizations have flourished with
inventions and buildings, science has left its signature.

When people think of science’s beginnings, Egypt is likely the first place
that comes to their mind. The Egyptians had to have some idea of engineering to
build their pyramids, not to mention some idea of the technology required to cut
and transport those massive rocks. The Egyptians manufactured clothing and
jewelry of various types, constructed shelters and water craft, and developed
armaments beyond simple stones. They also knew enough about the earth’s
relationship to the universe to develop their own calendar. They embalmed their
dead in ways that preserved cadavers four thousand years using methods modern
science has struggled to duplicate. Egyptians also knew enough about human
anatomy to develop some sound surgical procedures as early as 3000-2500 BC. 007

Writing was being developed during the Egyptian era however Egyptian writing
was complicated by numerous symbols and was limited to scribes in the priesthood
who held writing and all other forms of learning as a virtual monopoly. 008

Up until the time of the Greeks, science was mostly dependent on necessity.
People required food, so agriculture created methods and implements to provide it.
The crops required water so rivers were diverted into canals for irrigation. The
Egyptians likely had no idea why plants required water. They only knew if the
plants did not get watered, the plants shriveled up and died. Why plants shriveled
up and died was left to the priests, who created gods such as bounty and harvest.
This perhaps helps explain why generations of time would be required to learn
exactly why plants required water? It is doubtful that priests liked others
questioning their explanations for their explanations kept them in power.

Science may exist simply for the sake of knowing. When, for example, we
think of the motivation for Pythagoras in 536BC figuring out the world was round,
we do not think his aspiration for doing so was a desire for world domination.
Pythagoras simply wished to explain the universe and earth’s place in it. For many
of the Greeks, the matter of finding the truth seemingly was for truth’s sake only.
Offhand I cannot think of any useful purpose other than simply wanting to know
why things were for them to devote their time to endeavors which offered no
immediate economic or material application. It was the Greeks who brought in
science as we know it today.

About 600-400BC the Greeks began developing natural science apart from
philosophy and by 400-200BC were bringing about rapid advances in anatomy,
math, and astronomy. 009 Science in Greece was being carried to the next level, the
desire to explain the world by establishing a working model. 010 Around 250BC,
Aristarchus of Samos, having learned from his predecessor, Pythagoras 536BC, 011
that the earth traveled around the sun, discovered that the earth laid at an incline of
23.5 degrees. They were therefore able to rationally explain the seasons of the year. They were also fully aware that night and day were caused by the earth’s rotation on its axis. Day existed when a given point of reference on the earth faced the sun. Night was when a given point of reference was turned away from the sun.

More amazing, Hipparchus (160BC) was able to predict the “precession of the equinoxes” by noting that the North Pole did not point directly at the North Star and even changed from year to year. Take a top, for example, and set it up right on the floor and draw an imaginary line from its point on the floor (point A) to a point (B) in space, now the pinnacle of the top. Then spin the top in a manner that point A does not change. The top will rotate swiftly about its axis. As it does so however the pinnacle will leave point B and begin to wobble, spinning much slower around in space to form a circle around point B. If a line was drawn from point A through B therefore, line AB would come to represent a center line drawn through the center of the resulting cone.

By applying this slight wobble to the earth, Hipparchus was able to demonstrate that the earth’s equator would not be in same place each year and therefore, the equinoxes would not occur at exactly the same time from year to year. Hipparchus estimated this wobble by the earth would take 26,000 years to complete. The “precession of the equinoxes” remains one of the most profound discoveries ever made by ancient astronomers.

Other discoveries included the measurement of the circumference of the earth by Eratosthenes. Using shadows cast from the sun at different locations at the same time, Eratosthenes was able to estimate the circumference of the earth at 28,700 miles which was “not a very accurate result, but not a bad estimation for a first attempt.”

Also getting its start was geology. Strabo (25BC), by comparing Mount Vesuvius to Mount Etna, predicted that Vesuvius may become a mountain of fire again which it did sixty years after his death when Vesuvius wiped out Pompeii and Herculaneum. He was also able to describe, from finding fossil shells miles from the sea, that the area where the shells were found must have been a delta of a great river many years before.

And then a huge surprise for me! Atoms! Democritus (420BC) developed a theory of atoms as micro-small pieces of matter consisting of different weights. Epicurus (306BC) begins to speculate about atoms and vacuums followed by Lucretius (60BC) who authored “De Rerum Naturae.” Atoms! Wow --- to think anyone was considering atoms at this time was --- well, a shock to me. In all my years of schooling up until right now, all I was aware of from this era was Empedocles’ (440BC) four elements of fire, earth, air, and water. Even though this atomic theory was far from our current atomic theory of today, had it went mainstream, it is hard to imagine where we might be today, either off in space
somewhere boldly going where no man has gone before or simply another one of Frankenstein’s victims.

Hippocrates (420BC) was the father of modern medicine. Anyone who has ever been in the medical field has heard the words “First of all, do no harm,” or in other words as it was explained to me in Naval Hospital Corps School, if you do not know what you are doing, don’t do it. You may do more harm than good. Do what you know will help, stop the bleeding, make the person comfortable, treat for shock, prevent the patient from harming himself, and then let the injury take its course while you seek professional help. Life is fragile. Don’t, with good intentions, break it.

Aware of whom Hippocrates was and what he is famous for, I came across one of Hippocrates quotes that made me take notice. I shall quote it, not so much for its medical value but for the religious insight Hippocrates interjects into it.

“I am about to discuss the disease called ‘sacred*’. It is not, in my opinion, any more divine or more sacred than other diseases, but has a natural cause, and its supposed divine origin is due to men’s inexperience and to their wonder at its peculiar character. Now while men continue to believe in its divine origin because they are at a loss to understand it, they really disprove its divinity by the facile method of healing which they adopt, consisting as it does of purifications and incantations.” (Sacred= Epilepsy) 017

It is worth mention at this time that Greeks and their wonder about the world existed in an environment where few, if any, religious barriers existed. Human thoughts, rather than the claimed mumblings of gods by priests, once planted were allowed to bloom. Pythagoras planted a seed and brought Aristarchus, Eratosthenes, and Hipparchus into flower years later.

When most people think of Greece, the people who come to most people’s mind are regretfully Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Why regretfully? They were the philosophers, the beginners of mental isometrics. The social architects of the day likely wished to frame the world in a manner that benefited themselves and saw in these early philosophers’ writings the means to do so. Personally I am already more impressed with the scientists I’ve just listed. Those scientists, the exception being Hippocrates, most people have never heard of. Why? The puppet masters (priests and ministers) no doubt deemed that teaching Christianity was known to have thrown away factual information about the universe and replaced with myth would not be in religion’s best interest. That would mean Christianity could not
claim they were simply ignorant about the earth’s position in the universe. Having cast aside prior knowledge, the Dark Ages could be laid right on Christianity’s doorstep. And --- it has been.

the age of ignorance commenced with the Christian system. There was more knowledge in the world before that period than for many centuries afterwards.

Thomas Paine

Something of a side note might be worth injecting here. With all the rhetoric by the right that America’s founders intended America to be a Christian Nation, it is worth mention here that Thomas Paine was not the “filthy little atheist” Teddy Roosevelt claimed Paine was. In fact in his widely proclaimed book “The Age of Reason” Paine states:

I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.

I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make or fellows-creatures happy.

But, lest it should be supposed that I believe many other things in addition to these, I shall, in the progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe, and my reasons for not believing them.

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Catholic Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church, by the Protestant Church, nor by any church that I know of. My mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

While Paine believed in a god, one god, clearly it was not the Christian god, a belief that many of his associates and friends such as Thomas Jefferson also agreed.
In every nation and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own. Thomas Jefferson: Letter to H Spafford, 1814

End of side note.

Nearly everyone has heard of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as they (by design) are/were the most studied. Priests, kings, and rulers (the puppet masters) all saw something to gain by getting the rest of society to adopt these people’s principles. Unfortunately what they did, Plato and those who saw something in his philosophy for themselves, was to move thought away from the physical world to one of speculation and mysticism.

Plato, born 428BC, developed the “Plutonic Theory of Ideas” which held a World of Ideas exist apart from the natural world. Plato’s imaginary World of Ideas was thought to be far superior to the world of human experience. The Idea of Justice lay within this world absolutely perfect, eternally unchangeable, and immortal. According to Plato, people took the world of their existence, what Plato calls a shadow world, too seriously for it is in the World of Ideas where the real world resides. And how did this World of Ideas affect the future?

“There was much in the theory of Ideas that appealed to the first Christian philosophers. The emphatic affirmation of a supermundane, spiritual order of reality and the equally emphatic assertion of the caducity of things material fitted in with the essentially Christian contention that spiritual interests are supreme. To render the world of Ideas more acceptable to Christians, the Patristic Platonists from Justin Martyr to St Augustine maintained the world exists in the mind of God, and that this was what Plato meant."

354AD Augustine was born to Roman citizens in what is Souk Ahras, Algeria. In 386, Augustine read and was influenced by libri platonicorum and discovered the existence of incorporeal substances. He converted to Christianity that same year. In 395AD he was appointed bishop of Hippo Regius, the largest diocese in Africa, which he presided over until his death. According to Augustine, nature was not to be considered important; rather the spiritual world was (as Plato). The only truth by Augustine’s reasoning was that which could be supported by
scripture which is why Ptolemaeus’ Geocentric Theory was adopted rather than Pythagoras’ Heliocentric Theory. Only scripture, God’s word, could explain the universe and anything that might be seen as opposing scripture, books and thoughts, was quickly banished. Freedom of thought and written and oral expression is historically a relatively recent development. For those who were the shepherds of Christian souls and whose function it was to get those souls to heaven, the idea that anyone could think and say or write what he/she wanted was an absurdity. Moreover, it was dangerous because it might lead others into error. 021 Spirits and lost souls were everywhere. Behind every bush, tree, rock formation, building, animal was a higher meaning, a purpose to which only those in God’s service could hope to understand (which locked in their social status). Priests or those under them were the only ones to have access to scripture. Hence, before anything could be accepted as true; it had to go through them. And history stands as a testament to what happened next. A huge knowledge gap exists between about 100AD and 1500AD. Intellectual achievements virtually stopped in Western Civilization. If any advances in science or human intelligence were to be made, they had to come from nations to the east and free from Christianity, like Persia and India. Reading Plato’s writings, “(C) Ethics and Theory of the State,” offered at the Catholic website, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12159a.htm, I could not help but have scripture flashed through my head. Plato saw the state as “highest embodiment of the Idea.” As such, the state should have absolute authority and unlimited power. 022 If Plato’s idea is equated with scripture, it would not be a long step to:

Romans 13:1-2: Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

Personal property and family institutions, the author of the Catholic website writes, had no place in the Platonic state 023

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. Matthew 19:29

Children should belong to the state and be taken for the purpose of education (education = indoctrination) as soon as they are born. But when Jesus saw it, he
was much displeased, and said unto them, suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. Mark 10:14-16

According to Plato, the ideal state would exist in three layers, the ruling class, producers, and soldiers. While a short scriptural passage does not jump out at me for this one, clearly the Bible justifies a class system with the rulers at the top and the producers, landowners held at a level above the serfs and soldiers. The rulers should be educated in philosophy (redefined in scripture) which Plato considered the love of wisdom. A world without wisdom, it was reasoned, was doomed to ongoing troubles. Keep in mind that the immortal Idea world, this perfect whatever it is off in Lala Land somewhere, would not be a far jump to heaven and god. I have no physical evidence that Plato’s thoughts were written into scripture as I surmise here; however to deny Plato’s ideas did not intertwine with Christianity would be ignoring the obvious. Nevertheless, the great majority of the Christian philosophers down to St Augustine were Platonists. They appreciated the uplifting influence of Plato’s psychology and metaphysics, and recognized in that influence a powerful ally of Christianity in the warfare against materialism and naturalism.

Aristotle, Plato’s student, unlike Plato, took an interest in the natural world. His approach to the world, his philosophy, took on a much more scientific approach to natural phenomena. Even while a student of Plato’s, Aristotle showed a marked interest in the study of facts and laws of the physical world. While Aristotle set about to study natural phenomena like physics and motion, he apparently made the error of adopting the thoughts of others without checking out all other sources. For example, he believed the earth to be the center of the universe which he likely adopted from the myths swirling around him.

The earth according to this theory was stationary round which revolved the sun, the moon, and stars. Unfortunately Aristotle had not done his homework. Pythagoras some hundred years before (536BC) had already shown the earth orbited the sun. Aristotle, the intellectual praised as leading the world forward, instead took the world a giant step backwards. The universe was thought of as some design, some intelligence which imparted circular motion to these heavenly objects. This idea that nature was due to some design, some purpose, was taken for granted right up until the time of Newton and
Galileo and has resurfaced today with the “Theory of Intelligent Design.” The theory of Intelligent Design is in fact a far step back in history.

