

March 29, 00

Mike,

Thanks a lot for taking the time to talk to me last night. It helped my spirits a lot.

I'm sending this, primarily I guess, to see if the quality of the writing, and the perspective on the war is anything the VHPA might be interested in. By the perspective, I mean relating happenings in Vietnam to emotional consequences, and values learned. I know that after I started dealing with the emotional consequence (not of my own doing but by circumstance) I felt that I was the only person that had been effected in that way. As I talk to veterans I find that many, if not all, have been effected in similar ways. It did me tremendous good just to find out that I wasn't all alone with my reaction or in my perspective on things.

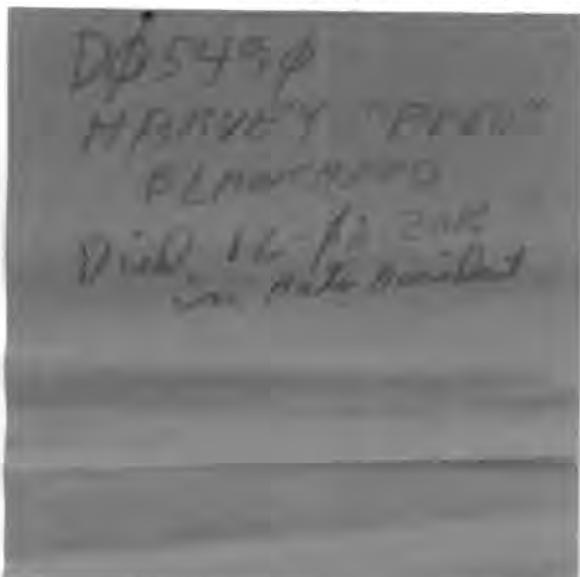
Like I said, if I submit this to be published I will edit it extensively. I'll drop most of the specific finger pointing, except maybe for politicians and the like. Also, after talking to you, I have realized that the good and funny sides of the experience also need to be written about. As you said, a story for the VHPA has a different purpose that does an account written for family and those effected by the consequences of my experiences.

Also a word of explanation. The Overview portion of the paper talks about problems that I continue to have. Those problems still exist but they have been very much better the last few months. I'm not sure why. Perhaps being able to explain and defend myself to loved ones was what helped. Perhaps doing that and having it accepted was the key. Or perhaps my doing better is just temporary. I do know that writing about Vietnam has always given me energy that I don't often have for other things.

One other thing: There are a lot of stereotypes about Vietnam veterans and their problems. Most of them don't have much to do with reality. But I've gotten the idea a couple of times that people, including Charlie Horse members, have assumed the wrong things when they have found out that I have had "problems" associated with the war. I'm afraid this paper might reinforce those ideas with you. So for the record, although there have been the problems described in the paper; I'm not having flashbacks, haven't had any problems with drugs or alcohol, haven't been jailed or institutionalized, I've held a job for years, I have a good credit rating, I don't beat up family members or strangers, don't run around dressed in jungle fatigues, and I only stick up a few convenience stores a week (but never on Veterans Day). Perhaps you didn't think any of those things but I feel better clearing that up.

I meant to ask if you have flown with any guard units especially Colorado or Wyoming. I flew with the 1022nd Med Det out of Cheyenne for eight years. I also know some of the Colorado guys. Mike Moore with Colorado is considered by me as a pretty good friend even though I've lost touch with him since his divorce. I used to be a member of the Aurora Fire Dept. Gary Adkins, Steve Swaim, and a guy who's name I can't remember all flew with Colorado. Don't know if this has anything to do with anything but I meant to ask. I also meant to ask about your tour. I wish there had been more time.

Anyway here's the paper. Let me know what you think. And thanks a lot for talking to me.



Fred Blanchard

*Fred*  
Removed  
Removed VNCA

March 29, 00

Mike,

Thanks a lot for taking the time to talk to me last night. It helped my spirits a lot.

I'm sending this, primarily I guess, to see if the quality of the writing, and the perspective on the war is anything the VHPA might be interested in. By the perspective, I mean relating happenings in Vietnam to emotional consequences, and values learned. I know that after I started dealing with the emotional consequence (not of my own doing but by circumstance) I felt that I was the only person that had been effected in that way. As I talk to veterans I find that many, if not all, have been effected in similar ways. It did me tremendous good just to find out that I wasn't all alone with my reaction or in my perspective on things.

Like I said, if I submit this to be published I will edit it extensively. I'll drop most of the specific finger pointing, except maybe for politicians and the like. Also, after talking to you, I have realized that the good and funny sides of the experience also need to be written about. As you said, a story for the VHPA has a different purpose that does an account written for family and those effected by the consequences of my experiences.

Also a word of explanation. The Overview portion of the paper talks about problems that I continue to have. Those problems still exist but they have been very much better the last few months. I'm not sure why. Perhaps being able to explain and defend myself to loved ones was what helped. Perhaps doing that and having it accepted was the key. Or perhaps my doing better is just temporary. I do know that writing about Vietnam has always given me energy that I don't often have for other things.

One other thing: There are a lot of stereotypes about Vietnam veterans and their problems. Most of them don't have much to do with reality. But I've gotten the idea a couple of times that people, including Charlie Horse members, have assumed the wrong things when they have found out that I have had "problems" associated with the war. I'm afraid this paper might reinforce those ideas with you. So for the record, although there have been the problems described in the paper; I'm not having flashbacks, haven't had any problems with drugs or alcohol, haven't been jailed or institutionalized, I've held a job for years, I have a good credit rating, I don't beat up family members or strangers, don't run around dressed in jungle fatigues, and I only stick up a few convenience stores a week (but never on Veterans Day). Perhaps you didn't think any of those things but I feel better clearing that up.

I meant to ask if you have flown with any guard units especially Colorado or Wyoming. I flew with the 1022nd Med Det out of Cheyenne for eight years. I also know some of the Colorado guys. Mike Moore with Colorado is considered by me as a pretty good friend even though I've lost touch with him since his divorce. I used to be a member of the Aurora Fire Dept. Gary Adkins, Steve Swaim, and a guy who's name I can't remember all flew with Colorado. Don't know if this has anything to do with anything but I meant to ask. I also meant to ask about your tour. I wish there had been more time.

Anyway here's the paper. Let me know what you think. And thanks a lot for talking to me.

Fred Blanchard



Removed

Removed VNCA

## Explanation and Opinion

The following paper was initially written as a response to a VA questionnaire. It was then expanded with explanations as a means of giving my daughters and loved ones some explanation of my experiences related to the Vietnam War. With the paper now being viewed by people who don't know me well enough to know my perspective on the war and its consequences, a word of explanation about that perspective seems to be in order.

The Vietnam War was, and continues to be, an American tragedy. Americans got into the Vietnam war based on the misinformation, ignorance, deceit, lies and arrogance of their politicians and bureaucrats. Politicians and bureaucrats then kept Americans in the war through the confusion generated by continuing deceptions. Finally, Americans got out of the war based on even more deception. Compounding the problem was the self serving methods and actions of political, military, business, and media leaders who cared more about their own concerns and expedience, than they did for principle and truth. Small wonder Americans have had little luck at coming to some sort of resolution about the war. And small wonder that most Americans are finding it hard to have any confidence in, or good feelings about their personal roles in the war.

The fear and resentment of being blamed for cowardice, cruelty, irresponsibility, immorality, and the like have left Americans needing to rationalize their personal actions. Too many times that rationalization has taken the form of arguments accusing those who acted or thought differently than we did of being cowards, immoral, unethical or corrupt. The logic seems to be that if I can prove that you were wrong, then I must have been right. Therefore I'm blameless. Therefore I'm guilt free. The reality is that few, if any of us, knew at the time what the truth was, much less what to do about it.

Americans got into the war with good intentions. They had been lead to believe that it was a simple and obvious matter of defending Vietnam from the cruelty and oppression that communism represented. We assumed after WWII that we were a powerful noble people who's responsibility it was to save other peoples. We had also learned that tyranny had to be stopped where ever it threatened to spread. With those assumptions Americans almost unanimously went to war in Vietnam. Both the Johnson and the Nixon administrations would continually appeal to those ideals to get support for their policies. As time went by Americans began to doubt that we were really saving the Vietnamese people from anything. We doubted our reasons for being there, our judgment, and our nobility. The longer we stayed the more we doubted. Finally we got out of Vietnam because we could no longer rationalize that we were the good guys, or that we were doing more good than harm. Americans doubted their nobility. The war had started with American innocence and good will, which turned to skepticism and doubt, and ended with cynicism and guilt. The loss of faith in truth, justice, the American way and in American nobility was devastating. Americans looked for someone to blame.

Many Americans believed that they had been deceived, and so, felt justified that they were not to blame. Many others could not bare to think that they had been deceived.

Laying the blame for deceit and incompetence on their political and military institutions, whom both their self image and security was dependent upon, was overwhelming and unthinkable. The most convenient place for the blame, was on the individuals who were directly involved. Veterans got the blame. America rationalized that not only did veterans lose the war, they lost it because they were criminals, cowards, and emotional and moral cripples. Veterans were in no position to answer their accusers. They were not organized. They had no voice. They were isolated, and would become more isolated. That suited those, who in reality, had responsibility for the disaster. Veterans knew truths about the war and American institutions that many did not want to either face or to be known.

