

WHY/WHAT IS NCVVI

NORTH CAROLINA VIETNAM VETERANS, INC.

When local Vietnam veterans formed NCVVI in the early 1980's, it was the first coming together of men and women who shared a common bond and a common cause. The bond was war; the cause was the proposed Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Capitol grounds in Raleigh. . .

Now, as the years have gone by, there is less and less talk of war. You still have to be a Vietnam Veteran to join and there is still a lot of old soldier teasing among vets of different branches of service, but those gut-wrenching beery teary nights when cold truths were told and hot wounds ripped open have become rare.

Now the talk is how to raise money for scholarships . . . Memorials are designed for future generations, but they are really about remembering the past, especially for those who place them. Scholarships on the other hand, are about the future . . . *Excerpts from the Dennis Rogers column, "Maybe Vietnam is finally over" in the News and Observer.

The NCVVI is a group of people brought together by the past, looking to the future, proving that the Vietnam Veteran, is a good and productive part of society and having a good time doing it with friends.

WF Veteran reveals Vietnam through football

The comparison is strictly intentional

By Ron Harris

Special to The Wake Weekly

(Editor's Note: Ron Harris graduated from Wake Forest High School in 1965 and served in Vietnam, 1966-67. "Upon leave the military, I left Vietnam behind. However, Vietnam did not leave me behind. When the North Carolina Vietnam Memorial was dedicated, I discovered that I had not been able to put the Vietnam experience behind me." Harris joined the North Carolina Vietnam Veterans Inc. and became active in presenting a positive image of Vietnam veterans. One of his most positive activities has been his involvement with Wake County schools. The veterans go into the classrooms to supplement the teachers' experience and what the textbook offers.

Harris says when he was in high school, football was the only subject he really understood or enjoyed. Thus, he chose an analogy on football and Vietnam. He read it to some classes and he could see the lights of understanding come on in the students' eyes.

He writes, "The reason I am writing this is I feel fortunate to have had the privilege of growing up in a town like Wake Forest. I feel fortunate to have teachers and community leaders who taught me standards that have been invaluable in my life."

He writes he was also fortunate that his family and friends showed him nothing but support, but unfortunately, some of his Vietnam veteran buddies received a much different welcome. His analogy is more about their experience than his own, he says. He does admit to some bitterness for the way American veterans are treated as a whole. He has written the following with the hope it will help some Vietnam veteran to be understood.)

What Was It Like In Vietnam?

Vietnam Veterans are often asked questions about their experiences in Vietnam. Questions such as: Why did you go? What was it like over there? How were you treated when you returned home? and Why are you still struggling? Why can't you let the experience go? It is easy for Vietnam Veterans to just say "If you weren't there, you just wouldn't understand." It's hard for veterans to answer the questions in a literary form that is easy to understand for those who did not experience Vietnam firsthand. In order to help better understand the Vietnam experience, please consider the following analogy.

Consider that the administration and school board of your high school required every student enrolled in the high school to be on the football team. The rules are firm, YOU MUST BE ON THE FOOTBALL TEAM!! It

doesn't matter that you do not want to be on the team or that you have better things to do with your time, or that you just do not like football. Of course, there are some exceptions, such as those students who are not physically fit to play football, and those students who are smart and are going to go to college, and those students who are the children of the administration, school board, or other important citizens of the community — their children are exempted from playing football, unless they want to play . . . everyone else must play!!

Your high school is a big 4A school. It has the most powerful football team in the state. Your school has a long history of winning. Your father and your older brothers were all on state championship teams from your high school.

Just before the first game of the season, the football coach calls a team meeting. He says something like this: "This is the best football team this school has ever put on the field. You are bigger, stronger, and faster than any other team in the state. You have the best equipment and training available. Your opponent in this game is a small, weak school, barely a 1A school. They are poorly equipped and enjoy little support from their fans.

