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P.M.I.M. President

This article is presented from the Vietnam War veterans' point of view, and it is not our intention to exclude any other group of veterans.

WHERE

While Gerald R. Ford was president he asked the American people to put Vietnam behind them and forget it. Unfortunately, his advice has been followed all too well. It is necessary to put the bitterness and dissent behind us. But to forget the Vietnam war, to forget its troubled veterans, and their families is unforgivable.

WAS

We Vietnam vets have experienced the traumas of war. We know the crash of bullets and shrapnel given and received and have lived to talk about it, but don't. We who have lived in our city streets and houses and our countries' prisons know the impact of the psychological disorder PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder first hand. We have fought our enemy and won only to continue battling in our minds and spirits with these same demons of the past. We have had to go on fighting with the system we fought for, who returned to "the world" and found only a self-indulgent "do your own thing" society full of emptiness and rejection ("baby killer", the Vietnam war was a "mistake", etc.). We have had more than one wall built - one in DC, the other in our minds. We were ostracized by our fellow countrymen because our presence reminds them of what Americans saw as a national embarrassment. These hurts that I have expressed - rejection with the thought of having risked death and mutilation in vain (I'm a combat injured quadriplegic) it has caused intense suffering to millions of veterans and our families in the prime of life.

Our Vietnam experience was different from previous wars and in most cases caused PTSD to occur. Here are some ways it was different:

* First teenage war. The average age was under 19. World War II combatants age was over 26.

* Vietnam fighting men were "plugged in" to a unit already in combat. We were not trained together. This made the war seem very individual.

* The guerrilla-type warfare made it extra stressful. A baby might be booby trapped or a child might be carrying a grenade. A rice farmer might be Charlie at night. Because of daytime search and destroy missions and night ambushes, there was little time for much-needed rest.

GOD

* Politics ruled our actions more than in previous wars. Don't fire until fired upon, etc. Also, there was a hostile division over the war causing many of us to wonder if we had done the right thing. "Born on the Fourth of July" movie.

* DEROS (date of expected return from overseas) promised a way out of the war other than as a casualty. Advantage: no prolonged time of combat. Disadvantage: DEROS became a personal thing hurting unit morale, cohesion and identification. Many fantasized about the specific day when all problems would stop as the freedom bird carried us home. This was usually a lonely ride, with a head full of grief, conflict, confusion and relief.

* Upon coming home reality hit. We were not welcomed with parades. There was little respect for these men and women who had gone to war under force of law - the draft. The Veterans Administration had a one year limit after discharge for service-connected disability compensating psychiatric problems. When the POST in PTSD showed up years later many vets were and still are unable to get help from the government. This makes us feel depressed, angry, afraid, afraid and restless.

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These things and many other problems go on disrupting all areas of life experience. The symptoms described below are experienced by most veterans and Vietnam combat vets specifically.

VIETNAM?