No more atrocities, demonstrations of criminal intent, or cowardice occurred during the Vietnam War than occurred in any other American war including WWII. As a matter of fact, Americans fought the war with self imposed restrictions that would have seemed absurd and would not have been tolerated in any other war. Americans who went to war in Vietnam were the same as the Americans who went to any other war. They were also the same as those who would never go to war. With few exceptions, Americans of all groups had good motives. They believed that they were honoring principles of truth, loyalty, and compassion. All were caught up in events beyond their control.

Veterans, though, distinguished themselves in one particular way. Their actions proved that they were also willing to suffer, risk the loss of their futures and their lives for the those principles. For the most part they had been heroes. They have yet to be given credit for that.

The rift caused by Americans need to justify themselves and the consequent finger pointing has done no one any good. Veterans have born the brunt of the damage caused by that rift. The truth is that the experience of the war, itself, caused much less harm to veterans than the treatment they received after they returned to America. Veterans have ended up disillusioned, alienated, outcast, and dishonored. Most veterans returned to America to discover that home did not exist anymore. They have been looked on and treated like emotional cripples and usually as criminals. As of late they are looked on more as victims but still as less than whole individuals. Their sense of self worth and their sense of unity with others in this nation have been ruined. That was their greatest loss. And that is what has done the greatest damage.

It has not been as much a case of veterans having a hard time readjusting to society as it has been the case that society adjusted itself to exclude and ignore veterans and the truths they knew and represented. Americans both at home and in Vietnam have not been guilty of intentional cruelty or crime. If Americans have been guilty of anything it has been in failing to be introspective, to take the responsibility for their own mistakes, and to place whatever blame there is where it belongs.

It is time that Americans look with pride at what they have in common with their veterans. As a group and as a rule, Americans at home and in Vietnam acted with good intentions to honor principles of compassion, loyalty, and truth. Many Americans at home risked their futures and the losses of their loved ones. Americans in Vietnam risked their futures and their lives. Neither can be blamed for their deception. Neither should blame the other for the resultant tragedy.

January 24, 1991

Dear Carl, Gay, Carol,

I received your package yesterday. Thanks for the thoughtfulness. It finally motivated me to write some things that I have wanted and needed to say for a long time. I considered visiting you, feeling that what needs to be expressed, should be face to face.. Now I think that, perhaps, a letter would be more appropriate.

Carl and I were in a unit in Vietnam that had over a third of it's aircrew members killed. Of those killed, Carl was one of three that I loved. I didn't realize how much I cared about any of them until they were gone. Of those three, Carl's loss has effected my life the most. It took ten years and the potential loss of my children before I was willing to deal with what had happened in Vietnam. A lot of reflection has taken place since then.

Carl wasn't John Wayne or any of the other media heroes we thought we were supposed to be like. Carl was like a little brother to me. We spent quite a bit of time together, drawing some peace from each others company, even though no words of great meaning were ever exchanged. At the time, Carl wasn't what I thought that I was supposed to be. Nor was he what I thought that he was supposed to be

, considering the circumstances. Neither of us seemed at all confident in what we were or what we were doing. What Carl was, and what I felt the terrible loss for, was gentle and kind. He had a good heart. But in those days I was under the misimpression that gentleness was a sign of weakness. Since then I've realized that gentleness is a sign of strength. It struck me as absurd that Carl flew gunships with his personality. On the one hand, I thought he should have been flying medivacs. On the other hand, I occasionally suspected he had some hidden cruel streak. Now I understand that his flying gunships was just a sign that he accepted without judgment, those things that life presented him; the same way he accepted without judgment those people who moved in and out of his life. Carl flew the missions and did his job as well as or better than most, without hesitation or complaint. And yet, while the rest of us were denying our fears and consequently the rest of our emotions both good and bad, he was open to his fears. While the rest of us did our jobs with the aid of being emotionless, he did his with his emotions intact. Carl wasn't full of hatred for, or fear of, our alleged enemies. Nor did he have the need to put on fronts of patriotism, bravado, killer instinct, or hate. Carl did what he did because he cared for his friends and because he was trying to keep his self respect intact.

I'm sure Carl knew he was going to die long before it happened. He talked of it often, usually in a kidding way. He was the only person I knew of that made any plans or

preparations for it. And, I think he accepted it. I'm also sure he knew that death was not an end. I know that it is not. After the deaths of Carl and the others, I felt for a long time that they had been left behind. Now I feel that it was me and the others who lived that were truly left behind. I don't agree with the traditional Christian view of heaven as an after life of wealth and excess. I do know that there is an after life of peace even though I don't know its exact nature. That was one of the lessons of Vietnam. The lesson of Carl's death was that spirituality is not some abstract concept that we have to believe in, in order to go to heaven. Spirituality is a tangible unseen side of our everyday experience. It is always there for us, when we are open to it. And it is there on occasion, to affect our lives, at times when we are not open to it.

I was with Carl and John Hunter, as a member of a flight of four aircraft, when they were killed. I clearly remember the last time I sat watching Carl fiddle with his maps as if it were yesterday. And I remember watching his aircraft impact the ground seventy five minutes later. Both John and Carl died very quickly. There couldn't have been any pain. They crashed on a green grassy hillside, on a cool sunny day, about three kilometers east of Laos, in a valley northwest of Khe Sahn. It was my job to rescue them. There wasn't anything I could do. There wasn't anything to be done. But the guilt was overwhelming. So, for the next nine years I told myself that I really didn't care that much about Carl. And so, I kept some distance from you.

I hope you can understand why I've needed to write this.

As it turns out, Carl was then the kind of person, that most of us only realize later in life, we should be.

Part of my comfort is that he is alive with peace. But I still miss him.



P.S. Carl talked a lot about home and fond memories. He spoke most often and with the greatest fondness of Carol. I hope that none of you have to live in Carl's shadow. He wouldn't want that. He would want you to go on just as he has. It took years for me to let Carl go. Finally I understood that I wasn't mourning Carl's loss. I was mourning my loss, of him.

## A VIETNAM WAR PERSONAL HISTORY

Copyright Fred Blanchard 1999

Fred Blanchard (Charlie Horse 23)

March 10, 2000

### Overview

I was an Army Warrant Officer, helicopter pilot, flying with an Air Cavalry Troop from April 1970 until March 1971. As such I participated in the American incursion into Cambodia in May of 1970 and the South Vietnamese incursion into Laos in February of 1971, as well as flying daily missions who's primary purpose was to locate and make contact with VC or NVA forces.

I was originally assigned to Charlie Horse, C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 17th Cavalry, based at DiAn, assigned to 12th Aviation Group, which was assigned to 1st Aviation Brigade. We were attached primarily to the 25th Infantry Division operating in Cambodia out of Tay Ninh, or the 199th Light Infantry Brigade operating out of Xuan Loc in eastern III Corps. In August we moved to Quang Tri and were attached to 5th Mechanized \_\_\_\_\_ Infantry operating along the DMZ and into Laos. Toward the end of 1970 or beginning of 1971 the unit swapped designations with another Air Cavalry Troop and became D Troop, 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry, belonging to the 9th Infantry Division, but still attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry.

During my tour the unit had approximately 1/3 of its aircrew members killed, 1/3 of its aircrew members medivaced out of country, and a few of the remaining 1/3 wounded and then returned to the unit. Our Scout platoon went through all of it's scout crews three times in eight months on the DMZ. The Lift platoon, that I was in, had about fifty percent casualties. I personally was not wounded but was regularly involved in actions where others were killed or wounded and where I felt either some, or a great deal of responsibility. I was also a regular witness to the deaths of enemy soldiers. There was a continuous atmosphere of great threat and great responsibility, a great sense of personal inadequacy, and a continuing ambiguity about the morality of the war.

Related to the morality of the war, which I questioned often: I requested a transfer to a Medical evacuation unit after being in the Cavalry unit about a month. Our CO continually frustrated transfer attempts, first by disapproving the transfer and letting me believe that was the end of it; then by losing paper work or claiming he did not have the time to process the request. Those types of actions continued up until the time he was about to leave the Troop. At that time he approached me and suggested that I submit another request for transfer, which he then approved and forwarded. The transfer was approved by him, Group, 1st Aviation Brigade and then turned down by USARV. By the time I got word back of the disapproval I had less than 5 months left in country and so gave up my attempts to transfer.

JW  
pw

Just as importantly, I was involved in and witness to a military that was preoccupied with politics, at the mercy of the whims of misguided or corrupt politicians and bureaucrats; and often lead by incompetent senior officers who's behavior bordered on the criminal. Officers who saw the war primarily as a career opportunity rather than an ethical or moral responsibility. Officers who constantly put their careers, ego, comfort, and safety ahead of the well being of their troops and the mission. There was an atmosphere of deceit that pervaded everything, and which later, would be blamed on those who showed the greatest loyalty to this country and took the greatest risks. Those who gave the most, ~~risk~~ the most, and lost the most would be blamed for both the misconduct of the war and it's loss. Those who served honorably, and their loved ones, would end up betrayed and profoundly hurt.

After returning home the war was still not over for me as I continued to learn of the deaths of friends who were still in Vietnam. I also started learning things about Americas participation in the war itself that would leave me feeling angry, alienated, distrustful, cynical, and foolish. For years after the war, I would be left with very serious questions about my participation in the war in general, and questions about my personal competence and character. At the same time I would have to deal with an American society, that along with it's institutions, dealt with the Vietnam War and it's aftermath in ways that both humiliated and betrayed it's veterans.