The idea that everything required a purpose, more specifically a human purpose, also existed prior to Christian doctrine Anthropocentrism, the idea that nature exists for human’s benefit, normally thought of as a Judaea-Christian concept can also be found in Aristotle’s thinking and likely Christianity borrowed into it.

In like we may infer that after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now if nature makes nothing incomplete and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all the animals for the sake of man. Aristotle, Politics.

Before moving on, I should mention Claudius Ptolemaeus. Ptolemaeus (140AD) was the originator of the Geocentric Theory of astronomy whose basic assumption placed earth at the center of the universe. Ptolemaeus was not known to be a scientist, but rather more of a recorder; hence it would be a guess whether Christianity borrowed the Geocentric Theory from Ptolemaeus or Ptolemaeus got it from the religious beliefs of his day. In either event, Christianity adopted the Geocentric Theory as the Geocentric Theory best suited scripture. Pythagoras’ Heliocentric Theory, like so many earlier discoveries, where simply put aside or outlawed.

Shaded by the Cross, the Dark Ages began.

“As early as 170 CE, the Church promulgated a list of genuine books of the New Testament and excluded others from use in religious practice. In 405 CE, Pope Innocent I published a list of forbidden books, and at the end of that century issued a decree that has been called the first Index of Forbidden Books.”

And so the civilized world would be lulled to sleep, a deep dark sleep that lasted better than a thousand years. The scientific advances of Greece were lost to the Romans who seemed to care less about science. Romans were too busy cheering for their favorite gladiators and defending their empire to care much about the earth’s position in the universe or tiny atoms too small to see. As Neo-Platonism began to rise, mysticism invaded the natural world and science slowly succumbed to superstition and Christian mythology until:

After about A.D. 300 interest in natural science almost ceases; Christianity, new and living, was giving men what they had always been seeking, and in that
new world of inspiration and love, nothing seemed important except to live well and know the Divine truth. So science almost disappears and for centuries the learned world is busy confuting heresies and defining exactly what a Christian can believe without fear of error.

It’s hard to imagine how many people died at the hands of priests for having nothing more than an insightful thought that challenged Christian mythology. By the time science was allowed to reestablish itself, it was some thousand years later. Scientists, like Copernicus and Galileo, were in the 1500s reestablishing what was already known some 2000 years before. The earth was not a fixed object at the center of the universe; the sun did not revolve around it, rather day and night were caused by the earth’s rotation on its own axis. Even at this late date however, to suggest such heresy had its punishments. Galileo, for example, was imprisoned and forced to recant. Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in the Campo dei Fiori in Rome on February 17th 1600.

Up until reading the Catholic Website “Newadvent,” I had always been under the impression that Bruno was burned at the stake for spreading the Copernicus Theory, but the Catholics via their website have finally set me straight. It seems Bruno was not put to death for his defense of the Copernican Theory but rather for what was deemed “theological errors” among which was Bruno’s insertion was that Christ was merely a magician, not a god.

“the Christian system, as if dreading the result, incessantly opposed, and not only rejected the sciences, but persecuted the professors.

Had Newton or Descartes lived three or four hundred years ago and pursued their studies as they did, it is most probable they would not have lived to finish them; and had Franklin drawn lightning from the clouds as the same time, it would have been at the hazard of expiring for it in the flames.”

I’m going to spare the reader a long boring chronological of Christianity and history of science from this point on as that is relatively simple to and well documented. If dates and discoveries are what you wish to know, the library is full of books on the subject so I suggest you go there. What I will say however is that Christianity and science, contrary to claims by religious leaders, are not, or ever were, compatible. Not only does Christianity contradict nearly every scientific theory ever proposed, it also contradicts recorded history, Noah’s Ark for example.

Another dissimilarity between science and religion is how each approach what each perceives to be true. Religion makes a number of assumptions, god
created the universe for example, and true or not throughout history has enforced these assumptions via intimidation, threats, and punishments going as far as capital punishment. It is forbidden for anyone to question the basic assumptions of religion.” Popes have written, “It is absolutely wrong and forbidden, either to narrow inspiration to certain parts only of Holy Scripture, or to admit that the sacred writer has erred.” Under the religious paradigm, if data comes in that does not support the original assumption, the data is either thrown out or rationalizations are thought up to explain this data in such a way that still allows the original assumption to remain intact.

Science, on the other hand, begs to be challenged. No scientist has ever been put to death for not conforming to another’s scientific theory nor has any scientist been cast into prison for not supporting the current scientific theory, whatever that theory may be. It is not forbidden anywhere in science to claim any other scientist has erred. Science relies on skepticism whereas religion relies on conformance and faith. Science and religion, I will say again, are not compatible, not now, not ever.

### Shadows on the Wall

I did borrow some of Plato’s thinking however. Speaking to my psychologist, Dr Paul Rentz – South Dakota VA, he came up with an interesting analogy of my perception of the world. Back around 360 BCE, Plato in Book VII of his “The Republic” discusses perception and reality in what has become known as “The Cave Allegory.” Since birth a group of individuals have been chained in this cave in a manner that does not allow them to turn around to see what is behind them. All they can see is the wall in front of them onto which is cast shadows from puppets operated by puppet masters behind and above them. The light to cast these shadows is provided by a fire behind the puppets. Plato writes in the first and second person as if two are conversing:

(Person One) And if they (the prisoners) were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them (the shadows).

(Person Two) Very true

(Person One) And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passer-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow? No question, he replied.

(Person One) To them (the prisoners), I said, the truth
would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images. 035

As the allegory moves to its conclusion, the question is asked if one of these prisoners were released of his restraints and turned around to view the entrance of cave, would not he having only lived in the dim light of the cave, the released prisoner, be distressed by the brightness of the light from outside.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light (the real world and sun), will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see (the shadows), and which he will conceive to be reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him? 036

The light, however that at first repelled the prisoner and caused his eyes pain, if forced to the outside world (reality), in time the prisoner’s eyes would become accustomed to the light. He would eventually come to realize that what he now was viewing (the outside world) is reality as it truly is. The question is then asked:

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them? 037

Then the scenario develops in which the prisoner, led into the light, is returned to the cave but rather than being as seen as someone who has seen reality, he is seen by those inside the cave as having been blinded, his eyes now not accustomed to the dark.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and
lead him up to the light, let them only catch the off ender, and they would put him to death. 038

CHAPTER ELEVEN
Clash of the Titans

Biological Fundamentalism

I was/am human and like any other human I longed for meaning, a purpose, something larger than myself that I could belong to, something to plant my foot on to give my life stability and meaning. Coming into Biology, I had none of that. All I had were voids, vast areas of nothing that before I thought meant something. Biology, like water into a hole, began to fill those voids. I did not need my thinking altered greatly to accept biological concepts, for example recycling of life necessities such as the carbon or nitrogen cycle. That all of life is life together, interlinked in ways all life depends is undeniable but not always known. If suddenly my wish that all mosquitoes would just vanish were granted the consequences of being granted such a personal benefit likely would not be realized until all mosquitoes were gone. Then it might be too late to undo that which was done. And the bad news is the consequence might be worse than the original annoyance.

Upon realizing this basic truth, I no longer could see the human race as anything particularly special anymore. We breathed the same air as any other animal. We require water, reproduce, seek food and shelter as does any other animal. In terms of what makes up an animal, we and dogs for example are far more similar than different. Most people I know would laugh about that statement -- but think about it. How are we different than dogs? Well --- dogs have a larger nose. You know --- a nose larger than a human nose but a nose just the same. Dogs have four legs --- well until really examined. Then the front legs begin to look more --- well arms and hands --- but legs just the same. Dogs have hair all over their bodies --- you know, like people who have much less --- but hair just the same. Hmmmmm, so much for the differences.

After answering that question, then ask yourself how we are the same? Dogs, like people, have brains and since we do not know what goes through a dog’s head, it cannot be said that people use that brain to reason while a dog does not. Dogs have a mouth, intestines, a heart, lungs, a liver, noses, eyes, and ears, feels pain, smells, sees, tastes, and experiences fear. Dogs have two sexes. Dogs form packs, hunt in cooperation, share food, and normally do not go around killing each other --- but will for reasons we do not thoroughly understand. So where did we, humans, get the idea that we were so different than any other species?
Of all the ideas obtained from my Christian background, the idea that humanity was created above all other life was one I’ve always considered the most repulsive. As I could not remove Vietnam from my past nor could I any reason to feel good about being part of it --- biology offered me a salvation of sorts. With the existentialist’s philosophy, that each person freely chooses his niche in life and is solely responsible for whatever that choice might bring adrift in my mind, I could forsake my material comforts and opt for a life style altruistically abandoning as many human comforts as possible in some vain attempt to save life on earth. To offset the day to day struggle of attempting not to utterly feel condemned or ashamed about being in Vietnam, Biology offered me a new face, a foundation on which to stand, one I could get my hands around and understand. Biology had the potential of reshaping my image. Within my twisted mind, condemning myself for not standing up for my beliefs in Vietnam led me to question my manhood ever since, Biology offered a cause against which I might be able to measure my own worth. What could possibility be nobler than to stand like Don Quote firmly against the windmills of progress and industry and the environmental polluters of the world? Everywhere I looked enemies existed, the discharge from Landry’s Packing Plant just down the hill, the unrestricted use of fossil fuels, the paper mill at St Regis, cement parking lots, urban sprawl, the conversion of native lands by development and agriculture, litter along highways, snowmobiles, boats dripping oil and gas into lakes, on and on and on.

So I donned my shaving basin and decided not to drive or own a car. I would walk, from 33rd Ave four blocks north of Division Street to the college on 5th Ave four blocks south of Division, a total of 36 blocks across town. Nothing, not rain, snow, gale force wind, subzero temperatures, would prevent me from making my daily my trek. I could rival in the fact that the parking situation, always a problem and how to fix it constantly being hashed over at St Cloud State, wasn’t any of my creation. If, after all, everyone followed my lead, St Could State would not have a parking problem. All that concrete could have been flowers. Every day I could bathe in the half gallon of gas I would have saved by walking past all those cars that were drove to school by people who lived much closer to campus than I.

At my apartment, I had no stereo or electrical appliances of any kind other than what was provided with the apartment. I stored food, soda, and beer between the outside windows in the winter to keep the refrigerator shut off. I stored and ate rice. All I had to sit on was a bed or the floor often propping myself against the wall for back support to read. No one needed to cut down a tree so I might sit in comfort off the floor in a chair. And there in the still of the night I’d dream of destroying automobiles with a sledge hammer and pushing them into holes in the around. Automobiles were after all the main reason why roads and parking lots were built, not to mention the fact that they burnt fossil fuels --- which was part of
the reason we were in Vietnam in the first place, to defend the Indonesian oil fields. That the war was partly fought over oil was reason enough all by itself for me not to drive a car. My first father-in-law gave us, Marcia and me, a car for a wedding present. Rather than telling him thanks, I resented having the reason I believed we went to war in the first place shoved in my face. Imagine what that did to Marcia’s and my relationship. Today I am sorry for all the pain I caused everyone.

I’d been overseas and seen population at its worse, children starving, ill with diseases never thought of in the States, homes (if they could be call that) with no cooking or heating material, children drinking Black water hence I was emotionally susceptible to books predicting environmental disasters such as “The Population Bomb.” I took such books to heart. I remember my sister, Helen, calling and telling me she was pregnant with her second child only for her to receive some off handed remark from me like “Just what the world needs, another mouth to feed.” I mean, how bad was that? I cannot believe I made that statement, but I did.

Biology also fit into my desire to live apart from the world in which I was raised. By the spring of 1971, I had become well informed on wild edible foods. I’d bought all the books on survival I could; how to build traps and snares, shelters, what plants of avoid, which plants were edible, and how to build fires using only what existed in the wild. Looking back, in reality all this effort I invested in moving to the wilderness was nothing but some implausible fantasy but even so, I was obsessed. I invested years learning how to survive the wilderness, for what? Never leaving and going there, whatever did I get back? So far I’ve made one loaf of bread from cattail pollen. The yellow pollen turns blue upon cooking. Now there is a bit of knowledge worth the wife I lost and the three or four years I spent learning it all. As much as I thought I could survive the wild, what I never would have been able to survive would have been the isolation as much as I would have liked to think otherwise. The evidence of that was apparent every day as I sat in my tiny shanty all by myself surrounded by nothing but concrete walls. I was going out of my head lonely. Attempting to attract friends by challenging their every thought is not the way to win friends and influence people.

