

IN THE LAND OF ME

I was doing pretty good actually. All the old photographs had been stored away, some even thrown away. My military service no longer showed itself on my resumes. My old battered flight jacket removed from the dressing closet, to some dark corner of the storage area. I no longer received any mail from the Department of the Army. My old dress blues stood in quiet attention waiting never to be worn again. I could answer the question "Were you in Vietnam?" with a simple end of conversation, YES! It was almost possible to listen to people having never been to Vietnam expound their wisdom on deft ears without any emotion. The Dog of War had finally turned into a sleeping dog, almost. For with the last helicopter flight out of Saigon, the press had to move on to other areas of human suffering, and conflict to find something worthy of exploitation. It being our given right as Americans to know all things sensational in the world at any one time. Especially if it sells newspapers or improves ratings. I had almost forgotten that we young soldiers had lost a war. Gee, I never knew we lost. Of course, the special on TV informed me that we had lost. Funny, the person doing the broadcast was so sure. I mean I knew we hadn't won the war, none of the "Actual Combatants" ever wins a war. One side just loses more than the other. But I beg to differ "WE" didn't lose. I had almost forgotten all the ugly things that war breeds and perpetuates so gallantly, almost. I was trying and I was doing just fine. AH, but I underestimated the power of the press. After being pounded out to be the modern day sons and daughters of Attila the Hun, the dogs of war had finally learned how to sleep. A good swift kick to the ribs seemed in order to bring them out of their self-imposed stupor. What is the new battle cry, "No more Vietnams?" Boy howdy, no more indeed and I'll be the first to agree. No more fools burning our flag. No more Laos. No more Delta with her rich rice fields. One of the richest in the world, in a part of the world where rice is worth a lot more than gold. No more Kampuchea, no more Rithysens for Christmas. If we sit back

and wait long enough no more beautiful Thailand. A country so rich in culture and history, that American history doesn't compare in scope. No more Vietnam. Well, we got our wish. There is no more Vietnam. Because if Vietnam still exists, then why do so many people die every day trying to leave it.

Of course all of the killing stopped the moment that last helicopter left Saigon. Of course the war machine of the North ceased all their military operations and started making their country a better place to live. Of course they did. That's why we had the slaughter of thousands in Laos and Cambodia, a slaughter that still goes on today. That's why we had so many killed in the border war -- both Chinese and Vietnamese --, because peace has been so restored to the region. The dying and the suffering hasn't stopped. Just ours. Today the news of our unwitting defeat amuses me. Have we become a Nation of non-thinkers? Why if we could think about all those innocent civilians caught in the Winds of War 10 years ago, can we not think of them now? Oh, I see, it's okay because they are being tortured and killed by their own people. It's all right now because we are not involved. Least we forget history is bound to repeat itself. No one forgets the Jews during history and the pain they have endured. While right now, today, there are death camps in the World and everyone just turns away. America turns away. Yes, I to have been guilty of turning away. Turning away doesn't stop the dying. Wars are still being run by people far removed from the fighting and pains of their actions. Why doesn't the media report the real camps in Vietnam. The ones with people in them that didn't give up. Didn't turn away, and may die for it. Nobody wants to hear about the boat people of Asia. Just turn away like me and try and forget. Could we have prevented this? Is that why we were there? What would have been the outcome if we had tried a little harder? Who knows. What about the new Vietnam? What have they done to improve the life of the common man? A man whose only wish is to raise a family, and be there to watch them grow. Have they stopped all war and let their tired soldiers go home? Sure they have. Now that they have a United Vietnam, why do they have

such a large standing Army. Wasn't a United Vietnam the goal? Maybe it was a United Asia. They haven't exported war or guerrilla activities in the region either. Like the Island of ^{MINOR}Minado in the Philippines, or fighting with the Indonesians over their new claim to territorial waters. No not the peace loving North Vietnam Regime. A regime that holds the remains of our war dead like so many poker chips.

During the sixties the cry of peace could be found on just about everything; or heard from just about any youth in America. Yet the World stood by and let the most peaceful country on earth be systematically removed and eradicated Tibet and the Holy Lama were removed as the World cried for peace. Peace is not free. Sometimes it is the most expensive thing on earth. I am sorry if I say things that no one wants to hear. Death and dying are a messy thing. So is losing. Turn away America, we don't have to do anything. Everyone is appalled at the story of a woman being raped in broad daylight, as a crowd looks on. Your right we don't have to help, just turn away. So today the news media tells of the 10 year anniversary of Hanoi's victory. Through the whole dam war we got nothing but bad press, and now 10 years later we are still getting bad press. Well, maybe our dead still have a few champions left. War uses the young, and this one used them well and hard. Not only in combat, for those few actual combatants were young only in years and aged beyond reason. The young here in the States were used for almost the same reason. They are easy to manage or gullible. For wars are fought by young men and managed by old ones. The ones fighting were hyper aged while the ones at home were not. This only increased the rift when the Veterans returned home. Returned home to, well, you lost but that's okay, or did we? I for one don't think so, because we tried! Maybe we kept the boat people out of their boats for awhile. Maybe we kept the war from escalating to Cambodia to such a degree. Maybe we kept it from threatening Thailand. Maybe we did those things, maybe not. But we tried, unwillingly or not, we tried! Which is a lot more than I can say for the arm chair hypocrites that turn their head to the atrocities in the area now. America you lost, not us. You're still

losing. You lose any time you no longer have the guts, foresight, compassion and resolve to help another. You lose when a crowd watches a woman in trouble and does nothing. You lose when you no longer committ yourself to anything but yourself. You lose, but we didn't. We tried and we died and now sometimes we cry. I don't know why, but sometimes we cry. Maybe it's for our very brave friends who gave so much. Maybe it's the horrors that never go away. Maybe for the Vietnam that lost so much, or maybe for America, the country we all love so much and lost. But we didn't and I hope I never lose the ability to feel for my fellow man or the depth to try and understand again. Indifference is the breeding ground for pain and hate. Communication is not possible when pain and hate are the prevelent emotions. Conflict is soon to follow, war is the end result.

Don't give us a Wall. Don't give us a parade 10 years late. Don't give us monuments or pats on the back. Don't give us sympathy to cover the past indifference. Give us the one thing we never received during the war years -- give us **HOPE**. Hope that 58,000 deaths will not be for not. Hope that the very people who reported so graphically the terrible things that can happen in war will bear the responsibility to unglamorize the gallantry and pagentry of war. War is only glorious if you are watching it on T.V. To a soldier war is a day in day out kind of numbness. Pain like freedom is something that civilians can indulge themselves in. The soldier has not the space nor the time for such luxuries. He must endure. He must sometimes look away and sometimes he must fight. Only if we do not sucomb to indifference can we hope never to be numb again, to look away or to fight. But, I hope we never lose the will to fight or to help one another. God Bless the Veterans, God Bless America, and God Bless the people in the boats on the South China Sea.