As time went on the stigma of Vietnam took a devastating toll on my life and my self esteem. I learned after a few months that the most intense and powerful experience of my life was to be something that I was expected to keep secret and be ashamed of. Because of my involvement in the war, I was considered an emotional cripple, a criminal, or both. I was shunned and looked down on by teachers and friends that I had formerly been close to. I was told on several occasions that I would not be considered for jobs because I was a Vietnam veteran. I was an embarrassment to my wife who was very socially conscious. The Vietnam experience continually interfered with our marriage. Ten years after the war, when my wife and I were involved in a custody suit, all she had to mention was that I was a vet, and counselors, evaluators and lawyers assumed that her innuendoes about me being unstable and possibly violent were true. No one bothered to check out my background or my references to see if those accusations were actually true. I still believe that being a vet was the primary reason that I lost the custody of my children. Ten years after that, my second wife's parents forbid her to date me after they found out that I was a vet. After we married she was eventually disowned, largely for disobeying her parents and marrying a vet, which embarrassed her status conscious parents.

In 1980, the experiences of Vietnam finally had to be dealt with. Between 1971 and 1980 I lived in a constant state of denial about both, my disastrous marital situation and the consequences of the war. After about 14 months of marriage counseling, I realized the marriage was over. I believe that the loss of the anxiety associated with keeping a terrible marriage together; the relief that came from not having to deceive myself and others about it; the threatened loss of my children; the guilt associated with knowing that I would likely not be able to be the primary influence in their lives; and the guilt of feeling that I was abandoning them to a mother who was mean spirited, unstable, self absorbed, shallow and deceitful, triggered the symptoms associated with PTSD. It began with me waking up in the middle of the night in January 1980 feeling like something

was terribly wrong. Within a couple of weeks I went from denying that Vietnam was an issue in my life to believing that it was. I began to seriously mourn the losses of Vietnam. There was a constant overwhelming sense of sadness. Anytime that I was alone I was crying. My heart literally hurt with a crushing sensation. I found it almost impossible to concentrate. The most minor tasks seemed monumental and overwhelming. I lost 25 pounds in less than five weeks. I could sleep no more than three or four hours a night. Naps were impossible. I began having extreme anxiety attacks that would begin everyday at 12 o'clock, get progressively worse, and then be over at 6 o'clock in the evening. (Later I would realize that between 12 and 6 o'clock I was reliving emotionally, the afternoon of February 11, 1971.) On many days I was incapable of functioning by mid afternoon. After a few months I began to organize my days around the knowledge that I would likely be unable to function in the afternoons. (That life style continued for four years). By March of 1980 I started to worry that I would never feel normal again and I began to consider suicide. By May I doubted my sanity. I didn't just feel worthless, I felt like I was and would always be a liability to my children. I felt like I was worth more as an insurance settlement than as a father. I became almost certain that I would never feel normal. I felt hopeless. I became seriously suicidal. Those feelings continued until the beginning of 1981. For the next eight years I had a conscious death wish. I found myself envious of the dead. Between 1981 and 1988 I was seen by counselors at the Denver Vet Center. Although they knew about most of my problems I kept the suicidal thoughts from them in fear that it would somehow get back to my ex-wife and interfere with my relationship with my children. As the custody and residence of my girls continued to be an issue I also feared that I might, at any time, need a decent evaluation from the counselors that I had been seeing. I was afraid that any mention of suicidal thoughts or feelings would ruin any chance of gaining custody. Even in the shape that I was in, I was still the better custodial parent for my girls. The custody issue overshadowed and took precedence over everything in my life up until my girls were old enough to choose for themselves who they would live with. Since they have been on their own much of the anxiety I had been feeling, along with the panic attacks, have been relieved.

The emotional problems created problems at work. I had joined the Aurora Colorado Fire Department in 1978. After January of 1980 I was functioning almost at the minimal level needed to stay employed and far from what I had been capable of. Later I would realize that I kept my job, in large part, because of the understanding and tolerance of coworkers. Because of emotional problems and an inability to concentrate I later chose to resign my responsibilities as a Rescue Technician, or paramedic, with the department.

Successful completion of promotional processes for other positions was almost an impossibility. The only times I felt close to normal were those times when the adrenaline was running high. The continuing emotional problems would be the major factor in my decision to resign from the Department in 1993. Since leaving the Fire Department and relocated away from Denver a lot of stress and the consequential symptoms have been greatly relieved. My present wife, Pat, has been very supportive. She has relieved much of the sense of alienation and isolation. My wife and our two daughters have added new centers to my life.

Still, the remaining problems have taken away any real sense of enjoyment of life and replaced it with pessimism and worry about the future. While I have some days when

I seem to think extremely clearly, on most days I can't think clearly or concentrate for any length of time. For example, it has taken over a year to get the information and energy together to write this. I view even minor problems or challenges as overly important and overwhelming. In general I feel alien to and different from the rest of society. I believe my value system and outlook on life is greatly different from the general public. As a result I feel distrustful of, and disconnected from, people in groups and society in general. Most activities I enjoy are solitary. I live, with my new family, on a farm in a rural part of Kansas. Our nearest neighbor is a half a mile away. Sleep is a problem. I usually get up for an hour or so in the middle of the night three to four times a week. Many mornings I wake up startled or panicked. I can't remember any of my dreams. My wife tells me that I occasionally sit up startled in the middle of the night although I have no recollection of that. I have trouble getting to sleep if there is any minor problem on my mind. Although things have gotten better, depression and anxiety have been a constant problem since 1980. I find myself short tempered when I don't think that anything is bothering me. I usually cannot keep a train of thought going and often forget what I was doing or why I was doing it. Minor projects cause disproportionate anxiety as I have little confidence in my ability to think clearly. There is usually little sense of achievement when I do complete a project; just relief that it is over. A year ago a Doctor who was staying with us diagnosed me as being dysthymic. He thought that new medications available would surely help. That got me back on the road to looking for treatments. Initially medications didn't help except briefly. But they did show me that I could do better. Since last September I have been taking Buspar which has helped noticeably. I still can't function mentally as well as I did before 1980. Many days are accompanied by a very strong sense of worthlessness. There are almost constant feelings of unworthiness. I define myself, first as a father and husband and second as a veteran. The war, it's consequences, and it's lessons are on my mind everyday.

*cont*

On the whole the Vietnam war was a disaster. Contrary to prevailing thought, there were many very fine people there of all ranks, of all services, and of all job descriptions who repeatedly demonstrated, at great risk to themselves, their integrity, their love for their friends, their love for their country, and compassion for the Vietnamese. Many took great risks to insure that Vietnamese civilians and noncombatants were not endangered. I saw that happen repeatedly. Considering that the following account is of the frustrations and tragedies of the war often related to failures of our leadership, a word of explanation and a good word for some is in order as a preface.

My second CO, Maj. Rodney Wolf, was an excellent officer and an exceptional person. He had integrity, was competent and very concerned for the welfare of his troops. He didn't expect his troops to do anything that he wouldn't do. He was one of the few Field Grade officers that I admired. Captain Phil Nelson, our Scout platoon leader, was a career officer. He was a Westpoint graduate. If he had an ego I never saw it. He had integrity, was competent, dedicated, fair-minded and compassionate. My third platoon leader, Captain Tom Ford was also competent, concerned for his troops, fair minded, and compassionate. He took risks and did jobs that he easily could have assigned to someone else. He was an excellent example as a human being. CW2 Harold Coverdale, one of our scouts, would repeatedly hold his fire in order to insure that innocents were not hurt. He was repeatedly shot up and shot down for his attitude. Almost all of the junior officers, non commissioned officers and enlisted men that I knew repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to take extreme risks in order to accomplish their mission and to protect or rescue others. I am very proud to have been associated with them. It angers me a lot that they returned home to unjustified criticism and contempt. They were dishonored, humiliated, and betrayed: When they were in fact, heroes.

The following narrative and opinion is geared primarily to combat veterans. Without getting to far off on a tangent, a further word of explanation is needed. Non combat veterans also suffer from many of the same problems that their combat counterparts do. During the Vietnam war it was common knowledge that regardless of the draft, there were ways to avoid military service. We all knew that we did have a choice. The choice some made was to honor their sense of responsibility to this society by way of military service; even though it meant giving up control of their lives. Those that made that choice also knew that few of us, going into the military, would be able to choose what we would do or where we would do it. We all knew, going in, that the luck of the draw would determine if we would end up in combat. We also knew that if we did end up in combat, the subsequent consequences would be a matter of pure chance. This is not to take anything away from those who volunteered for combat duty. But for most, the moment that most proved the veterans love of this society, was when they took their oath of service. At that moment, they proved that they were **willing to risk** their lives and their futures **to try** to do what was right. All would share in the coming humiliation and betrayal.

There is another group that generally go unnoticed but who have been very seriously affected by the war. Those people are the loved ones of the veterans. Most of them would sharply feel the consequences of the war and share in the subsequent humiliation and betrayal. They had supported the choices of this society and the choices of their loved ones. They would be left to pick up the pieces. Their pain would be commensurate with that of their loved ones. Society would also turn it's back on them and the truths they represented. Their suffering would go ignored and unrecognized: Their personal losses unappreciated. They would end up confused, alienated, outraged and heart broken.