And yet I dreamed of becoming thee Biology Messiah. I could move somewhere to the outskirts of town and live in a dirt house dug into the side of hill with a southern exposure to make the best use of solar power. I would have no modern conveniences, radios, televisions, automobiles, stereos, stoves, or running water. I could compost all my waste and use it to fertilize my garden. Drying food would be preferable to canning because canning required heat, utensils, and hardware such as jars. I could easily create a storage cellar for keeping vegetables all winter long. Fish were plentiful assuming I fished pan fish and settled for rough
fish, those no one else wanted. I knew too to do so would be a lonely and unrewarding existence --- but I was sure twenty to thirty years down the road someone would come climbing up the side of my hill seeking knowledge and happiness. I also felt that down the road, should I undertake this style of living, the next generation would hail me as a prophet, someone years ahead of the times. But --- my dream of attaining Messiah status only remained a dream. I lacked the will. I simply did not have the guts. And I could not help but wonder, “What does that say about me?”

Today the trend is toward going green which is good. But --- I feel that going green today is too little too late. Although I do not know that for sure I support any effort to move toward green even if it is too little too late. I know however when the biggest environmental polluting vehicle I drove was a ten speed bike, the only thing I got for my effort was hit by a passing car. I have since reassessed my devotion to Environmentalism. I believe strongly that in order to save the Earth as we know it, sacrifice concerning the personal use of its natural resources will be required on a global scale, not simply mine. My error was taking this sacrifice on myself as few, if any, are willing to commit themselves to such personal renunciation of the comforts they’ve become accustomed. Personally, I doubt many will unless doing without is forced on them --- and someday it will be, either politically, to maintain the elite’s status quo as long as possible, or naturally, when the well goes dry.

**Disconnected: Does Anyone Care?**

With Vietnam only two years removed, a war of emotions was still raging in my mind. The war was still in full swing and although most veterans I left behind and knew were no doubt home, the fact that people were still there dying there existed as visual images whenever a news article came out about Vietnam. At center stage was the ineffectiveness of the Paris Peace talks where the biggest concern seemed to be what should be the **shape of the table**. On October 31, 1970 South Vietnam’s President Thieu reconfirmed what I always believed; North Vietnam had no intentions of negotiations. Thieu stated that the Communist would not settle for anything less than complete domination of South Vietnam. The Communists at the peace table, according to Thieu, was merely stall tactics designed to gain time and win victory gradually.°°°

The second issue, front page, was the trial of Lieutenant William Calley. The trail was opened November 17th, 1970.°°°° Calley made me want to hide under my desk. I wanted to pretend I’d never been in Vietnam but every time Calley would come up I visualized half the class turning around to see what a baby killer looked like. Actually the class never knew I ever was in Vietnam. I kept Vietnam inside
me like some dirty secret -- but like some warped dream, I kept imagining the class turning around anyway. I felt I was being judged and I kept feeling that these people, having no idea what the stresses of battle were, had any business judging me or any other veteran. All this was simply in my head of course. That did not stop my opinion of these people from becoming less and less even though they did nothing to earn my displeasure --- directly anyway. Indirectly --- they were guilty of expressing an idealistic view of the world that I could not realize given my background. I wish the Summer of Love could have been --- but it wasn’t. I wish the gentle people would have been --- but they weren’t. I wish the world would have given peace a chance --- but it didn’t. And I wasn’t sure whether I should be mad or sad. I really had no idea what to think.

This was the 70s of course. The very foundation of what America was built on was being undermined according to conservatives or being improved upon according to liberals. Whichever it was, everything was an issue. There was the sexual revolution, woman’s liberation, coming out, environmental activism, cat litter boxes as art, the Indian Movement, the drug culture, hippies and acid, to name a few. I remember a political cartoon that about summed up the seventies as I saw it. A hippy like character is pictured holding a sign on which is printed the words “Conform to Nonconformity!”

For me, while I related to a number of these causes and inwardly at least supported many of them, the issue constantly tripping me up was Vietnam. While, as stated before, I was against war, I could never bring myself to publicly stand in opposition to Vietnam as did the “Vietnam Veterans against the War” knowing that by doing so I might actually be contributing to it. What bothered me the most however were not the antiwar protestors or being treated as Service Trash. What bothered me most was the oblivious attitude of the majority of students on campus. I could understand the protestors, those who scorned veterans, or those who were politically active attempting to bring the troops home. What I could not understand was all those with no opinion of the war one way or the other, who went about their business like nothing was happening, who just plain and simply did not care about what was happening as long it did not affect them. I wanted to scream “People are dying -- Damn It! Don’t you care? Doesn’t anyone give a Damn?” I’d myself thinking these people needed woke up. “Maybe,” I would contemplate,

“If I physically hung myself on the flag pole and was found dangling there the next day, someone would have to stop and take notice.” What probably kept me from not doing anything like that however was the knowledge that such an action no doubt would be used to confirm Vietnam Veterans were nothing but a bunch of whacked out morons.
Draft Dodgers: Cowards or Heroes?

Somewhere within this time frame, on his second day in office, January 21, 1977, President Jimmy Carter pardoned all civilians that sought refuge in Canada to avoid the draft. While numerous veteran organizations were enraged and objected to this pardon arguing that by doing so the American government would encourage further flights should national defense and social conscience again collide, I applauded Carter’s action. As stated before to leave one’s country believing that you just gave up your whole way of life, friends, relatives, all over the belief that war is wrong in my mind took guts and conviction; both being admirable traits by my standards. If I felt bad about anything, it was that none of those returning was me. Carter did not pardon those 500,000 to one million who went over the wall, absent without leave (AOL) after joining the military. Those in this group, those that went AOL, I had mixed feelings about. Going AOL, I largely saw as simply bad behavior, skirting the duties they agreed to. It was not like this group had any moral conviction against the military, they just wanted a vacation. In my mind, this is the group they build brigs for. A few days in the slammer might make them think about going on vacation again.

Desertion, however, I did not know what to think. Yes, it could be argued the deserter was living up to his beliefs, leaving the military with no intention of returning, but if he was truly anti-military to begin with, I reasoned, he should not have joined. Maybe he did not know what he was getting into before joining the service; much like me after watching children killed by members of my unit in Vietnam. I contemplated laying down my weapon and going to jail. This is a more difficult matter and may involve one’s basic moral values. The military after all is anything but honest about what a given person’s position might end up being or what duties a given person may be ordered to carry out. Furthermore, many join the service not old enough to enter into any other contract yet they are legally bound to the military, subject to criminal prosecution should they renege once their name is scribbled on the line. Why should what a child signs matter more than the fact that he is still a child?

Evangelicalism Rising: Woe to Ye Liberal

One problem that came with both my wives was religion. Marcia, my first wife, was Catholic which obviously created a problem for me the moment I stepped into her church. All those religious symbols, the church itself, the smell of incense, the holy water, and all that magical mumbo jumbo I watched as those Buddhist monks led through that village in Vietnam instantly came rushing back. It was like I never left that village or the village followed me home. In any event, I
had all I could do to keep from running out of that church the second the priest walked down the aisle swinging a pot of burning incense on a two foot chain. All those hungry children came right back to me. And as the collection plate came down the aisles all I could see were the monks plundering the people’s rice. It was all so vivid.

My second wife, Lynda was a member of the Assembly of God in Paynesville. Her family is devoted members of the Assembly of God; their social life is completely engulfed by the church. Numerous members of Lynda’s family perform every Sunday on stage and the only college members of her family even have considered is Evangelical in nature. Even music has to be gospel. Secular music, the music I just happen to listen to, is largely outlawed from any music box in their homes. Even today after twenty five years of being together, I hate the approach of Christmas as Christmas music is all I hear played from Thanksgiving to sometime into the New Year. While I can tolerate “Frosty the Snowman,” after a month and half, over and over for twenty-five years, “Frosty the Snowman” is, at the very least, a little redundant. Christmas Carols, however, “Away in the Manger,” “Oh Come All Ye Faithful,” “Joy to the World” are extremely depressing. I no joy in false philosophies designed to dumb down society being sung on my doorstep. I do have to admit, however, given my love for music “Oh Holy Night” sung well is one of my all-time favorite songs. Religious or not, Oh Holy Night is a marvelous song. Also much of my most cherished music is gospel in natural done by backwoods string bands (the Carter Family) or lone guitarists (Sam McGee) and African Americans such as Leadbelly or Sister Rosetta Thorpe.

Ironically, gospel music brought me into the light. Not the light of god, of course, but the light shining on the dangers of the current rising Evangelical movement. Not having cable television and with nothing to listen to other than what was on local television; I popped on the old boob-tube just for some noise early one morning. And noise is what I got. It was an evangelist hammering away at all the sin and corruption in the world and threatening his audience that if they would not step up to the television that instant and place their hands on that television to be “Saved” then and there ---- why --- just as sure as the sun would come up, the listener would be on a one way trip to Hell’s fire.

I honestly could not believe what I was hearing coming from a loving god’s messenger. I thought for moment that I was in a time warp --- back in Germany about 1930. Homosexuals, according to this minister, were worthy of death: Leviticus 20:13.

“Hey!” I thought “I know a few of them, one being my own brother.” I did not want any obsessed fanatical religious zealot rounding up my brother and hauling him off to some crematory. Drug dealers, according to this minister should be lined up against a wall and shot:
“Hey! I know many so called drug dealers (This minister’s definition of drug dealers included anyone who so much as shared a joint with a friend) and none of them I knew” as far as I was concerned “deserved to be lined up and shot.”

Then he continued, ranting and raving about Darwin’s evolution, science, secular humanism, atheists, and liberals while at the same time preaching some pre-millennial state that could have only existed in his head. Given my secular views of human sexuality, drugs and my philosophy of the world that the wrong information is worse than no information, I called the station and asked if they agreed with this person’s views. I reminded the station that he was speaking from their stage.

“What views?” they asked.

“Well” set back over the fact they did not even seem to know what his views were “the views of this minister on your station this morning” I replied.

There was this calm.

I then asked the station if they ever listened to this minister and they said no. But, they added, they were surprised that I did because they did not think anyone did.

“So why then” I asked “was this person given more air time than Dan Rather?” which he was. Why would a station air this person if the station believed no one listened to him?

Their answer was because “SOMEONE” paid the bill. Of course they would not tell me who paid that bill for that air time. So I asked what I had to do to be aired so I could oppose this minister’s views. All I got was if I had something to air, all I had to do was come up with the money to buy the air time. Knowing I could not come up with the money, I hung up the phone thinking “Talk about the freedom of speech --- here it is. If you have money you can get your voice out to anyone who will listen, but if you do not, forget it.” Freedom of speech in America apparently comes with a price tag.

Anyway, the word “SOMEONE” flashed in front me like a large neon sign and rung in my ears like a muzzle blast. Someone aye? Not everyone.

Not some large following. Not even a few. Just Someone. The question of who this someone was just begged to be answered.

I read once that Jimmy Swaggart got his start from H.L. Hunt, a billionaire Texas Oil Man. Although I have nothing to reference this, digging around in numerous books I did find one interesting coincidence. It turns out that Jimmy worked the oil fields around his home state of Louisiana, preaching whenever he was not working in the oil fields. He did this for five years between the age of 18 and 23. That would have given Swagger plenty of time to become known to H.L. Hunt. H.L. Hunt also began what was termed “LIFE LINE,” a rightwing “Educational” and “Religious” organization dedicated to spreading “Thee word.”
Thee word of course largely was his own word via the radio. Half the show was purely political with a heavy mix of old time religion. By the early 1960’s Hunt claimed his program was aired on 354 stations in forty seven states and claimed to have a following of five to six million. The sponsor of Hunt’s program had one lone, soul sponsor: HLH Products.

Again, I had been staggered. In my head somewhere was this idea that if something was on the air, television or radio, it was because people listened and it was popular. The more popular a show is, the more people listen, and hence, the more the broadcast is aired. Wrong! Although I had thought about and studied propaganda, I really never given any thought to the fact (I just discovered) that any given show, Paul Harvey, Rush Limbaugh, Jerry Falwell, or Pat Robertson might be aired for no other reason than propaganda purposes for the benefit of a single (person or corporate) supporter, whether anyone listened or not.

Returning to the discussion on the reach of the John Birch Society (JBS); in 1977, agreeing to help raise a billion dollars for “Here’s Life,” an affiliate of Bill Bright’s Campus Crusade for Christ, Nelson Bunker Hunt, a member of the JBS, pledged ten million dollars of his own money. He further donated five million dollars for the filming of “Jesus” to be used by “Here’s Life” in their missions overseas. Bunker’s brother, Herbert, threw in another cool million. The Hunts also gave $3.5 million for a new spire for the Highland Park Presbyterian Church in the memory of their mother and it does not stop there. The Ruth Ray Hunt Philanthropic Fund gave $4.8 million to the Dallas Woman’s Foundation which in turn supports faith-based programs. The goal of the organization is to instill dignity, hope and faith to women who have been disenfranchised (or at least that is their claim). I doubt however the money has as much to do with helping women as it did about building support for Faith Bases Programs. More on women and Faith Based Programs will come.