This should be an easy VICTORY. However, the school's administration has instructed me that we must play this game a little differently than we normally play. We will be playing with a different set of rules than our opponents. We will not be allowed to pass. All of our running plays must be up the middle, no running around the end! Also we will only be allowed to play between the hash marks on the field. This means that if the other team breaks to the outside of the hash marks, we can't pursue them. Now go out there and play your hearts out for a TIE!!

The game starts, your team is doing well in spite of the new rules. Your team is pushing the other team all over the field. Victory seems assured . . . STOP, remember you are playing for a TIE in this game.

Your team fights hard for 9 yards in three downs. Many of your players are injured getting those 9 yards. The coach calls a time out! The coach says that the school board has sent word that your team has to give those 9 yards back and start fourth and 10 on the original line of scrimmage. "You need to remember," he says "we are playing for a TIE in this game."

Near halftime, you notice a lot of your school's fans and fellow students are moving to the other team's side of the field and they start to cheer for the other team. Even some of the school's administrators and school board

members start to cheer for the other team. (Remember they are the ones who made you play football in the first place.)

As you limp off the field with an injury, covered with mud, your girlfriend yells to you from the stand, "Dear John, I don't like the way that you are treating that other poor team! By the way I am going to ride home with Jody from the band."

The head cheerleader for your team, Jane, goes to the other side of the field and starts to cheer for the other team. She yells for you to quit playing for your team and to help the other team. You see her posing for pictures with the other team.

During the game some of your fellow players are knocked out of bounds on the other team's side of the field. Instead of letting them come back into the game, the other team locks them in their locker room.

The game finally ends in a TIE. This is hard for you to understand. If you could have played by the real rules of football, you could have won!

When the team gets back on the bus to return to your school, you ask the coach about your fellow teammates who have not returned from the other team's locker room. Your coach demands the return of all of his players by the other coach. The other coach says that he has returned all of his players and if he has a problem with that, talk to his school board. You are forced to return to your school without a full ac-

counting of your fellow teammates. Having to return without your fellow teammates hurts the most of all. The school board tells you that there is nothing they or you can do about your missing teammates. You are told that the best thing you can do is forget about them.

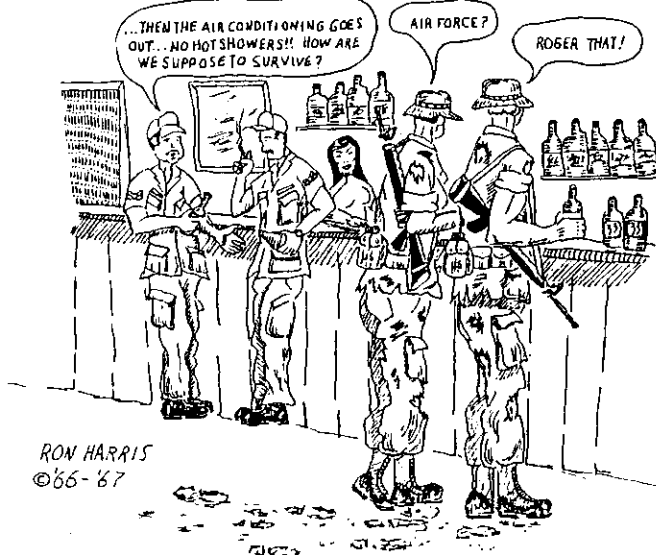
When you return to school, some of your fellow students and teachers say bad things about you, or worse they ignore you. When you ask why . . . they tell you that it's because you tried to WIN the football game instead of trying to TIE it. No one will sit with you in the lunch room, your fellow students act as if you may go crazy and hurt them. The only friends you have that understand how you feel are your fellow teammates.

The school board, the school administration, and your fellow students have forgotten the football players that were left behind. The forgotten player's only hope is that you and your teammates don't forget them.

This analogy may not hold up in all cases, not every Vietnam Veteran's experiences were the same. But I think that this analogy is close enough to the truth, that it will help someone who is not a Vietnam Veteran understand why some of us veterans feel so frustrated and angry, and why we are unable to let the Vietnam experience go!

(The comparison between the Vietnam War and a game is strictly intentional!)

Ron Harris
Cary



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