Lastly I need to make a comment about awards for valor to clarify later statements. I certainly do not want to discredit those who deserved awards and received them. But, there were many instances when the awards system was used inappropriately in Vietnam. Perhaps the most inappropriate misuse, was not when people were given awards that they didn't deserve, but when people were not given recognition that they did deserve. Our Scout crews were a good example. The job they did was essential and very hazardous. They were all volunteers. Every time they took off they knew that the odds were heavily against them completing their tour without being wounded or killed. From my perspective, they deserved a medal every time they took off, for the risks they demonstrated they were willing to take. They got little, if any, official recognition, appreciation or thanks. That was exemplary of an official attitude, common with all types of units in Vietnam, toward individuals who routinely took personal risks to accomplish their mission. Too often politics, habit, expedience, the need for unit visibility or invisibility and the like, took precedence over the need to acknowledge personal effort. The following narrative may lead the reader to conclude that everyone in Vietnam got official recognition; the majority of them when they didn't deserve it. Unfortunately many, though not the majority, did get awards they didn't deserve. But the truth is that few got the official recognition, commensurate with their actions, that they deserved.

## Combat History

CHARLIE HORSE  
C Troop 3rd Squadron 17th Air Cavalry.  
12th Aviation Group  
1st Aviation Brigade  
D Troop 3rd Squadron 5th Air Cavalry.  
9th Infantry Division  
U.S. Army

By 1970 the primary job of Air Cavalry Troops was to locate and gather information on NVA and VC units. Visual Reconnaissance, or VR, missions were the way that job was done. VR missions probably accounted for 95% of our Troops activities. Scout helicopters literally tracked NVA and VC units down. Scout helicopters would work at or below tree top level and usually at less than 40 mph. At the altitudes and the speeds the scouts worked they took terrible losses. On the DMZ, our scout pilots, observers and crew chiefs were lasting an average of two months before they were either killed or medivaced out of Vietnam. Circling above the scout would be one or two AH-1G Cobra gunships plus a Huey loaded with five troops. The scout would relay a description of what he was finding to the gunships. They would keep track of where he was and what he was finding. That information would then go to the Tactical Operations Center, or TOC, at Division level. The gunships primary purpose was to give the scout cover and engage enemy troops or positions as soon as they were found. Charlie Horse included a Huey in the VR team. The Huey was considered a support or chase aircraft for the team itself and was there primarily to rescue any downed team members, to provide cover fire for the rest of the team and to adjust artillery on targets inappropriate for the gunships.

Air Cavalry units were the only aviation units that had their own troops. When an area needed closer scrutiny that our scouts weren't capable of, our troops were air lifted in and had a hands on look. When our aircraft were shot down the chase aircraft would land immediately and the troops it had on board would perform the ground portion of the rescue. The Lift platoon or section, flying Hueys, also inserted, resupplied, and extracted American Ranger teams. Rarely the Lift section would work to move or supply other units troops. That job was generally left to Assault Helicopter companies.

Generally speaking, the working end of an Air Cavalry Troop was made up of four platoons or sections. The Scout platoon was equipped with six to seven light observation helicopters (nic named Loaches), either OH-6s or the OH-58s that we flew. The Weapons platoon was equipped with seven AH-1G Cobra gunships. The Lift platoon was equipped with seven UH-1H Huey utility helicopters. And the Aerial Rifle platoon was an infantry unit consisting of four squads of six troops each. For support there was also a Maintenance platoon, a Signal detachment, and a Headquarters platoon.

In 1970-71 there were four Air Cavalry Troops, (A, B, C, and D Troops), in our Air Cavalry Squadron. We were C Troop of the 3rd Squadron of the 17th Air Cavalry, written as C Trp.3/17th Air Cav. Our call sign and our name was Charlie Horse. I was Charlie Horse 23.

TOC  
9-10

During my tour we were regularly (once or twice a week) in contact with enemy units in which we would exchange fire. I am not able to list the majority of them. Contrary to prevailing thought, there was as much or more stress from worry about the safety of friends, loved ones, and those I felt responsible for as there was stress from concerns of my own safety. The losses of friends and loved ones, together with the circumstances we worked under were the things that caused the stress and brought home the sense of living under a continual threat. Adding to the problem was the fact that almost every time we took off I had nine people on board that I felt very responsible for. My primary role, most often, was to provide rescue to downed aircraft in our unit. There was continual conflict in my mind about how far I should risk the nine people I had on board to possibly save two or three. The unwritten unit policy, which I early on adopted as my own, was to attempt immediate rescue no matter what the circumstances. There was also continual personal conflict between how I viewed my actions in a war that I felt was a personal issue as opposed to how I viewed my actions in a war that I disagreed with politically. That problem would nag myself and other veterans both personally and socially for years. We saw the war and our actions in it from the perspective of personal experiences. Our society saw the war only as a political or moral issue; and many preferred to see us as the willing accomplices of misguided and corrupt politicians.

The following are narratives of the events that I remember the most and that I think have influenced me the most. Those narratives often end with a personal comment. Most often when I use the word "we" I am referring to both veterans and their loved ones.

April 1970  
DiAn  
C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry

In country briefing by our Squadron Commanding Officer. Standing beside a chart that listed all of the medals that Squadron members had won, our CO assured us that we would all leave with this medal or that medal. I didn't think much about it at the time. Later I would come to understand that to many of our leaders it was just another way of keeping score of our apparent successes: Body counts and medals. People would get medals that truly deserved them: But more commonly, people would not get medals or even a thank you when they truly deserved them. And people would get medals that more properly should have been court marshaled. The system discredited and dishonored those who either deserved recognition or properly received awards.

April 1970  
West of Xuan Loc  
C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 199th Light Infantry Brigade

Unit suffered it's first KIA after I was assigned to it. I wasn't even flying that day. One of our ground troops, or ARPs (Aero Rifle Platoon) was killed in a very brief fire fight. I didn't know him. I didn't know how to react and I felt guilty about it. And I felt like an outsider.

April 29, 1970

Xuan Loc area.

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 199th Light Infantry Brigade

One of our scouts crashed into a pond or small lake. Later there would be various theories about what had caused the crash. The pilot, Willard Sparky Cannon, survived the crash and helped rescue, or did rescue, his crew chief from the wreckage and dragged him to shore. Another unit's Huey, call sign Greyhound, was on the scene and flew them to Xuan Loc. There they transferred to a medivac and were flown to a hospital at Long Binh. The attention during the fifteen minute flight was on the injured crew chief. On arrival at Long Binh, Sparky was discovered dead of internal injuries. His crew chief was medivaced out of Vietnam. I was beginning to see that heroism would be shown in unexpected forms at unexpected times. Death also would be coming in unexpected forms, from unexpected directions, at unexpected times. Heroism and dying were not what the movies had taught. But then, nothing would be as the movies had taught.

May 1, 1970

Cambodia west of Tay Ninh

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 25th Infantry Division.

Three of our troops were shot stepping off of the Lift aircraft during an insertion. None of the three aircraft in the landing zone took a hit. I felt badly that I hardly knew them: Or that I didn't know them well enough to feel a lot for them. But I was starting to get the idea that the Lift platoon itself was somehow blessed. Perhaps we couldn't get hit. Perhaps we were even immortal.

Spring 1970

Xuan Loc area

C Trp.3rd.Sqd. 17th Air Cavalry attached to 199th Light Infantry

Our Squadron CO (Redhorse 6) and our Troop CO (Charlie Horse 6) decide they needed or deserved medals. While flying together they monitored a request on the radio for the evacuation of an American KIA. The fire fight was already over. One of Charlie Horses Lift platoon aircraft was already making his approach to pick up the dead GI. Redhorse 6 told him to abandon his approach. Redhorse 6 and Charlie Horse 6 then landed and picked up the casualty. The LZ was secure and there was little if any risk involved. Afterward, Redhorse 6 awarded Charlie Horse 6 a Silver Star for gallantry. In return, Charlie Horse 6 wrote Redhorse 6 up for a Distinguished Service Cross also for gallantry, which I assume, he was subsequently awarded. I was shocked. But I was beginning to see how things worked in Vietnam.

May 30, 1970

Cambodia west of Tay Ninh City

C Trp.3rd Sqd,17th Air Cavalry attached to 25th Infantry Division

Copilot on rescue of downed scout aircraft. Wounded in the crash were the pilot, CW2 Harold Coverdale, and copilot WO1 Tom Crosser. Tom was and is an admired friend. I met Tom my first day in the Army and became good friends with him as we attended basic training and flight school together. Tom took my place in the Scout platoon and was seriously wounded less than two months later. I felt a lot of guilt about what had happened to him. The war was beginning to become personal.

June 1970

Cambodia west of Tay Ninh

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 25th Infantry Division

1st Lt. Larry Brown was shot down and force landed in a dry rice paddy field. (By the time Larry finished his second tour with Charlie Horse he had been shot down five times and crashed twice with mechanical failures.) After his chase aircraft picked him up, the rest of us were assigned to recover his aircraft. The insertion of our troops and the retrieval of the aircraft went well. When we tried to extract our troops the NVA had other ideas. I was still flying as copilot. I remember sitting up exposed on the rice paddy dikes loading troops while we took automatic weapons fire out of tree lines about 150 meters away from us on one side and 100 meters away from us on the other side. I still clearly remember the muzzle flashes in a dozen different places from the NVA gunners. No one was wounded. No aircraft took a hit. I was just about convinced that the Lift platoon was blessed and that I was immortal.