J. Howard Pew was one of Billy Graham’s main financial contributors.

“Eventually, Dr Bell and I shared my vision with J. Howard Pew, chairman of the board of directors of the Sun Oil Company. I met him for the first time not long before conceiving the idea for Christianity Today. He had been asking me to come to Philadelphia to meet with him and spend the night. I had never heard of him, and I declined. Then he sent me a check for our work in the amount of $25,000, along with a message:

“When you come and spend the night with me, I’ll have another check for $25,000 for you.” Needless to
say, that got my attention. After that (and my visit to Philadelphia; yes, I flew up there!), we got to know each other very well. I came to have great affection and admiration for him, not because he had a great deal of money but because he was a man of God and a man of wisdom who wanted to see his wealth used wisely for the cause of Christ”.009

Pew also agreed to underwrite, if necessary, half the cost, $50,000, of a live ABC Saturday night broadcast across the country, “Hour of Decision.”010 Another $500,000 contribution was made to the Billy Graham in 2000 “For a conference to provide preaching evangelists with encouragement and training for their ministry at the start of the new century.”011 Graham of course was not the only religious group Pew donated to. A few others include the Young Scholars Program, a fellowship program for evangelical undergraduates and graduate students at the university of Notre Dame, Indiana, to the sum of $2,080,000 over four years.012 Simply by totaling up Pews donations at the Pew Foundations website, I found the Pew Foundation has given something like $121,250,600 to various religious causes, most right wing in nature.013

In 1975 Richard M DeVos, the president of the Amway Corporation and the 1981-82 finance chairman of the Republican National Committee along with John Talcott of Ocean Spray Cranberries and Arthur De Moss, chairman of the National Liberty Insurance Corporation, ceased control of the Christian Freedom Foundation (CFF) for the purpose of using CFF’s tax exempt status to publish “One Nation Under God” in an effort to elect Christian conservatives to Congress in 1976.014 In fact, Richard DeVos is one of the known largest contributors to rightwing religious groups. Just a quick look at a watch group that traces rightwing money, mediata transparency lists $91,249,084 worth of donations by Richard DeVos to Christian organizations alone.015

I have not even begun to mention the rightwing groups which were spawned by former members of the JBS. For example, the Heritage Foundation, the flagship of the conservative right founded in 1973, came into being funded by donations from JBS member Joseph Coors.016 The Cato Institute and Citizens for a Sound Economy owe their beginnings to Charles and David Koch, sons of former JBS member Fred Koch and the Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation also in the Koch family. Together the Koch family donated $6.5 million to the Cato Institute and $4.8 million Citizens for a Sound Economy between 1986 and 1990.017

I would at this point like to mention two other television evangelists who, in their own words, apparently benefited substantially from sizable corporate contributions. From his book “The Secret Kingdom” by Pat Robertson, himself a
lawyer of a major international corporation (pg 97), Chapter Four “How God’s Kingdom Works,” Page 60-61:

“How well I remember the day in the late sixties when God showed forth this favor in my life in a practical, workaday manner. CBN was in urgent need of $3 million worth of modern equipment that would allow us to broadcast with the power and quality needed if we were to do what the Lord had called us to do. With absolutely no worldly credentials or the support that would normally be required to do business at this level, I began negations with one of the world’s leading electronics manufacturers. There was no reason to expect a successful outcome.

But God had other plans. In the most remarkable, yet smooth and calm manner, I received favor from the giant company and arranged for our equipment needs to be met for a period of years at the finest terms imaginable. Others in the industry were envious, for I had received every concession in price, down payment, and credit terms that it was possible to get.”

And from Kenneth Copeland’s “The Laws of Prosperity”, Chapter Three “Your Heavenly Account,” page 95:

“Ten days later I had in my hands the exact amount I had confessed as my withdrawal. Someone I didn’t even know said that God had told them to give the money. I was to put it into the ministry and not disclose from whom it came. This person wanted God to receive all the glory and He has! If you borrow from the bank, you have to answer to the banker; but when you get it from God, there are no strings attached!”

How much money did Copeland receive? Enough money to purchase an airplane, five times the cost of his former plane that he gave to another Evangelist plus enough money to finance his television ministry. Although Copeland does not credit some industrial giant for the money he received, what’s important here is that quantity of money all came from a “SINGLE” source. These people are not on
television because of their following and popularity. They are on television due to the contributions of a very few who have much to gain by what these ministers preach. And I will get to that. So what’s the point? To completely understand what is going in the religious sector today, it is absolutely vital that we know who is giving to whom, how much, and what, if any strings, are attached. The full extent as to exactly how much a few very wealthy men may be propping up the Christian Right, we may never know. What we do know is vast amounts of money sent by a few wealthy individuals are finding their way to collection plates; and the question should be asked --- why?

Given that knowledge, I came across an interesting piece of information while sitting in the doctor's office. I picked up the December 2nd, 2002 addition of Business Week. In it was the story of "The New Philanthropists" beginning on page 89. To sum up the story, these so-called New Philanthropists are supposedly working about as hard to give their away their money as they are at earning it. The difference between the old Philanthropists and the new is personal involvement. The new philanthropists are far more involved, seeing that their money is going where it is supposed to go and expecting results if their good will is to continue.

I refer you back to that Pew Report examining the changing religious affiliations in American society. Two ways exist to think about these large sums of money finding their way into collection plates. The first, and of course the reason most people believe people give, is charity. This would be money given to a religious order normally to help the poor. Even if that money does not find its way down to the poor, most people, as did I, believe what is good for the church is good for the needy. No money would be expected back, directly or indirectly, from this gift I shall entitle a “Donation.” This idea comes out of the Bible, the idea that the rich should give to the poor. To believe however that this money is largely being used to aid the poor, as I shall point out, is mostly nothing but smoke—which leaves the second reason which is anything but goodwill. This money I shall call an “Investment,” an expected return on money borrowed. If money is being thrown at religion as an investment with some sort of payback in mind, an investor (not donor) might wish to know if his money is having the desired effect.

So, let's back step to the new Philanthropists and take a look at where their money goes. Adjusted for inflation, an estimated 80.96 billion (with a B) dollars goes to Churches and Religious Groups. 31.84 billion goes to Education meaning of course, that for every dollar education receives, religious groups get about two and a half. We of course can only guess at what part of that goes toward learning science (assume a third), which means that for every dollar spent learning how to scrutinize information and to question it, eight dollars goes to accepting what is handed down to the students via faith. As for the education portion, I do not know to which education facility this money goes but my guess would be
public schools receive very little. My guess would be this money either goes to
private or charter schools which can also have religious affiliations.

But it goes further. Human Service receives 20.71 billion, meaning that
every dollar human services receive, religious originations receive nearly four.
Health care receives a mere 18.43. Uphta! But now comes the kicker. Of the
money given up by the New Philanthropists, 6.41 billion goes to environmental
issues. That means for every dollar that goes toward caring for the future and
generations to come, nearly twelve dollars goes toward learning "Take no thought
of tomorrow". For every dollar going for preserving endangered species, nearly
twelve is going to subduing the earth and all that's in it. For every dollar going
toward the teaching that only we, humans, can change the course of human destiny
(not to mention life on earth), twelve dollars goes toward teaching that God is in
control and that whatever happens has been preordained. In other words, every-
thing is as it should be.

As inconceivable as it seems, tax exempt organizations do not have to report
the money they receive, from whom they received it, or how it is used. Further-
more, being a tax exempt organization, they can air views unabashed and
unchallenged. The American taxpayers may also end up reimbursing part of the
Forum,” states that rather than running an educational or charity program as Hunt
claimed, Hunt’s “Facts Forum” was running one of the “most powerful private-
propaganda” organizations in the United States. Because of the “Facts Forum” tax
exempt status, not only did Hunt get to air his political views with his money, he
also received about four million dollars’ worth of air time free a year at the
American taxpayer’s expense.

CHAPTER TWELVE:
Like a Phoenix from the Ashes

The Political Wheel: The Right and Left as seen on a Wheel

Worth mention, the following discussion is not meant to be
a course in Political Science. The graph is to only to be thought of in
general terms and is only designed to give those who have never
given the matter of politics much thought a visual representation of my view (to which many political scientists and sociology majors agree) of the political world. I chose to use a circle to represent political stances as it is important to realize that whether a movement is to the right or the left, ultimately if carried to the end (in this case the bottom) both movements end up in the same place, totalitarianism. Does it really matter whether people’s heads are being chopped off by those on the left or right? In either case, the people end up dead or enslaved with no rights or political choice.

**Totalitarianism**

Totalitarianism can come from numerous philosophies but the only two this writing is concerned with is totalitarianism that comes from Communism or Fascism. Looking to World War II at the height of each, on the left was Communism and Stalin. On the right was Fascism and Hitler. Both represented the most brutal regimes known to the Twentieth Century. Both murdered millions. Both ruled with an iron hand, murdering millions and imprisoning anyone that offered a challenge to the state. As such, this writer’s purpose is not to enter into a pissing contest over which state or dictator was the most ruthless. I would prefer to live under neither.

What I will do however is speak of Fascism. At nowhere in this writing should that mean that I am deliberately picking on the right or suggesting Communism is in any manner the better of the two philosophies. Instead I shall approach the subject exactly like I approach the issue of religion. In my mind, no religion advances nature and science to the level nature and science are entitled. Furthermore, I see no reason to believe in anything that cannot be demonstrated as true as a road to follow. As such all religions that rely on faith are at the very least questionable. I write of Christianity not so much because I believe it to be worse than any other religion. I write about Christianity because it is the religion that currently affects my life the most. I do not hear for example that America was founded on Buddhist principles nor has Scientology been jammed down my throat at public displays such as Memorial Day. Christianity holds a monopoly on those occasions. I can predict without any doubt that some Christian minister/priest will ask me to stand in honor of some deity in which I do not believe at nearly any public function I attend. Currently I do not feel that Buddhism is about to take over the White House nor do I believe Scientology represents a major threat to scientific theory. I do feel however Christianity is on the verge of both hence Christianity, not Buddhism or Scientology, is my greatest concern.

Communism holds for me the same threat as does Scientology. I do not feel the United States is in danger of falling into the hands of Communists. In fact, Communism appears to be falling by the wayside. The Communist government in
Russia has largely folded although recently it was been stirring. But you know, I would be a little uncomfortable too if I looked at my borders, borders which in the past have been crossed twice in recent history by the west (France and Germany), and saw it lined with missiles all aimed in my direction. Anyway, the Berlin Wall has come down and the Iron Curtain is gone. China is in the process of opening its doors to the western world more every day. Cuba, it is said, is the last true bastion of Communism in the world and even that, with Castro no longer at the helm, is leaning west. While North Korea may represent a military threat now that they have come up with nuclear weapons and are experimenting with the means to deliver them, I do not feel that the Communists of North Korea are anywhere close to imposing their government on the rest of the world. As such, I see no reason to be immediately concerned with Communism.

I will make this distinction however. My definition of Communism and Robert Welch’s definition of Communism is as different as Stake and Steak. The extreme political right, including the John Birch Society, has been very successful in labeling any belief to their left as communistic. The right makes no distinction between socialism and communism. Socialism and Communism are not equal but since I do not feel either is a particular threat; I see no reason to separate the two. If you, the reader, really want to know the difference between socialism and communism, my advice is to go to a noteworthy library and look it up. Know what you are talking about. Be careful of your source of information.

Fascism in America today, however, is a real concern of mine. Like Christianity, Fascism is what I feel is encroaching on the rights of my fellow Americans with increasing frequency every day. As America marches further to the right with every election, I myself wondering just how long it be until a right wing President, backed by a right wing congress, numerous right wing generals, and a right wing court, will simply call off the next election and assume power. Politically, I feel the date is just a matter time until the Phoenix flies again. I therefore will focus solely on Fascism.

**Fascism: The real danger in America**

“Antitrust laws do not just protect the marketplace, they protect democracy” Paul Bigioni

I’m going to jump straight out with a huge supposition and state that the United States is well on its way to becoming a fascist state and before reacting emotionally and angrily, I should like inform the reader that I am not the only American who has that concern. Lewis H Lapham, for example, writing for Harper’s Magazine states America is not on the road to becoming but ALREADY
IS a fascist state. When most people think of fascism what comes to their minds, if anything, is Nazi Germany, extreme nationalism, racism, dictatorships, goose stepping, jack booted military displays. This view of fascism however has been skewed by images of World War II, namely Nazi Germany. In fact, many experts on fascism argue if what has been traditionally regarded as Nazism is fascism at all.