June 1970

An Loc, Tay Ninh area during Cambodian incursion

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 25th Infantry Division

- The Lift platoon and our ARP's chased American politicians around. Responding to the public uproar about the U.S. presence in Cambodia, a group of politicians, all hawks, came to Vietnam to "learn the truth." We chased them around all day. Besides us, they had about a dozen gunships swarming around them for security. They didn't go anywhere the generals didn't want them to go. They didn't see anything the generals didn't want them to see. They didn't go to Cambodia. They didn't go anywhere they would be in any danger. As far as I know, they never talked to any of the troops, outside of pleasantries. They went home heroes for having risked their lives to find the truth. I'm sure they got plenty of votes out of it. Our scouts had flown the day without rescue or troop support. A week or so later we would do it all over again with a bunch of political doves. Our

scouts took the risk, the politicians got the credit. Appearance mattered more than substance. I would see it continually through out the war. I was starting to understand that the people actually doing the fighting were just cannon fodder for the generals and politicians. And I was learning that rank or titles do not equate with integrity.

June 1970

Cambodia northwest of Tay Ninh

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 25th Infantry Division

Captain Bob, was a nice guy but a burned out pilot. He had finished a year tour and was working on a six month extension. Bob was a regular side show at the mess hall. He had the shakes so bad he couldn't eat peas without flinging them off whatever utensil he was using. There were times when he couldn't point to a specific spot on a map. So one fine day, Bob flies all nine of us over a target knowing that a fighter is in bound on his bomb run. Bob took no evasive action, he just watched the fighter come repeatedly saying "I don't believe this." The fighter pulled up after releasing his bombs and flew under us looking up at us. He was so close that if he would have been going slower I could have read whatever it was the pilot had written on his helmet. Later Bob would confuse two completely different looking villages that he had flown around for a year. I was learning that rank or titles do not equate with competence. Bob would soon be our platoon leader.

June 1970

Cambodia north of Tay Ninh

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 25th Infantry Division

We were to provide a screen from the air for an armored unit that was to sweep through an NVA base area. Before the armored unit moved we sat on the ground with them watching the NVA base area be hit with an airstrike. As soon as it was done, we cranked up, the armored unit got underway, and I was impressed with how smoothly everything was going. As soon as the armored unit got into the NVA base area, American artillery fired a barrage into them. Instead of screening for them we medivaced their wounded.

My doubts about the competence of Army leadership deepened.

June 1970

Cambodia west of Tay Ninh

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th.Air Cavalry attached to 25th Infantry Division

The team I was with was dispatched to check out a Yellow Jacket report. In other words, an NVA radio transmitter had been located by triangulation and we were supposed to go find it and destroy it. When we reached the area it was supposed to be in, we found an open dry rice paddy field with a small creek meandering through it. There were fairly large bushes along its bank. There was no sign of a radio transmitter. The scout found several people hiding in the bushes who he could not get to come out and identify themselves. There was no way to tell for certain who they were. For scouts to survive they had to shoot first and ask questions later. We were in a free fire zone. The scout was very exposed. He had tried shooting over the heads of the people in the bushes. He had tried CS gas. They wouldn't come out. Finally he told W01 Rich Torres the pilot of the gunship who lead the team, that he was going to shoot to kill. I was still a relative new guy and still flying as copilot. My job was to keep my mouth shut and do whatever I was told. I got on the radio and argued to let the people on the ground go. Torres agreed and told the scout to leave them be. I didn't know quite what to think. I had a role in saving their lives, but they were probably NVA. Perhaps as a result, someone else on our side would die. Months later Rich Torres told me that incident had been one of the things that had made him reconsider his role in the war. As such he left the Weapons platoon as a gunship pilot, and became it's maintenance officer. I was glad.

June 1970

DiAn

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry

Scott Wendt returned to Charlie Horse. Scott had been an IP (instructor pilot) at squadron level. He and another IP, Jerry Spiers, had refused to go along with a cover up. Squadron had sent a pilot to Qui Nhon, I believe, to pick up a new OH-6. Everyone knew he could fly the aircraft but he wasn't officially qualified to fly it. He crashed on the return flight killing everyone onboard. Squadron wanted Scott and Jerry to go along with the cover up which meant falsifying documents. They both refused. Jerry was transferred completely out of Vietnam. Scott was transferred out of Squadron to C Troop. C Troop was where Squadron sent it's problem children.

KJA

June 19, 1970

DiAn

C Trp.3rd Sqd.17th Air Cavalry

I passed my 22nd Birthday. That was about the average age for Warrant Officer helicopter pilots. Charlie Horse had one pilot that was 19. We also had an old guy, Gary Lusk. Gary was 26. The average age for Commissioned Officers who regularly flew combat missions was probably 23 or 24. We would be forced to routinely make snap life and death decisions. We were not prepared for that kind of responsibility or equipped to deal with the emotional consequences. Few in our society have ever had the experience of making those kinds of choices. Of those who would later judge us harshly; I doubt that any had ever had the experience of having to make even a minor decision under such circumstances.

June 1970

DiAn

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry

Captain M was transferred to a staff position at Squadron. Captain M was a very nice guy. He was the first person I met in country that had words of understanding and encouragement for me. He was big, strong, and very book smart. I doubt that he could have tied his shoelaces without an instruction manual. He had no common sense or leadership ability. He had come in country trained to fly Cobra gunships. He couldn't handle the copilots job in a Cobra. So he was promoted to Platoon Leader in the Lift platoon. When he couldn't handle that either he was promoted to Troop Executive Officer. From there he went to Squadron. I was surprised to learn that the Army would promote incompetent people, into positions of increased responsibility, in order to get rid of them. A few months later I would take that concept for granted.

June 30, 1970

DiAn

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry

U.S. withdrew from Cambodia. The 11th Armored Cavalry was co-located at DiAn with the 3/17th Air Cavalry. When the 11th Armored Cavalry withdrew from Cambodia they had been in the field approximately two months. They pulled out of Cambodia and drove straight through to DiAn, a distance of about 80 or 100 miles. Coinciding with their arrival at DiAn, a colonel was placed at the door of the Post Exchange, (the only place you could buy soap, clothing, shoe polish and the like), and he would not allow anyone in without their boots shined or their hair cut. Appearance was the issue in Vietnam: Not combat.

June 1970

Xuan Loc area

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 199th Light Infantry Brigade

A medivac helicopter (Dustoff) crashed while being covered by one of our gunships. A medivac helicopter had an engine failure at a hover above the tree tops while trying to rescue wounded using his hoist. I can't remember the cost in injured. A friend of mine from flight school, who was flying with that medivac unit, told me that they couldn't get replacement engines because of cost cutbacks. So they were flying their engines way past overhaul times. They had other crashes for the same reason. We would have the same problem later in getting rockets for our gunships. But there was always plenty of money for the officers clubs.

July 1970

Xuan Loc area

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 199th Light Infantry Brigade

After policing the bodies of VC which our unit had killed, I viewed the personal effects of one of the individuals killed. Among his effects was a photo taken of himself and one of his friends, smiling and with their arms around each other's shoulders. There was white lattice in the background. It brought home to me the fact that we were fighting other people, much like ourselves, who were also there because they believed what their leaders told them. Like us, they were doing what they were told to do. The incident pretty much got rid of what little aggressive feelings I had for the "enemy." I then felt conflicted between my responsibility to protect my friends and myself, from people that I had a hard time believing were enemies of ours, and my conscience. The war became more personal and more confusing.

July 4, 1970

Operations in the Xuan Loc area. North northeast of FSB Mace.

C Trp.3rd Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 199th Light Infantry Brigade

W01 Mark Jernigan and W01 Frank Stearns were shot down and killed flying an AH-1G Cobra gunship. While returning from a visual reconnaissance mission they unexpectedly discovered Viet Cong in a clearing and attacked. They never pulled out of their dive and crashed. The VC disappeared before we could react. It was over and done in seconds. More unexpected death.

*KIA*

July 1970

Xuan Loc area

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 199th Light Infantry Brigade  
Northeast of FSB Mace.

While flying copilot with our Troop CO, I was present at the death of a possible VC prisoner who had been wounded. We had inserted our troops to check out three individuals that had been shot evading one of our aircraft. Only one of the individuals was carrying a weapon. Our troops, in contact with our CO by radio, repeatedly ask for a medivac for one of the individuals who had been shot in the neck. Our CO's only reply was to tell our troops to interrogate the wounded individual. He was repeatedly told that the individual could not talk as he had been wounded in the throat. There were repeated requests for medivac only to be met with demands to interrogate the individual. After several minutes our troops reported that the person had died. The incident raised more questions about the morality of what we were doing, the morality of our CO, and questions about what, if anything, I could have done to intervene. It was obvious that the political excuses for the war had either been forgotten or had become a joke. The war became more personal.

July 1970

DiAn

C Trp.3rd.Sqd 17th Air Cavalry

Our Squadron CO informed us that C Troop, alone, would be going to work the DMZ. The DMZ was known to be a very bad place. In the past we had complained about how tough we had it in III Corps. All of a sudden III Corps looked pretty damn good. Our Squadron CO, sensing our uneasiness, told us not to fret. He said he would bring our Troop back to III Corps. in ninety days. He was a liar; so we fretted.

Throughout the first few months I was also learning things that put the war into a certain perspective. For example: 1. In order to make sure that all of it's officers got a shot at command of a combat unit, which was a big deal for career officers, the Army came up with a fairness policy. Under this policy, all officers were to spend six months in command of a combat unit. It could only be six months since there were too many officers and not enough combat units. Besides helping career officers get promoted, what this policy did was ensure that combat units were lead by inexperienced officers. Just about the time an officer began to know what he was doing, his six months would be up and the unit would get the next inexperienced officer. It wasn't much of a war, but it was the only war we had; or so an officer corps slogan went. Going along with this inexperienced thing was the fact that almost all of the Field Grade officers had been trained for conventional war in Europe. Most had never been in combat. The last time many had even been in a fox hole was during OCS years before Vietnam. They didn't

know what they were doing and they weren't going to admit it. But their troops knew it. 2. The awards system for aviators was absurd and encouraged recklessness. Generally speaking, awards were not given until a pilot was either wounded or shot down. Most often, at the time most pilots were either wounded or shot down, they were probably doing the same thing they had been doing for weeks or months without so much as a thank you. I mention this now as it played into a disaster on February 11, 1971. 3. Rich Vietnamese could buy their way out of military service. So it was the poor who fought the war to keep the rich, rich. I understood completely why they were reluctant to fight. 4. We compensated the rubber plantation owners around one hundred dollars for every tree we damaged. The compensation for dead civilians was forty dollars. It was hard to believe that we were helping the Vietnamese people fight for their rights as human beings.

Unfortunately at the same time I was judging others for their moral and ethical ineptitude I was also having to face my own. By July 1970 I was feeling confident enough in myself that I was beginning to take on a sense of personal responsibility for what was happening around me. After arriving in Vietnam I had fast come to the conclusion that the war was wrong both morally and politically. My experiences were deepening that conviction. And even if the war was not wrong morally or politically, I felt that I was complicit in the criminally unethical and incompetent way in which it was being conducted. Consequentially, for some time, I had been questioning my own integrity and character for being a part of it. Those doubts about myself and the subsequent guilt would nag me for years. It would leave me feeling that I had no right to point fingers at anyone, or to make moral judgments. It would also leave me feeling that society had a justifiable reason for its contempt for me. It would be years before I would understand that society's responsibility for the disaster in Vietnam was just as great as my own or any other veteran. Society had no room to point fingers.

But in the spring of 1970 I was facing an immediate moral and ethical dilemma of my own. My attempts to transfer to a medivac unit were being frustrated. My only other choice was to simply refuse to be a part of the war. At the time, I didn't have the knowledge of the war, or perspective on life that would give me confidence in a decision to refuse to fight. And I was pretty sure that refusing to fight would leave me labeled a coward and, at best, land me in Long Binh Jail. That would humiliate my family and myself, and worse, I would end up ostracized from people I both cared about and felt responsible to. The truth of the matter was that I would rather risk getting shot than face accusations of cowardice and certain humiliation and ostracism. I didn't have the confidence or the courage to say no. It would be a secret that I would have to fashion my life around for years.

The longer I stayed in Vietnam the less the war was looked on by me as a lofty and confusing issue of national morality or politics. That perspective was quickly fading. I didn't hate our adversaries in combat. Like our adversaries in combat, the war for me had become primarily about protecting my friends and myself from immediate harm.

It was a good thing, I guess, that by the time I became aware of the nature and the consequences of much that was going on, I could rationalize that the war for me, had ceased to be a national moral or political question at all, and had become completely personal.

August 1970

Quang Tri

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Charlie Horse moved to Quang Tri. We began work for the 5th Mechanized Infantry along the DMZ from the coast west to Laos. The DMZ would be much more stressful and more depressing than III Corps. But it had at least one advantage. The enemy troops we would encounter would be uniformed North Vietnamese Regulars. The local villagers had all been resettled into one or two large camps. Almost all of our missions would be flown over and into NVA controlled territory. The war would be much more like a conventional war than a guerrilla war. As such we didn't have to worry about civilian casualties as we had in III Corps. The war was less confusing.

August 22, 1970

Quang Tri province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Approximately 2 kilometers west of the Rock Pile

One of our scouts flown by a well liked Lt. who's name I can't remember was shot down. His observer, Spc.4 Robert Leon Dunaway Jr., and crew chief, Spc.5 Paul Ward, were killed. During his rescue the semi conscious pilot talked about crashing in a stream bed and nearly drowning. In truth he had crashed on a hill top. He had been pinned in the wreckage in such a way that his face had been pushed into a depression in the ground. He nearly drowned in the blood of Robert Dunaway who was suspended above him. I led the Lift platoons flight to rescue him and didn't do a very good job.

Fall 1970

Quang Tri province northwest of the Rock Pile

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

While on a visual reconnaissance flight a scout burst into flames and went into the trees inverted. There was no radio transmission from the pilot. The crew was assumed to be dead and the resulting operation was organized around the idea that it was a body recovery. The pilot, W01 Osborn was found dazed but alive. He had a relatively minor burn on his shoulder. It wasn't his time. Fate was deciding who lived and who died. Not us.

Fall 1970

Quang Tri province southwest of the Rock Pile.

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

W01 Mike Brush, another of our scouts was shot down. While flying low and coming over a rise Mike took 50 cal. machine gun fire while in a turn. The aircraft took six hits through the windshield; two or three through the green house; two or three in the crew chief's back rest; a couple in the engine compartment; and several down the tail boom. By explanation, a 50 cal. bullet has just over half again the diameter of a 30 cal. bullet. But it must have ten times the kinetic energy. It doesn't just punch bigger holes, it blows things to bits. Those bits turn into shrapnel that tear other things apart. One 50 cal. hit is serious. The scout helicopters were less than five feet wide. The pilot and observer sat shoulder to shoulder. The entire crew should have been killed. The only wound that Mike, his observer, or crew chief suffered was a cut finger. A bullet coming through a radio control head had torn shrapnel loose that cut Mike's little finger to the bone. All wounds that involved a bone were shipped to Japan, if not the U.S. Mike left Vietnam. Fate was also deciding our futures. Some of us were, indeed, immortal.

September 22, 1970

Quang Tri army base

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Jackie Ray Brooks, one of the Lt platoon crew members and a very well liked individual committed suicide by shooting himself. 1st. Lt. Kurt Mueller and other crew members were present in the room with him when he did it. He was taken to the hospital where he died a short time later. He had received a Dear John letter.

November 18, 1970

Quang Tri military base

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

CW2 Ben Miller and W01 Thomas A. Knopik were both killed when the tailboom on a new Huey separated in midair. I landed at the crash site and viewed their bodies as they were taken away. Tom Knopik had been a friend since I arrived in Vietnam. He had been responsible for my orders to Pilot in Command and consequently Aircraft Commander. The details of his death were not released to the family, at least as far as telling them that a brand new aircraft had a structural failure that may have given them grounds for redress from Bell Helicopter. I felt the Army had betrayed the family to protect itself. For my part, I felt guilt that I had been glad that it had not been me.

Fall 1970  
Quang Tri  
C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry

I found out that aircrews had been asking to fly with me. No medal could have made me feel more honored. It was the good side, of the personal side, of the war.

November 27, 1970  
Quang Tri  
C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th. Air Cavalry

The red cross informed me that my oldest daughter was born. I tried to call my wife but got mostly static from the poor connection. As such, I had my daughters name wrong for over a week. Her birth would become the most important event in my life. After I returned home, the knowledge that I was still capable of feeling unconditional love and affection for someone would be a major, if not the only factor, in me being able to feel any self worth. She would become the center of my life. Six years later that center would expand with the birth of a second daughter.

Fall of 1970  
Quang Tri Province near Khe Sahn  
C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Mechanical failure and emergency. I had a transmission oil pressure failure miles from friendly forces. I landed at deserted Khe Sahn. The loss of transmission oil pressure in a UH-1 helicopter can lead directly to complete structural failure of the aircraft. Bell helicopter representatives told us that after loosing transmission oil pressure the aircraft had between 30 and 90 seconds before the transmission would seize and the aircraft would come apart. W01 Jim Pero was my copilot. We were more than 30 seconds from the ground when Jim discovered the pressure loss. To add to the problem, I didn't know how long we had already been without pressure. We were miles from friendlies and over NVA controlled territory. 1st Lt. Al Wester and W01 Carl Nacca were pilots in one of the gunships that came to our assistance. During the recovery of my aircraft, one of our mechanics broke his leg. The Chinook helicopter that would sling my aircraft out was seriously damaged. It lost one of it's engines on the flight back to Quang Tri and did not have the power to hover with the load it had. Instead of setting my aircraft down gently the Chinook was forced to drop it while making a low pass down the runway. My aircraft was trashed. Lt. Wester ran out of fuel and crashed destroying his gunship. As a result, Wester lost his flight status for several weeks. No one was killed. Not a bad day.

Fall 1970

Quang Tri province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Highway 9, halfway between FSB Vandergriff and Khe Sanh

Extraction of an Army Ranger team while under fire by American artillery. The landing zone which was in the mountains, was being repeatedly used at the direction of the 5th Mechanized Infantry TOC (Tactical Operations Center) as an insertion point for Ranger teams. The repeated use of any landing zone in enemy territory was against any tactical common sense. As such, I was expecting NVA gunners to be waiting for us. After inserting the team, and immediately after takeoff, the team was surrounded by explosions that I assumed to be NVA rockets. I continued the turn I was in and began an approach to the LZ to extract the Rangers while they were under fire. After landing and loading I found that the helicopter was too heavy to fly outside of translational lift at that altitude. Expecting to be blown apart at any moment I used the power that I did have to slide the aircraft over to the top of a cliff and drive over the edge. I got enough forward speed to achieve translational lift before we hit the cliff face and we were flying. A short time later, one of the gunships that escorted me found out that instead of it being NVA gunners that were shooting at us, it was American artillery. They were firing on seismic sensors the Air Force had placed, which we activated by landing near them. My lack of confidence in our leaderships ability to coordinate and show some competence was confirmed. I wanted to know who to complain to. I was told not to make waves. We were cannon fodder.