It is probably safe to say not many people actually know what fascism is, a failing that could be placed directly on the education system. To place the blame on the education system however by no means implies that teachers are not doing their job as their jobs are often defined, as well as the curriculum they teach, by school boards and politicians who have personal agendas. Many of these boards and politicians idea of education is to control what is or what is not taught in the classroom. If they do not wish students knowing certain aspects of history, it will not be taught. Welch did not want the membership of the JBS known because if it was numerous groups and organizations may have been exposed as JBS groups. Fascists, or those leaning toward Fascism, would not like common people knowing what Fascism is because much about Fascism is seen normally as good by the general population. When people begin to pry into things like patriotism or Christianity and the reasons for them, Fascists begin to worry. It is therefore in the interests of Fascism that these items remain as individual items unrelated to Fascism.

When Paul Bigioni asked people to define fascism, he claims that most people answer by telling him how fascism was viewed during World War II, with as Paul states “an assumption that it (being fascism) no longer exists since the Axis Powers were defeated.” These same people, Paul writes, end up muttering when they realize that they know nothing of the political or economic attributes of fascism. To test if Bigioni statement was correct,

I walked around Northern State University at Aberdeen South Dakota asking students or anyone I met if they could define fascism. I first asked if they were students, what year they were in, and whether or not they had European History in either high school or college. Most of whom I asked was sophomores but those asked spanned all four years of college even including graduate students and professors. All had taken at least one history class in either college or high school. Out of thirty asked, only one had only a vague idea what fascism was, one remembered that fascism had its beginning in Italy, 60-70 percent had no idea at all, and three, believe it or not, thought fascism had something to do something to do with a style of dress. When I voiced my concern of the threat of Fascism to a member of the faculty, a history professor mind you, when I mentioned fascism, his question was instantly a condescending “Where are the brown shirts?” This professor by the way had one of those bronze plates announcing his PhD hanging
on his door also. Granted this was not exactly a scientific survey, but the thirty asked did have at least ten years of schooling. Given they could not define fascism, it is reasonable to assume that the general public, having even less education on average, knows even less. My conclusion: Bigioni is correct.

Bigioni believing “that North America is on a fascist trajectory” takes his observation to the next logical level by making the statement that unfortunately for the people of North America if fascism was to return, they would not even be aware it happened. Given if most people do not even know what fascism is, it would be absurd to think they should know Fascism if it returned. Again, I place the responsibility for this lack of knowledge directly on how history is taught. In my school as stated before, we were introduced to World War II and its major battles, drew out the spread of the Axis powers on a map, listed the generals, dictators, presidents, and prime ministers, recorded the dates of the events, and all that other trivia that makes the study of history so boring. By stressing dates and personalities, the teaching of history misses nearly everything important; for example, an understanding of what fascism is and what conditions and methods brought it to power in the first place. I believe far too much credit is given to the actors (Hitler-Roosevelt-Churchill) and too little on the stage (living conditions and political methods used) from which they perform

By retrieving from our historical memory only the vivid and familiar images of fascist tyranny (Gestapo firing squads, Soviet labor camps, the chimneys at Treblinka), we lose sight of the faith-based initiatives that sustained the tyrant’s rise to glory.

“Faith based initiatives” Scary. I wonder if the author of those words was making a reference to the White House’s current “Faith Based Initiatives” or if those terms were actually used back in the thirties?

So What is Fascism? Fascism Explained

Again, it depends on who you ask. I’ve seen the term fascist used to berate liberals, the women liberation movement whose members are called Femi-Nazis by a prominent rightwing propagandist that doubles as a radio talk show host, and scientists, people I would not even consider under the umbrella of fascism. And then let’s not forget academia. Professors often approach topics such as fascism like some elderly drive, approaching street lights with so much caution that the green light gets completely missed. By tweaking the definition of fascism to
include this or to exclude that any important communication gets lost in a maze of Mental Isometrics.

To be sure, however, fascism is a concept. It is not something we can pull down from the self and examine, measure and weigh, hence, no definition will ever be absolutely definitive. Just ask any philosopher. That however should not mean that the term “Fascism” cannot be fit into a field of play.

So here we are again. Since this is my book, for this book and the fact that I feel it is more important to communicate with my readers rather than getting some philosophic debate over which definition is exactly correct, I will use the definitions of fascism I happen to agree with. I believe that knowing my definition will put you, the reader, in a ballpark in which most of academia would agree that the ball, fascism, would fall if I just tossed it in the air. From there, hopefully you will be able to see the rest of the game being played out.

Benito Mussolini has reportedly made the statement: "Fascism should rather be called corporatism, as it is the merging of government and corporate power." That quote has been rebuffed as a possible fraud however, as other researchers have been unable to track down the original quote’s source. At any rate, the fact remains that fascism and corporate power fits very well together. Before fascism, the interests of big business were treated favorably over the interests of the citizens of both Italy and Germany and it was big business that gave rise to the Fascist dictatorships in both countries. As such, the interests of big business are guarded in fascist’s counties with what Paul Bigioni terms as “remarkable ferocity.”

I have before me two documents on fascism, “The Doctrine of Fascism” by Benito Mussolini (1932) and “The Coming American Fascism” by Lawrence Dennis. In these documents are a number of things I believe the average reader of this book, given that you are not one of America’s privileged class, should be aware of. First, I’ll begin with “The Doctrine of Fascism” (previously hyperlinked) by Benito Mussolini. To the issue of religion Mussolini writes:

“The Fascist conception of life is a religious one (7), in which man is viewed in his immanent relation to a higher power, endowed with an objective will transcending the individual and raising him to conscious membership of a spiritual society.” Footnote (7) states: “If Fascism were not a creed how could it endow its followers with courage and stoicism only a creed which has soared to the heights of religion can inspire such words as passed the lips, now lifeless alas, of Federico Florio.”
Fascism is “a spiritual revolt against old ideas which had corrupted the sacred principles of religion, of faith, of country.”

Keep in mind Robert Welch’s and McIntire’s statements about modern day religion. The Social Gospel, by their standards, is “merely a watered down faith of their fathers” if not outright Communism by promoting such ideals as wealth redistribution. Both Welch and McIntire, I feel safe in saying, would agree that the Social Gospel “corrupted the sacred principles of religion.”

“Fascism, in short, is not only a law-giver and a founder of institutions, but an educator and a promoter of spiritual life.”

“Peace will only come when people surrender to a Christian dream of universal brotherhood, when they can hold out hands across the ocean and over the mountains.”

“Fascist State sees in religion one of the deepest of spiritual manifestations and for this reason it not only respects religion but defends it. The Fascist State does not attempt, as did Robespierre at the height of the revolutionary delirium of the Convention, to set up a “god” of its own; nor does it vainly seek, as does Bolshevism, to efface God from the soul of man. Fascism respects the God of ascetics, primitive heart of the people, the God to whom their prayer are raised.”

Now here is the kicker to the last quotes. Does the propagandist, in this Mussolini, believe his own propaganda? Following his statement of the Christian dream and universal brotherhood, Mussolini states, “Personally I do not believe very much in these idealisms.” As can be seen, however, regardless of whether or not he believed them, he saw value in these idealisms and used them. Mussolini was wise enough to know these idealisms were strings that if pulled could make his puppets move --- and that was good enough for him.

In matters of government, Mussolini states that the State is above all, a concept likely handed down from Plato to Christianity to Mussolini. Individual rights and liberties take second place:
“Anti-individualistic, the Fascist conception of life stresses the importance of the State, and accepts the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State."\textsuperscript{016}

“The keystone of the Fascist doctrine is its conception of the State, of its essence, it functions, and it aims. For Fascism the State is absolute, individuals and groups relative.

Individuals and groups are admissible in so far as they come within the State."\textsuperscript{017}

In matters of class, Fascism favors and supports the privileged elite casing aside the idea that government should be ruled by numbers. Rule should come from the elite majority.

“Fascism denies that numbers, as such, can be the determining factor in human society; it denies the right of numbers to govern by means of periodical consultations, it asserts the irremediable and fertile and beneficent inequality of men who cannot be leveled by any such mechanical and extrinsic device as universal suffrage. ---- (deleted for sake of space) In rejecting democracy Fascism rejects the absurd conventional lie of political equalitarianism, the habit of collective irresponsibility, the myth of felicity and indefinite progress."\textsuperscript{018}

Fascism props up management, downplaying the working class and its complaints as nothing more than “class envy. Think about that the next time you listen to a conservative talk show host.

“We wish the working classes to accusation themselves to the responsibilities of management so that they may realize that it is not easy matter to run a business."\textsuperscript{019}

“Fascism believes now and always in the sanctity and heroism, that is to say in acts in which no economic
motive, remote or immediate – is at work. ---- Fascism also denies the immutable and irreparable character of the class struggle which is the natural outcome of the economic conception of history; above it denies that the class struggle is the preponderating agent in social transformations.

If you listen carefully, you might hear in Mussolini words the Christian doctrine of suffering: Hard labor is expected from its working class. In fact, above the gate at Auschwitz were the words “Arbeit macht frei” meaning “Work Shall Set You Free.”

No action is exempt from moral judgment’ no activity can be despoiled of the value which a moral purpose confers on all things. Therefore life, as conceived of by the Fascist, is serious, austere, and religious; all its manifestations are poised in a world sustained by moral forces and subject to spiritual responsibilities. The Fascist disdains an ‘easy” life.

Fascism openly opposes liberals: “Fascism is definitely and absolutely opposed to the doctrines of liberalism” Mussolini writes. What is liberalism? According to Webster’s New World Dictionary, politically liberalism is a philosophy that advocates individual freedom and democracy. In terms of religion, liberalism supports a broad interpretation of scripture free from dogma. In short, the Bible many have many interpretations and therefore it is safe to say is not to be taken literally. Fascism also opposes worldwide organizations such as the United Nations: Fascism has a go on your own mentality which fairly accurately describes how the United States ended up in Iraq.

“Fascism will have nothing to do with universal embraces; as a member of the community of nations; it looks other peoples straight in the eyes; it is vigilant and on its guard; it follows others in all their manifestations and notes any changes in their interests; and it does not allow itself to be deceived by mutable and fallacious appearances.”

Worth notice, “Get out of the United Nations” was one of the John Birch Society loudest chants. Internationalists do not want individual nations, backed by
other nations, influencing their actions. And as for the military, dying fighting for fascists makes one a hero. “Fascism is anti-pacifistic” Mussolini asserts. “There is something more sacred and more important...death...Fascists knew how to die.” Mussolini writes regarding the fighting spirit of Fascists.

Never before have the peoples thirsted for authority, direction, order, as they do now. If each age has its doctrine, the innumerable symptoms indicate that the doctrine of our age is the Fascist. That it is vital is shown by the fact that is has aroused a faith; that this faith has conquered souls is shown by the fact that Fascism can point to its fallen heroes and martyrs.

My definition of Fascism shall begin here: Fascism is what I call business controlled government. That’s not to say that business physically controls the government or that dictators take their orders directly from CEOs. On the contrary, under fascism large corporations may be nationalized and brought under the control of the state in ways almost invisible to any casual onlooker.

The fascist State can easily convert the great monopolies and bureaucratically-managed large corporations into State-controlled enterprises, the present owners and creditors of which will receive income bonds or shares in a government investment company and never know any practical difference between their present capitalistic relationship to the property and the relationship which a fascist State will define and maintain for them.

Through fascist eyes the State is seen as the most important element of fascism. All things are viewed in terms of what value it offers the state. Industry is seen as vital to fascist nations. What’s good for industry is good for the state; therefore under a fascist state, the influence of industry on the political process far exceeds that of the common citizenry. A lost industry may be difficult to replace, but the common worker, thousands of them are at any time clamoring for employment, particularly in times of economic down. The more desperate the labor force is the better. Low wages are good for industry; therefore, low wages also serves the interest of the state. The rationale of this thinking is not hard to derive. In fact, if enough people cannot be found to work at the wage scale offered, slaves and forced labor can keep the wheels of industry turning. Germany ran much of its
war industry with forced labor. Oh but you’d say --- slaves and forced labor are not used here in America --- but then American industries are not bound to exist within our boarders are they?

Take Unocal for example: Unocal, an American Industry, benefited from the forced labor imposed upon the Karen population of Burma by the Burmese army. Sweatshops exist the world over producing clothing once produced in the United States for a fraction of the wages. Child labor is commonly used to produce our goods and our military stands ready to intervene should any of these nations experience serious unrest and their military are unable to cope.

While Fascists may nationalize vital industries, for the most part, business under fascists nations were/are given a free hand provided they served the interests of the state. In neither Germany nor Italy were there any antitrust laws. Industry could grow as large as they were able. There were few if any regulations placed on industry in the form of environmental or safe working conditions. In Germany and Italy, economists and businesses constantly pressed for self-regulation. In modern American terms, self-regulation has been redefined as voluntary compliance. Under fascism, in both Italy and Germany, corporations were given “massive subsidies”. Today here in the United States those subsidies are often referred to as “corporate welfare.”