Fall 1970

Quang Tri

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Sure enough, our Squadron CO hadn't lied to us after all. Our Troop received orders to return to good old III Corps. just like he said it would. Our paraphrased orders read; C Trp.3rd Sqd.17th Air Cavalry was to return to III Corps. minus all personnel and all equipment. Our name was going back to III Corps. The left over personnel and equipment would be called D Trp.3rd Sqd.5th Air Cavalry; and would work for 5th Mechanized Infantry along the DMZ. I was disappointed. And I was surprised; but I wasn't.

Fall 1970

Quang Tri province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Approximately 1 kilometer south of the DMZ and north of Charlie 4

More high level incompetence kills our own. Anyone who had any experience in the field knew that NVA troops would not initiate engagements with helicopter gunships unless they were cornered and had no choice, or unless they thought they had more firepower than the gunships. If they did initiate an engagement when they weren't cornered we knew they had heavy fire power on their side and the area they were in was very dangerous. Twice in four days, in this one particular location, we had lost scout helicopters escorted by gunships and slicks (troop transports) to NVA gunners who initiated the engagement. Anyone should have known that it was a very dangerous area. The day after we lost our second scout we were sent further west to work near the Laotian border. The 5th Mech TOC sent two unescorted scout helicopters, from another unit, into the area without warning them about the danger there. We spent the afternoon retrieving their bodies. I remember landing next to the completely burned up wreckage of one of the scouts. Still sitting upright amid the ashes was the body of one of the crew members. He was positioned as if he were driving a car. The only reason I recognized that he was a person was that he still had his flight helmet on. When we complained about the incompetence we were told to forget it. "People get killed in wars." I had little problem with people making mistakes; even those mistakes that got people killed or wounded. I had a big problem with people not being willing to admit and correct their mistakes. It left us without a way to prevent deadly mistakes from happening again. I was becoming cynical and very bitter toward our own officers, their incompetence, their arrogance, and their disregard for unnecessary casualties. I was also becoming more contemptuous of myself for being a participant. More cannon fodder

Fall 1970

Quang Tri province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Approximately 60 kilometers west southwest of Quang Tri city

- Spc. 4 Koverman was blinded while participating in a visual reconnaissance mission. He was hit with one bullet in the side of the head that took out the back of both of his eyes. He was a big, burly, energetic, and fun loving type who had his life completely changed in a split second.

Fall 1970

Quang Tri province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Near the Laotian border just north of highway 9.

After inserting another unit's troops to search an NVA base area both a scout and gunship were shot down. The scout pilot being Captain Phil Nelson and the gunship pilot being CW2 Chuck Gibson. After another of our slicks, piloted by Captain Bob Larkin and 1st. Lt. Mel Pobre, managed to rescue the helicopter crews, myself and three other slicks were left to extract the ground troops. It was nearly dark, the troops were miles from friendlies and out of the range of artillery support. I was flying the last aircraft in the extraction. Going in all aircraft took fire. Tracers were flying every direction. My aircraft was targeted by an RPG which missed. The extraction was successful without casualties or further loss of aircraft. My copilot was W01 Bill Thornton, the crew chief was Spc 5 Bob Andrade. A Captain riding in the back of a Huey, that was in the area but did not participate in the extraction, was the senior officer present. He had done nothing but interfere with the extraction by tying up the radios with unnecessary chatter. He got a medal. We got appreciative waves from the troops when we unloaded them at Quang Tri. Those waves were better than a medal. They were personal.

Fall 1970

Quang Tri

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th.Air Cavalry

My parents began sending me daily copies of the Denver Post. On occasion, I got to read about something we had done a few days after it happened. The media's reports were grossly misleading. The military's reports were pure deceit.

Late 1970

Quang Tri province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

The 5th Mech TOC wanted prisoners. So they issued baseball bats to a Ranger team and told them to go get some. It was absurd: Capturing armed, trained and experienced NVA troops with baseball bats. The Rangers set up an ambush and called what was left of the NVA dead, prisoners. More incredible incompetence and indifference. Our leaders were in fantasy land.

Late 1970

Quang Tri province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

The 5th Mech TOC called our operations and told us that they wanted us to go take out someone else's mechanical ambush. Mechanical ambushes were large sophisticated booby traps. They were very dangerous to fool with even for the people that put them in and knew exactly where they were. They were suicide to remove for someone else. Our CO, Major Wolf, told his superiors at the TOC, "No". His people were more important than his Officer Efficiency Report. He was one of the few Field Grade officers that I admired. I was proud that I was associated with him in even a minor way. As far as our leaders at the TOC went, they proved again that they were idiots.

December 25, 1970

Quang Tri Province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Skip Barger got his first kill. During the Christmas truce we flew VR missions as usual. W01 Kenneth Barger (Skip) had volunteered to fly scouts and was transferred out of the Lift section in the late fall. He was about 2/3 of the way through his training as a scout pilot and flying as pilot/observer. Shoot outs for the scouts meant looking into the eyes of the people they were exchanging fire with. Winning in that fashion, for the first time, usually resulted in a lot of flamboyance on the part of the scout, if he returned to Quang Tri in one piece. Instead, Skip returned and stayed to himself and quiet for several days. About a week later he asked to be transferred back to the Lift section. The transfer was granted. I was very relieved.

Late 1970 early 1971

Quang Tri Province

C Trp.3rd.Sqd.17th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Area approximately 30 kilometers southwest of Quang Tri city.

Mechanical failure. During the insertion of an American Ranger team the hydraulic system failed somehow causing the collective lever to go full up and stay there. If let go for more than a few seconds the aircraft will run out of rotor rpm and crash. Both myself and my copilot W01 Randy Fisher struggled with the controls for several moments trying to force the collective back down. Our rpm was down about 10% and the transmission had been over torqued when the problem resolved itself. We then had a momentary hydraulic failure and the controls returned to normal. The insertion was canceled. More proof that I was immortal.

Unit designation changed around the first of January 1971 to D Troop, 3rd Squadron, 5th Cavalry assigned to the 9th Infantry Division, but still attached to the 5th Mechanized Infantry. Our call sign and our name was still Charlie Horse.

January 30, 1971

Quang Tri province

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Lam Son 719 began. Nearly all of Charlie Horses missions for the next several weeks would be flown in support of that operation.

February 5, 1971

Quang Tri province

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

East northeast of Khe Sanh during the Lom Son operation

W01 Carl Wood and W01 James Paul were killed after flying into clouds and hitting a mountain. While flying up a river valley beneath a cloud layer with three other aircraft they rounded a bend in the river to find the clouds down to the water level. After entering the clouds the three other aircraft turned left and climbed, Carl Wood and James Paul turned right and climbed into a mountain side. Three aircraft including myself were dispatched to search for them after the weather cleared. After finding the wreckage, the other two aircraft were needed elsewhere and I lead the body recovery. The recovery took about three hours in poor weather. We recovered Carl Woods burned body but only found the burned forearm of Jim Paul. The only reason we knew it was his arm was that his watch was still attached. I found out later that day that the mission they had been killed on had been canceled but they hadn't gotten the word. At the time I knew that Jim Paul was listed as missing. Carl Wood and I were both from the Denver area. Two or three years later I ended up working with the officer who had handled Carl's funeral in Denver. He told me that Carl had also been listed as missing for over a month. I called his mother hoping to give her some assurance that he had never been missing and that his death was very quick. I also wanted to answer any questions she had. I didn't know quite what to say and she didn't either. The conversation went badly and I felt like I had done more damage. I felt completely inadequate.

February 11, 1971

Quang Tri province

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry.

Area west northwest of the Rock Pile near highway 9

This was the first of three events that effected me more than any of the others. Both the loss of someone that I loved and the circumstances surrounding that loss left me reliving the afternoon emotionally years later. The anniversary of this event and one on February 20th leave me unusually depressed every year for about two weeks.

CW2 Ken Barger was killed. He went by the nic name of Skip. Ken had been in country about two months longer than I had. He was the first person to befriend me after my arrival. He was soft spoken, good hearted, and cared more about what he thought of his actions than what others thought of them. He was very trustworthy, and he was a good friend. I had hoped that we could attend college together after our tour. Skip had transferred to the Scout platoon in the fall of 1970. The scouts were taking terrible losses. I had continually encouraged him to return to the Lift platoon. Less than six weeks after he transferred back he was killed.

Both Ken, and his crew chief Pfc Ray Carroll were killed. 1st Lt. Mel Pobre, Ken's copilot, W01 Joe Douglas, and Sp4 Bob Bunny as well as the rest of their crew and five troops were wounded. Mel Pobre was and is an admired friend. Ray Carroll had been married the previous week. Bob Bunny was a well liked and trusted individual and a friend. Joe Douglas was the copilot/observer, and Bob Bunny was the crew chief of a scout helicopter, flown by Captain R, that was shot down.