Under fascism, in both Italy and Germany corporations received enormous tax breaks. In recent times in the United States, George W Bush’s tax breaks gave billions back to the nation’s wealthiest individuals while at the same time creating the largest budget deficit in history, a whopping $8,358,845,535,382.12 as of May 31, 2006; 3:56:47 PM GMT or $27,973.06 for every citizen of America. Over the span of 2001-2010, the wealthiest one percent of Americans is destined to receive 477 billion dollars. In contrast, of those making less than 73,000 per year, if Bush’s tax cuts were froze at the 2002 level, 99 percent of the population would experience no difference in their taxes as whatever cuts they may have received were already in place before Bush’s action.

Side Note: When I first put this book together you never heard about the 1% versus the 99% that you do today. Interesting, I thought, the numbers just seemed to fall into place. End of Note.

Both Germany and Italy under fascism opposed labor unions and banned strikes as did Ronald Reagan during the during the air traffic controllers’ up rising. That action by Reagan sent shock waves rolling through organized labor, encouraging industry challenges to labor all over the nation. The biggest threat is perhaps that a company will just pull up stakes and move out of the country to an
industry friendlier country such as Mexico where labor is cheap and few if any regulations exist. Forced concessions from labor, as a result, often include reductions in benefits, medical in particular, wages, job security, and retirement. That money saved by corporations is then rerouted to shareholders. Once protected by unions, the middle class is being squeezed out in a very similar manner as it was during the fascist years of Germany and Italy. It should also be noted that Mussolini abolished the inheritance tax (in today’s America, the Death Tax). In recent days I have been inundated by advertisements calling for the repeal of the inheritance tax, often referred to as the Death Tax.

Some of the parallels between fascism in the first half of the twentieth century and today are horrifyingly similar, jaw dropping and awe inspiring, if one knows what to compare the current United States political direction with. One comparison I could not pass up was Paul Bigioni’s quote:

“That Hitler’s economic policies hastened the destruction of Germany’s middle class by decimating small business. Ironically, Hitler pandered to the middle class and they provided some of his most enthusiastically violent supporters. The fact that he did this while simultaneously destroying them was a terrible achievement of Nazi propaganda.”

Compare that to Thomas Frank’s “What’s the Matter with Kansas.”

Thus the primary contradictions of the backlash (the revolt of industry against union gains and government regulations gained in the early twentieth century): it is a working-class movement that has done incalculable, historic harm to the working-class people.

Really? A working class movement that has done incalculable harm to itself. Carefully reread Frank’s quote in the light of Bigioni’s quote again “The fact that he (Hitler) did this (destroyed the middle class) while simultaneously destroying them was a terrible achievement of Nazi propaganda.” Franks continues

“Like the French Revolution in reverse--one in which the sans-culottes pour down the streets demanding more power for the aristocracy—the backlash pushes the
spectrum of the acceptable to the right, to the right, farther to the right.\(^{033}\)

In 1934 the Baptist World Alliance, being Protestants (see Side Note below next page for why this was important), was held in Berlin. While many Baptists were reluctant to enter Germany, once in Germany many Baptists were delighted witnessing a ruler who did not smoke or drink, a ruler who had restricted woman from wearing lipstick and smoking in public. One Baptist delegate, Dr Bradbury, was “delighted with the forced morality of the fascists.”\(^{034}\)

It was a great relief to be in a country where salacious sex literature cannot be sold; where putrid motion pictures and gangster films cannot be shown. The new Germany has burned great masses of corrupting books and magazines along with its bonfires of Jewish Communistic libraries.\(^{035}\)

It should be further noted that Hitler, in his “\textit{Mein Kampf}” made reference to Martin Luther as one of Germany’s greatest religious reformers. In 1543, Luther wrote “\textit{On the Jews and Their Lies}” calling for the burning of synagogues and Jewish schools, the deportation of Jews, and numerous other actions later attributed to the Nazis. The vast majority of Protestants remained tragically quiet on the Nazis treatment of the Jews and fell in line with the Nazis against instability and Bolshevism. In fact, 3000 of the 17,000 Protestant pastors in Germany joined together in 1932 to form the Germany Christian Movement for the purpose of merging the Protestant Church with the Nazi State.\(^{036}\) Nazi Germany was a Christian nation.

\textbf{Side Note:}

While many speculate on what the religious views of Hitler and the Nazi Party were “\textit{The Holy Reich, Nazi Conceptions of Christianity 1919-1945}” by Richard Steigmann-Gall” removes all doubt. While Hitler in his youth was raised up Catholic by his mother, in later years his idea of god moved toward Protestantism. Hitler saw in Catholicism a challenge to his authority, namely the Pope, hence he attempted to solidify his Christian base (Protestants) into a state religion. It was Martin Luther who largely influenced
Hitler’s persecution of the JEWS (see “On the Jews and Their Lies” last page).

What Hitler got attempting to combine Protestants into a state religion however was infighting by Protestants over which version of Protestantism should be adopted (the same form of infighting still in process today in the USA). As such, Hitler abandoned his original idea of forming a state Protestant religion and began distancing his party from its religious foundation, an act seen as atheistic and called persecution by many Christians. At no point however was the practice of religion outlawed in Germany and only those Protestant Christians who represented a challenge to the state’s authority were imprisoned or murdered. That treatment was reserved for Jews and many Catholics. Hitler never did denounce his religious beliefs and likely in the end died, having become disillusioned with Protestantism, a theist. See the pictures below as to how Nazi Germany and Hitler viewed religion.
So spoke Jesus Christ

A front page of the Nazi publication, Der Sturmer.

The headline reads, "Declaration of the Higher Clergy/So spoke Jesus Christ: You hypocrites who do not see the beam in your own eyes. (See Matthew 7:3-5)"

The cartoon depicts a group of Hitler Youth marching forth to drive the forces of evil from the land. The caption under the cartoon reads, "We youth step happily forward facing the sun... With our faith we drive the devil from the land."

(Source: http://nobeliefs.com/mementoes.htm)
Ron Chernow throughout his book “Titan, The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr” documents millions of dollars given by John D to the Baptists of which he became a superintendent Sunday school. As such, Rockefeller was able to merge religion and business “into a powerful platform for expounding capitalism.”

Rockefeller never wavered in his belief that his career was divinely favored and asserted bluntly, “God gave me my money.” During the decades that he taught Sunday-school classes, he found plenty of scriptural evidence to buttress this claim. (I will expound on this in my up-coming book.)

One of Rockefeller’s favorite quotes was Proverbs 22:29 “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

Rockefeller always adverted to his own adherence to the doctrine of stewardship---the notion of the wealthy man as a mere instrument of God, a temporary trustee of his money, who devoted it to good causes.

Given Rockefeller’s justification for capitalism via Biblical scripture, Rockefeller donated billions of dollars (adjusted to today’s money value) to the Baptists, numerous churches, religious causes (the Temperance Movement), and religious universities (University of Chicago—which received a half a billion dollars by 1996 dollars), it follows that the Baptists should be hailing Germany, if for nothing else, as being a force against atheistic Communism which Rockefeller detested. But there was more. It turns out Standard Oil had a substantial monetary interest in Nazi Germany also as a major oil supplier, in particular supplying ethyl lead, an anti-knock compound used in aviation to improve engine efficiency without which Germany’s Luftwaffe would never have gotten off the ground; to say nothing of their mechanized ground warfare. I wonder how many American lives this US corporation cost --- and if nothing else should send shockwaves through the current political situation in the USA for anyone wishing to vote in favor of corporate interests. Many of the these corporations lobbying congress on a daily basis are multinationals. There interests are theirs alone and often do not represent the interests of the American public at large.

It should also be noted that no sooner had Benito Mussolini assumed power in Italy than a
deal between the Catholic Church and the state of Italy, known as the Lateran Pact
of 1929, made the Catholic Church the only recognized church in Italy. Christopher Hitchens documents in “god is not Great” that an alliance formed
between Nazi Germany and the Vatican effectively tied the hands of twenty three
million German Catholics, many of personally opposed the Nazi Regime. “Their
own Holy Father (the pope)” Hitchens wrote, “had in effect told them to render
everything unto the worst Caesar in human history.”

Hitchens also exposes the Catholic Church’s support for other fascist
regimes in Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria. In Slovakia,
the nation’s leader was even a man of holy orders named Father Tiso. The Churches’ support for fascists even outlived the Third Reich and assisted with the
transporting Nazi War criminals, such as Klaus Barbie, via the Vatican’s infamous
“rat line,” to safe harbors in fascist leaning nations of South America where
many of these Nazi criminals lived out their final years protected from war crime
prosecution. A recent study entitled “Forced Labor and the Catholic Church:
1939-1945” revealed that nearly 6,000 people were enslaved by Church
administered institutions such as hospitals, orphanages, and monastery farms
during the Nazi era. Prepared by historian Karl-Joseph Hummel, the report
downsplays the churches responsibility by stating the Church leaders operated
under the menacing eye of the Nazi regime and subject to hostility if orders from
the Nazis were not followed.

The report further attempts to soften the news by pointing to the 13,000,000
forced into labor by the Nazi regime during the same years as if putting up a lesser
number alongside a greater number makes the lesser number a lesser crime. Never-
theless Hummel does state the Church should have condemned the use of forced
labor but failed to do so. Clearly, Christianity and the capitalistic west lined up
far more behind Hitler than Stalin. And I really do not care how evil and cruel
Stalin was. Neither Hitler (fascism) nor Stalin (communism) deserved the support
of Christianity if Christianity is to attempt to claim that the Church stands for
brotherly love and considers human rights important.

One book worth mention when attempting to understand fascism is
Lawrence Dennis’ 1936 “The Coming American Fascism, the Crisis of
Capitalism.” Do bear in mind; the views expressed below are that of a Harvard
graduate who worked on Wall Street and later for international banking firms
during the early years of the twentieth century. His views are his own and are only
placed here to help you, the reader, better understand exactly what fascism is, the
arguments fascists may make against the establishment, and the values fascists
holds as true. You are not being asked to agree with any of views expressed below.
**Side Note:**

Currently attempts are on by the rightwing Media here in the USA to make fascism sound as if it was/is a leftwing movement. The source I have chosen to use are from the past, the individuals closest to the mindset of Fascism, if not as in the case of Mussolini the author of it. I would consider these sources much more reliable source of information than any conspiracy drummed up by Glenn Beck or Jonah Greenberg, author of “Liberal Fascism”.

Dennis’ basic theory was that capitalism was doomed which left two choices; communism or fascism which W.A. Carto states in preface of Dennis’s book was “laughably naive.” Naïve or not however, Dennis is credited with raising serious questions about Capitalism and economics which have, as Carto points out, yet to be given their full consideration. Dennis, according to Carto, may have not had all the answers, but he knew which questions needed an answer.

Over the course of the book, Dennis focuses on two important issues of fascism, the state and the elite. Meshed together, the state and the elite form the body which under fascism rules over the masses. The elite according to Dennis are those who earn most their income from property, business enterprisers and farmers, professionals, or those whose salaries exceed $3,000 per year, or about $125,000 per year adjusted at a straight 6% inflation rate over 65 years. Dennis makes it clear that “a wise social philosophy, such as that of fascism, strives to make a place for all the members of the elite” because according to Dennis, if the elite are not satisfied, they have to power to challenge existing social structures and to create war. If the friends of peace, or the liberals of the Allied powers at Versailles thought more of the welfare of the elite of the defeated nations and Allied nations crushed by war and took careful measures to incorporate the elite into a peaceful scheme,” Dennis writes, “rather than leaving the elite unemployed and politically excluded, the elite may not have seen opportunities in war that were otherwise unavailable to them.” One of the failings of liberals, argues Dennis, is their ability to grasp the idea that average men would rather go to war than to suffer the humiliation of defeat, starvation, and prolonged poverty. Fascism, Dennis asserts, recognizes that the elite rule all social structures whether Liberal, Communist, or Fascist. The central point is that it is useful to think of government and management as being the function of a minority, and that it is not useful to any good social purpose to proceed on the theory that the people or the majority rule.
I see in those words more of the current United States government than most people would wish to admit. While most in America holds the “majority rules” idea, let’s not lose sight of who actually rules and makes our laws. Many people running for a national office are millionaires in their own right. When is the last time that a person living below the national poverty level, or for that matter a member of the middle class, has had an actual vote on the senate floor? If it takes money to get a seat in Congress or the Senate, what difference really does it matter which millionaire is voted in? In either case, a member of the elite is voted in and once in, very, very few, millionaires will favor legislation that may threaten the accumulation or redistribution of wealth. It is after all, the elite’s wealth being redistributed. Voting in America only gives the illusion that the majority rules given the minority of Americas in power are members of the elite and the majority of voting members are not. And to this issue, I would like to add this hyperlink, a cartoon about how people continually vote in people who do not have their voters best interests in mind.

Dennis continues hacking away at of some very basic liberal assumptions; for example, that man is equal under that law. As known to anyone who has had the misfortune of dealing with the legal system in America, a two tiered system of law exists, one for those who can afford it and one for those who cannot. Due process, according to Dennis, is bought, not given. The social plan, in this case the law, expresses “the will and purposes of the dominate class.”

I remember being told to me by a law professor in a Criminal Justice Class that the legal system is basically set up to protect the interests of the upper classes. This, the professor stated, was by design. Had OJ Simpson had remained any African American from a lower class; he’d likely have been toast by today. The trial of OJ was not a race issue which Simpson’s lawyers attempted to make it. Simpson’s trial was a matter of class.

Side Note:

Since writing what is above, I have read a book on the subject of inequality under the law entitled “With Liberty and Justice for Some” by Glenn Greenwald. Mr Greenwald confirms everything stated above, that the criminal justice system which currently exists in America is indeed criminal. I only have one strong objection to this book --- its title. It should be called “With Liberty and Justice for None” as justice is not served allowing white collars to walk away from their crimes with their profit. End of Note
Fascism, in very simple terms, is the merger of government and business in a symbiotic relationship designed to serve the interests of each other. Businesses are encouraged, supported, and protected by the state while at the same time supplying the State with what is required to carry out the State’s plan. Do keep in mind who is running the state --- the elite, corporations, lawyers, millionaires and as such the state’s quest seems to be the accumulation of wealth, the preservation of wealth through inheritance and substitutes, and world dominance. With State support for industry and animosity for labor, the resultant gap between the rich and the poor will widen as we are seeing in the US economy today. And finally, the division of church and State may be breached, resulting in a theocracy or some form of government close to it.

Arms Full of Money: 
The Military Complex’s Bank Account

Today, 2008, more American politicians are further into the pockets of the military industrial establishment than ever before. Granted, everyone thinks they know that politicians are in the pockets of money, for example oil, but few really have any idea just how deep into those pockets these politicians are or whose pockets they are into --- nor do they realize what it means to us, the common Joe’s out fighting their battles either with our lives or lives of our children. I’d like to point out that the last three wars commenced during the last three Texas president’s terms, a point also made also by Kevin Phillips. Granted an argument could be made in Johnson’s case, Vietnam dated back to the Eisenhower administration and persisted through the Kennedys. Not until a Texan, a Brown and Root recipient, stepped into office of the presidency, Johnson, were the Marines, with guns ablaze, off loaded into Vietnam. Were three Texas presidents and three wars simply a matter of coincidence? Or is something else at work here?

Biographer Robert Bryce in his book, “Pipe Dreams,” stated that “if Lyndon was Brown & Roots kept politician, Brown & Root was Lyndon’s kept corporation.” Brown and Root is a subsidy of Halliburton, a Dallas based corporation, whose business just happens to be oil and the military industrial complex. Michael C Ruppert points out that “everywhere there is war or insurrection there is Brown and Root” offering “logistical support for the U.S. military.” Dick Cheney, formerly the defense secretary under George H W Bush, resigned as CEO of Halliburton to become the vice president of the United States under George W Bush. Just coincidently even before the 2003 Iraq War began, Halliburton was awarded seven billion dollars in no bid contracts by the Pentagon to put out oil field fires and rebuild war torn oil fields. Halliburton, it was argued, was the only company prepared to deal with all those weapons of mass destruction claimed to be in Iraq at the time of the invasion.
But --- Cheney claimed, he had severed all ties with Halliburton before accepting the Vice Presidential position. Not so, says Senate Democrat Frank Leutenberg. According to Lautenberg, Cheney still received hundreds of thousands of dollars in a deferred salary from Halliburton in his first two years in office and as of May 2007 still held close to a half million shares. Cheney in a back door admission to these charges later stated any profit from his referenced Halliburton shares would be given to charity. My problem with Cheney giving to charity is what charity? Christians United for Israel whose membership includes close associates to the JBS such as Gary Bauer and the John Hagee, an evangelical minister who refers to the Catholic Church as the “Great Whore” and has been allegedly actively promoting war with Iran to say nothing about suggesting Hitler was sent by god to force the Jews to build the state of Isreal. Those are charities. If Cheney didn’t lie this time and he in fact gave money to charities, were these charities, not to mention dozens or more like religious denominations, any of the recipients?

Cheney’s ties with Halliburton however is only the beginning of sorrows. The Bush clan has profited from America’s wars for over four generations. George Herbert Walker, George HW Bush’s grandfather, for whom both George HW (Herbert Walker) and George W (Walker) Bush are named, made a good chunk of his fortune profiteering from war. During the WWI, Walker benefited from his connection with J.P. Morgan through whom wartime purchases came to $3.2 billion dollars, four times the United States Federal budget in 1914. Prior to WWII, Walker became involved in investing in Germany and Russia. During WWII, Walker, along with Prescott Bush, George HW Bush’s father and George Herbert Walker’s son in law maintained investments with Germany even beyond Pearl Harbor. Kevin Phillips points out that while not all Walker’s dealings with Germany may have been sinister in nature, Walker and Prescott Bush apparently had no qualms about trading with the enemy.

In August 1942, the property of the Hamberg-Amerika lines, for many years partly owned by the Harriman and Walker controlled American Ship and Commerce Corporation, was seized under the Trading with the Enemy Act. On October 20, the alien property custodian seized the assets of the Union Banking Corporation. Eight days later, with the UBC’s books in hand, the government acted against two affiliates, the Holland-American Trading Corporation and the Seamless Steel Equipment Corporation. In November, the government seized the assets of the last major entity connected to Harriman, Walker, and Bush – the Silesian-American Corporation. Given that money was more important than national allegiance to members of the Bush family ancestry, I see no reason why national allegiance, other than what they can profit from it, should matter to them now.
While the Bush side of the Bush’s ancestry was not nearly as important to the current status enjoyed by the Bushes as Walker’s, Samuel Bush, GHW’s grandfather, became wealthy as the president of Buckeye Steel Castings which manufactured railroad equipment. Later he became the director of Pennsylvania Railroad subsidiaries, which got entangled with John D Rockefeller in a kickback scheme dreamt up by Rockefeller. This assured Rockefeller a huge advantage over all other refiners and ultimately led to Rockefeller’s competitors demise. Samuel Bush also served on the War Industries Board in charge of forgings, guns, small arms, and ammunition. He later became the first president of the fascist organization, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), which worth mention was the pool from which many of the original John Birch Societies Council Members climbed out of.

On March 2, 1938, evidence was presented before congressional hearings that NAM was controlled by 207 corporations of which General Motors, du Pont, Chrysler, National Steel, and Samuel Bush’s Pennsylvania Railroad were the most powerful leaders. It turns out that these businesses were also the leading contributors to pro-Nazi groups such as the American Liberty League, the Crusaders, the Sentinels of the Republic, and the National Economy League. Some of the biggest names and leaders of American industries pop up within the ranks of NAM, for example, Henry Ford. While I was in high-school, Henry Ford was glorified as the designer of the assembly line and a thoughtful man who paid his employees a large enough wage to afford the Model T Ford that they, Ford’s employees, manufactured. Ford, according to what I was taught, was an inspiration to all Americans, a true example of the American dream.

What I was not taught --- Ford also had an extremely dark side. I am talking fascism, Nazism, and anti-Semitism. What most Americans considered totally unacceptable and sent millions of their young sons to die fighting against, Ford openly supported. I always thought that it was scrupulous propagandists such as Joseph Goebbels who sat in neat little Nazi offices in Germany and spun monstrous lies about Jews and History. Well, I hate to admit it, but I was wrong. People like Henry Ford, a person thought of as an honorable American, also fell into this Nazi fray. Ford published of a four volume set known as “The International Jew: The World’s Foremost Problem.” Ford’s Dearborn Independent, a newspaper also dubbed The Ford International Weekly, also published the “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”. These publications became the inspiration for the Hitler’s Final Solution and were taught as history in Nazi classrooms. Hitler, it is rumored, kept a copy of “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion” on his desk. Henry Ford was awarded the “Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle” by Hitler in July 1938. The “Grand Cross of the Supreme Order of the German Eagle” was considered Germany’s highest honor.
that could be bestowed upon a foreigner. Benito Mussolini was given the same honor a year earlier.\textsuperscript{072}

Also within the top ranks of NAM were names such as du Pont and Rockefeller. Again, when I think of du Pont, I think of “\textit{Better Things for Better Living}” I got that of course from du Pont’s own advertisements. Only later did I learn what better living that du Pont’s chemistry brought the world. Since their first arrival in America, the duPons were in the business of profiting from war. Historically they have been the main manufacturer of gun power in the world, often profiting from both sides of opposing forces.

The DuPonds have an even a darker side than Ford which I never heard about in my high school history class either. During the FDR administration, shortly after purchasing Remington Arms, considered a preparatory action by historians, du Pont and a number of other radical right industrialists came up with a plot to seize the White House via a military coup d'état. Approached to lead the charge was two time Medal of Honor recipient Major General Smedley Butler who exposed the plot.\textsuperscript{073} Butler later gave a speech about war denouncing war’s profiteers:

\begin{quote}
there is a way to stop it (war profiteering). You can't end it by disarmament conferences. You can't eliminate it by peace parleys at Geneva. Well-meaning but impractical groups can't wipe it out by resolutions. It can be smashed effectively only by taking the profit out of war.

The only way to smash this racket is to conscript capital and industry and labor before the nations manhood can be conscripted. One month before the Government can conscript the young men of the nation – it must conscript capital and industry and labor. Let the officers and the directors and the high-powered executives of our armament factories and our munitions makers and our shipbuilders and our airplane builders and the manufacturers of all the other things that provide profit in war time as well as the bankers and the speculators, be conscripted – to get $30 a month, the same wage as the lads in the trenches get.
\end{quote}
Let the workers in these plants get the same wages – all the workers, all presidents, all executives, all directors, all managers, all bankers – yes, and all generals and all admirals and all officers and all politicians and all government office holders – everyone in the nation be restricted to a total monthly income not to exceed that paid to the soldier in the trenches!

Personally, I’ve always felt the way to end war was to reinstate the Draft. Then for the criteria of who gets drafted first, those who have the most to lose should the nation fall should be drafted first and assigned to lowest level of enlisted positions of the infantry. You’d think they would fight like the dickens to preserve what is theirs. Why send away people who have little or anything to lose should they lose? Oh well --- I doubt neither Butler’s nor my proposal will ever happen. As such, the elite will always be attempting to get their fingers in the war pie as long as those doing the dying or someone else or someone’s kid.

Anyway, American business aiding and rearming Germany was booming and profitable and not doubt the reason for the propaganda to the left published in the Oaks Times. As it was Remington Arms (du Pont) was secretly shipping arms to Germany through Holland via the German-Hamburg-Amerika line from which George Walker, the ancestor of two American Bush presidents, profited. Standard Oil (already mentioned), Rockefeller’s baby, was busy supplying Germany with tetraethyl lead which without the Luftwaffe could not fly. Fritz Thyssen, hailed as Hitler’s Angel, was channeling money thought to be for the benefit of “Nazi bigwigs” into the Union Banking Corporation whose director just happened to be Prescott Bush. Quoting “The Splendid Blond Beast” by Christopher Simpson, Phillips points out that between 1924 and 1940, the US Commerce department showed in 48.5 percent increase in U.S. German investments while at the same time declining nearly
everywhere else in Europe. According to Phillips by 1939, American manufacturing was the mainstay of Germany’s war machine. Any questions about why America’s policy toward World War II was none involvement (see propaganda last page)? Too much American profit was being made feeding the eagle.

Kevin Phillips points out that “both Samuel Bush and George H Walker were present at the creation of the U.S. military-industrial complex and its intelligence-gather adjunct.” Their descendants are still making a fortune from the industrial military complex. In the last three decades, twenty of those years a Bush has held a seat in the White House. In that same time both Bushes have launched the United States into a war, a war which they themselves and close associates profit from. Phillips also points out that by the 1980’s, the United States had become the largest arms dealer in the world. Many of these arms went to the very counties we are currently engaging such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

I have of course only scratched the surface of the network of war profiteers currently in or swarming around the White House with their check books open passing out donations, investments for which they expect a good return. I am dismayed beyond any hope of ever feeling good about my government or for that matter my country again given what I know of the corruption and war profiteering that exists within it. People – hear me - you get what you vote for. If you vote for those with their hands in the pockets of the military industrial complex, don’t be surprised when you end up in a war and your child ends up being offered up as some sacrificial lamb. Also don’t be surprised should some lone military officer show up at your door unannounced offering you a folded flag.

Stolen Words: What’s in a Word?

Before leaving this discussion, Chris Hedges in his book “American Fascists, the Christian Right and the War on America” makes a point worth mention. He titles this section “logocide” meaning the killing of words. The traditional meanings of words are replaced with different definitions. I do not see this as much of a fascist’s trait as a propaganda tactic in general. Groups whose mission it is to steal these words for propaganda purposes change the original meaning of the word to their advantage. Hodges uses the example of the Christian Right and its use of the word “Liberty.” Quoting “Liberty” from the Bible

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 2 Corinthians 3:17
the meaning of liberty, according to Hedges, is twisted by those of the Christian Right to become a measure of how well America obeys Christian law. The radical Christian right is therefore able to speak of the importance of liberty and justice for all while at the same time condemning people such as atheists and secular humanists. By this definition liberty becomes liberation from Satan, a designation often bestowed on any person of different or no faith. Since those people of different or no faith are not where the Spirit of the Lord is, for them there can be no liberty and in the hands of a word trickster, you can hardly take liberty from someone who does not possess it. No liberty --- no need for justice.

Lincoln has a superb take on the same word:

The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now, are much in want of one. We all declare for liberty; but in using the same word we do not all mean the same thing. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men’s labor. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things, called by the same name———liberty. And it follows that each of the things is, by the respective parties, called by two different and incompatible names———liberty and tyranny.

The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep’s throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as a liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act as the destroyer of liberty, especially as the sheep was a black one. Plainly the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of the word liberty; and precisely the same difference prevails to—day among us human creatures, even in the North, and all professing to love liberty. Hence we behold the processes by which thousands are daily passing from under the yoke of bondage, hailed by some as the advance of liberty, and bewailed by others as the destruction of all liberty. Recently, as it seems, the people of Maryland have been doing something to define liberty; and thanks to them
that, in what they have done, the wolf’s dictionary, has been repudiated.  

“Address at a Sanitary Fair”  
Abraham Lincoln April 18, 1864 Baltimore, MD

We let our politicians get away with words like Compassion, Freedom, Liberty, Independence, Sex (Clinton), the Dream, by never inquiring of them exactly what their version of these words mean. Is it any wonder therefore that in the political arena we never get what we thought we voted for? When I think of stolen words, a phrase that comes to my mind is “The American People.” I hear “The American People” harped on all time by politicians in general and by conservatives in particular. Exactly who are these “American People?” Are these “American People” considered the same American People by the political left as the political right? I doubt it. As an atheist, am I part of the “American People” in the eyes of those of the Christian Right? If America is a Christian Nation, am I even an American given I am not a Christian? And where does that leave me? A veteran --- A combat veteran? Did I fight for a nation that does not even recognize me as one of its citizens?

Before closing on the subject of fascism, fascist governments intertwined with religion, have given the world some of the most brutal governments ever known. Hitler’s Germany was one such nation. If the fascists of America should ever truly dominate and the Bible becomes America’s roadmap, why should America struggle so hard to defend such pest nations as Iraq? Why should we battle so called insurgents, unaware who the real enemy is, when killing everyone would be far easier. If Moslems are an enemy of Christianity, as some America fundamentalists and evangelicals preach, why should American Christian soldiers be concerned with who is an insurgent and who is not? Are not Iraqis nearly all Moslems? Are not Moslems the enemy? Why not, as a shirt states available at any Marine Corp commissary, “Kill them all. Let god sort them out.”

And the LORD our God delivered him before us; and we smote him, and his sons, and all his people. And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain: Only the cattle we took for a prey unto ourselves, and the spoil of the cities which we took. Deuteronomy 2:33-35

To be sure, I am not promoting any part of the prior discussion. Make no mistake; I am not advocating such reasoning. I deplore that type of reasoning and
hope America never reaches that point. I am not naive enough however to believe Christianity is beyond leading the faithful to a kill them all mentality for history has proven time and time again that Christianity is capable of exactly that. I am not naïve enough to believe our military would be incapable of carrying out such a policy either.

**The Myth of Liberal Controlled Media: The Big Lie**

Somewhere it must have occurred to a few of these corporate giants that if you own the media, you control the media. It does not take government to censor what is heard or read in the news. All it takes is enough money to own it. I recall Ross Perot, speaking to his followers in Denver about a television station that declined to air a 30 minute Perot political advertisement in favor of Monday Night Football, state that if the station would not allow Perot to get his word out, he would buy the station. Perot did not buy the station that I know of but somewhere out there in LaLa land I am sure his message was heard loud and clear.

Ever wonder why there is so little, if any, important news in the media. For example, to whom exactly is the federal deceit owed? Why we are really involved in the current Iraq War, and who, like Bush/Cheney, are really profiteering from the war? It might be due to the fact that NBC is an affiliate of General Electric, a military contractor I might add. Donald Duck, Goofy, and Mickey Mouse control ABC and CBS is currently owned by Viacom who purchased CBS from Westinghouse, another military contractor, for forty-six Billion dollars in 2000. “Media and entertainment companies are overwhelmingly dominated by a handful of global behemoths” Johnnie L. Roberts, Newsweek’s Web Exclusive warns, all of whom have “pivotal business pending in Washington.” More worrisome, Roberts writes that after 9/11 generals, Roberts does not name, asked film makers such as Steven E. De Souza, screen writer for *Die Hard*, and Joseph Zito, director “*Delta Force One*” to use their skills to produce “apocalyptic brainstorming of the kind that has yielded acts of cinematic terrorism” no doubt to heighten fears of future terrorist attacks. You would think these stories should be front page news rather than gossip swirling around some celebrity. What celebrities do does not affect my life at all. Referring back to Edward R Murrow, I find it truly distressing that indeed Murrow had it correct. Media today has become merely wires and lights in a box.

This instrument (television) can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely wires and lights in a
box. There is a great and perhaps decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference. This weapon of television could be useful.088

Murrow was also correct that society will pay a horrible price for not using its available medium to its full potential --- to educate society about the political and ecological dangers before us. What we don’t know can hurt us --- and will.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:
How Evangelical Christianity Buttresses Fascism has been omitted as it will be updated and an attempt at publishing it will be sought.

And in the End

Once Upon a Time: Not so long ago in the very same land where he currently resides, a young naive adult went to war believing he was defending democracy, human rights, and liberty. What he found was the war he was involved in had little to do these idealisms, rather that war had more to do with profit. This money was being either made directly as the result of producing war materials or by keeping that nation, Vietnam, open to American capitalists’ exploitation. Had our reason for going to war been to defend democracy, human rights, and liberty, we would not have stopped with only Communist countries. If human rights would have been an issue, we should have also been in Guatemala, Burma, and Chile. I guess by American standards it is all right if such brutal regimes exist as long as brutality does not inhibit our economic interests. We as a nation seem to have nothing against forcing the people of third world countries into near slave labor and child labor as long as we are the beneficiaries. As a nation, we would never think about invading Mexico to guarantee a living wage and safe working conditions for its labor force. In fact, that is why most American companies are in Mexico, for the cheap labor and the lack of government regulations Mexico provides. But let Mexico decide to insist on a living wage for its workers and watch what happens.

Once upon a time not too long ago a naive young man went to war believing he was defending humanity. What he found was humanity existed on either side of the battle and that he had been programmed to see only his definition of humanity as praiseworthy. If America’s presence in war were for humanity concerns, America would have never dropped two Atomic bombs on a defenseless nation that at the time offered America no threat. America is the only nation to date that has ever used this monstrous weapon on another nation. Worse, this action was not needed to win the war rather it was used to keep that nation and others around it
from falling into the hands of nations which would have restricted America’s future influence in the region. In Vietnam the military had this reasoning that to save a village, they had to destroy it. That same argument could be applied here, I suppose. To save Asia we had to drop the bomb on two of its major cities --- but I doubt that argument would have sat well with the Nations of the world. Well, the argument that we had to destroy a village to save it did not sit well with me either. America’s concern over humanity was not the issue in either case. Commerce was.

Once upon a time not too long ago a naive young man went to war believing Christianity represented righteousness. What he found was Christianity is a hoax designed to benefit imperialistic nations such as France or the United States. While expressing concern and commitment to the poor, Christianity, from what I was to learn, simply justifies being poor far more than it helps lift people out of poverty (the subject of Chapter Thirteen). In fact, by preaching “Be fruitful and multiply” and their “Theory of Domination,” Christianity is guaranteeing that there will not only always be the poor but that there will be countless more poor in the future.

Once upon a time not too long ago a naive young man went to war believing that honor, heroism, and his love of country were ideals worth dying for. What he found however is everyone, regardless of which side he fights on, believes the same thing. Most people regardless of where they live love their homeland and are willing to die for it. All these idealisms really guarantee is war will never end. Hence the question really needs asked is “Are these idealisms really idealisms to revere? Or are they merely strings in the hands of puppet masters being utilized to manipulate people into doing the puppet master’s will?”

Once upon a time not too long ago many naive young men of this nation signed into the military to defend the world against Fascism. Millions died beneath the guns, in prisons, and the concentration camps of Fascist oppressors. How odd it is that these young men’s grandchildren are now once again in danger of living under a Fascist government without a shot being fired. Or so it seems anyway --- that a shot was never fired. Actually in recent history there have been a number shots fired, for example the one that killed John Kennedy in Texas. Another shot took the life of Medgar Evans. Another took Martin Luther King. Another took Robert Kennedy. And another took John Lennon. Whether or not any of these were a larger conspiracy may never be known. What they all had in common, however, these folks were all liberal. These people were all shot by one lone gunman.

Let’s also not forget Allen Berg of KOA radio machine gunned down in his Denver driveway or the two U. S. congressmen whose planes just dropped out of the sky. Had those congressmen lived the Democrats would have ceased the majority. Whether or not any of these are connected by a single thread, for example fascism, one thing is for sure; to be liberal, in favor of wealth distribution
as a means of fighting poverty, to stand against racism and war, and to be popular and able to have their views aired is life threatening in this land of free speech.

I am jubilant over the election of Obama to the office of the Presidency of the United States. For the first time in eight years, I have a glimmer of hope that America will get back to the track of leading the world rather than ruling the world. If I have been duped only time will time will tell. All that matters to me at this point is America in this election took a step away from fascism trajectory it was on. But the monster still breaths and as long as it can draw a breath, it is capable of a ferocious come back. If the economy really goes sour, people will be looking for a scapegoat. If Obama is unable to change the course of the current economy, people will be looking for a new leader --- a strong leader, a leader capable of returning America to her former greatness. People will call on god, to make America a Christian nation. All of which will keep the monster well feed.

Hence I am trying not to be too optimist. There exists the dreaded lone gunman out there somewhere willing to take the shot that will in his mind place America back on the right track. Well, anyway that is the political world, our imagined world, the world as mainly the elite would like it to be, the world they want us (the common people) to die for attempting to construct and preserve.

But there is the other world, the natural world, the real world, the world as it is. Humans may think they control the natural world but that’s pure delusion, merely shadows on the cave wall. Following these shadowy delusion, that we can control the natural world, will only lead to a point where we will find we were wrong. Unfortunately, that point will only be acknowledged by the elite, those with the ability to possibly change humanity’s course, when the fact that they (the elite) were wrong can no longer be denied. Let’s face it. If I had it all, I would probably would not want things to change either and likely would stumble around in some fanciful state of denial.

Anyway, many environmentalists, me included, believe life, as we’ve known it, is already at that point. The problem is by then (assuming we are not there already) knowledge will be too late in coming to effectively change course. That we cannot change course will be the last thing many will realize as we, thrust forward by the herd, plunge over the Buffalo Jump we ourselves have allowed to exist. Life on earth is in peril and few, if any, dare speak about it.
Environmentalists are not going door to door to warn people of the coming environmental crisis. Educators are not standing out on street corners educating the general public of the real dangers of things no one wishes to talk about such as overpopulation, fascism, science, and global degradation. The media would rather shoot for the ratings airing *Pro Football* or sitcoms like *Two and Half Men* rather than educate people on political, religious, and environmental matters. As Murrow warned these powerful media instruments, television and radio, have been reduced to nothing but wires in a box for which we shall all pay.

The people out there banging on doors are the religious. And the religious and propaganda spinners at this point appear to be winning. Should that be the case, no political ideology will have the ability to save us from ourselves. Nature is not ruled by a democratic or religious process. Nature in the end will treat us, being humans, like we’ve treated it. Someday, we will find that out to our dismay.

**Corpsman Up!**

*A Marine Medic Struggles with War, God, and Patriotism*

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