My impression of Captain R was of a very ambitious career officer with a colossal ego. I doubted his integrity. I also doubt that he possessed a shred of sincerity or compassion. He talked down to anyone he considered himself superior to, which was almost everyone of lower rank. Capain R cared little about the accuracy of his statements or the consequences of his actions as long as he got attention. He made a habit of doing and saying anything necessary to promote himself and further his own career regardless of the effect his actions had on others. I always had the impression that he pictured himself as some Rambo type of hero, in a war movie he had playing in his head. He dressed in tailored, starched, jungle fatigues. He maintained ramrod straight body posture. And he never had a hair out of place. When flying he had at least one and sometimes two small pistols concealed on himself at all times. He carried a Swiss made automatic machine pistol with him in the aircraft. And he often had a machete strapped to his lower leg just for looks. He was, as the cliche goes, a legend in his own mind. Knowing him, I'm guessing that on this particular day he was looking to get himself a medal. According to the pilots of the aircraft escorting him, Captain R was taking chances that were not warranted whatever his reasons.

On this particular mission Ken Barger was the Aircraft Commander flying cover and rescue for the scout flown by Captain R. After the scout was shot down Ken attempted to land at the crash site but was shot down at tree top level. The aircraft rolled over in the tree tops spilling the troops out and then crashed and burned. A medivac aircraft was called with a hoist to try and extract the injured and was shot up. More of our own troops were air lifted into the area and the wounded were evacuated.

I was not scheduled to fly that day. As soon as I found out that Ken was down I was desperate to get the to the crash site. All of our Hueys were tied up. I tried borrowing a Huey off of another Air Cav Troop. They refused, of course. I found one of our scouts, flown by W01 Steven Hiscock, preparing to depart. Assuming that he was going out to Ken's crash site I ask him if I could fly as his observer. He agreed. After taking off we were diverted to look for the pilot of and Air Force F-4 Phantom that had also been shot down attacking a target in the vicinity of Ken's crash site. After about an hour we found the pilots body. We returned to Quang Tri for fuel. The maintenance Huey had returned from Da Nang and was available. I found a copilot, 1st Lt Kurt Mueller, a crew, and joined our operation at Ken's crash site in time to participate in the extraction of our troops. During the extraction I ended up picking up Captain R. After dropping Captain R at the hospital and returning to Quang Tri, I learned that Ken and Ray Carroll had been killed. Captain Bart Bartholomus took me aside and informed me. He looked like it was as hard for him to tell me as it was for me to hear it. I didn't know what a good friend Bart was until then. Nor did I realize, until that moment, how important Ken was to me. At the time I didn't know what the circumstances had been related to Ken's death. As I learned over the next few days what had happened, and what the circumstances had been, I became outraged.

The operation they were participating in was the war in a nutshell. The VR mission that their team had been on was part of a larger operation to clear a NVA battalion size base area. The 101st Airborne Division had tried it in about October of 1970 and had 12 out of 15 helicopters shot down. During the Lam Son operation Americal Division took the area over and decided to show the 101st how it was done. The overall operation was very poorly planned. It was repeatedly delayed, because of weather, so that everyone knew the NVA knew we were coming. The reports and advise of junior officers were ignored. The morning of the operation it was clear that the NVA were waiting for us. They allowed the Americal to get a couple of lifts of troops on the ground and then they shot incoming aircraft down plugging up the landing zones. The troops that were already on the ground moved to an abandoned FSB (Fire Support Base) on a mountain top. The weather worsened so that we couldn't either extract them or resupply them. They sat up there for three or four days getting shelled and rocketed to pieces.

Charlie Horse was to screen to the southwest of Americal's operation. At the end of the first day, two of our people were dead, nine were wounded, two aircraft were destroyed and a medivac shot up. Everyone that had been on board the two destroyed aircraft were either dead or injured except for Captain R. I can only speculate as to why Captain R took the unnecessary chances that he did. But he did. He was uninjured. He got a medal and bragged about his exploit. The day was the war in a nutshell.

That day changed the way I looked at many things including myself. After Ken's death I worried even more about how far I should risk the nine people I had on board in order to possibly save two or three. I also related enough to Skip that I realized that it could have been me. I would have done the same thing in his situation. I quit feeling immortal. I became more bitter. I became an old man overnight. Most of all I felt that something or rather someone very good had been taken from all of us, but most of all from me. And I felt very cheated. His was the first of three, very hard, personal losses.

Mid February 1971  
Quang Tri  
D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry

I received a letter from my mother in law. The only letter I would receive from her during my tour. She complained that I had not sent my wife a Christmas present and had then forgotten my wife's birthday. I was shocked. Besides resenting her insensitivity, I couldn't believe that I had completely forgotten Christmas. Not just my wife's Christmas, but Christmas itself. I had, however, remembered my wife's birthday and had already sent her present, albeit late. My mother in law's letter began, "I can't imagine what you are thinking about." It would be preparation for coming home.

February 20, 1971  
Quang Tri province  
D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry  
Approximately one kilometer east of the Laotian border, 10 kilometers north of highway 9, northwest of Khe Sanh during the Lam Son operation.

This was the second incident that would seriously effect me for years. W01 Carl Nacca and 1st Lt. John Hunter were killed. As with Ken Barger, and later Steve Peck, I didn't realize how important Carl was to me until he was gone. The events of this day would continue to feel not only like a great personal loss, but a great personal failure.

Carl Nacca had become like a little brother to me. We lived in the same hooch, liked nearly the same things, and had the same outlook and opinions about most things. He was good hearted and trust worthy. He had also written his parents and told them that I should escort his body in the event that he was killed. He had mentioned the letter to me at the time but I had dismissed it as paranoia on his part. Nor did I want to acknowledge the possibility of his loss. Now I believe that he genuinely knew what was coming. I also felt that he trusted me completely. For three years I would wonder if I had partial responsibility for his death.

We normally flew visual reconnaissance missions in teams of one scout, two gunships, and a slick which I flew. After completing a visual reconnaissance mission deep in NVA controlled territory and while returning to Khe Sanh for fuel, both gunships were shot down. Carl and John impacted the ground very hard and burned. At the same time the second gunship, flown by 1st Lt. Al Wester, and Captain Paul Carter radioed that they were hit and forced to land. My copilot was 1st Lt. Gary Jewett. Referring to Carl and John's crash, I turned to Gary and asked if he thought that they could have lived through the crash. He didn't think so either. So my attention went to rescuing Wester and Carter. After picking them up an Air Force FAC that I had ask for assistance, reported seeing a mirror flash from the area of Carl and Johns wreckage. Believing that none of us had been issued survival mirrors, I dismissed the FAC's report as mistaken. Being low on fuel, and having another team arrive on the scene I made one fast pass across their wreckage to see what I could. I then departed for Khe Sanh. After shutting down at Khe Sahn I

remembered that the gunships had a rear view mirror on the canopy. I began to wonder if I had left one or both of them alive. Later that day I learned for certain that John Hunter had been killed on impact.

It would be three years before I would find out for certain that Carl was also dead on impact. After learning that Carl had been killed on impact the reoccurring dreams I had been having about him stopped. But I still couldn't justify my actions to myself. I felt that the incident had shown both poor judgment and a lack of character on my part. Besides this being a terrible personal loss, I had to deal with my own shame and my own questions about what I could have or should have done. It took twenty years to come to some sort of resolution. That resolution has been my strength and my peace. It has easily been the most important and valuable lesson of my life. It is another story in itself.

February 1971

Quang Tri

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th. Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

The Lam Son operation in Laos was turning into a disaster. We were told to start counting as definite kills, those kills that we thought we should have gotten. Up until then we had never counted as killed any NVA or VC unless we had a large enough piece of them that their death was beyond doubt. The military leadership was looking for some way to justify what was happening in Laos. They were resorting to the old standby; body counts.

February 23, 1971

Quang Tri province

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Approximately one kilometer east of Laotian border, 10 kilometers north of highway 9, northwest of Khe Sanh during operation Lam Son.

CW2 Stephen Hiscock, crew chief Sgt. Ray Armentrout, and observer Spc 4 William Walezak were killed. Steve wasn't a close friend but I had flown with him on several occasions. They were shot down in the same location that we had lost two gunships three days before. I was again flying with 1st Lt. Gary Jewett.

Mid to Late February 1971

Quang Tri province

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry.

Lam Son had become a disaster. Besides other types of aviation units, there were eight Air Cavalry Troops, of about twenty aircraft each, assigned to the operation. Normally we flew VR missions in teams of four aircraft. Between mid and late February we were told that we were the only Air Cavalry Troop that could put one team in the air. We were getting clobbered. So was everybody else.

Late February early March 1971

Quang Tri province

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

Approximately 5 kilometers west of FSB Fuller

My last combat flight. I evacuated a dead GI after a brief fire fight. He was young, black, and his shirt was open exposing his only wound; one bullet hole in the center of his chest. There was only one drop of blood showing. The image is still very vivid.

First part of March 1971

Quang Tri

D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry attached to 5th Mechanized Infantry

I was ordered to return to the United States to escort the body of Carl Nacca. I was not to return to Vietnam. Captain Tom Ford, the Lift platoon leader, had to find someone to replace my spot as AC. There were several pilots well qualified to do that. The choice came down to either Tom himself, or W01 Jeff Bavar. Tom was senior in rank and time in service to Jeff. Jeff, however, had more experience as a Lift pilot. As platoon leader life would have been much easier for Tom as an AC. There were also big issues of both control and status. Being both platoon leader and senior to Jeff, Tom had the authority to make the choice himself, for himself. Instead, he told the Lift platoon ACs to choose who best should take my place. We chose Jeff. I got the job of telling Tom. He accepted the choice without hesitation or comment. Jeff got the job. Tom got my admiration.

March 5, 1971  
Bakersfield California

I met Carl Nacca's family, Carl senior, Gay, and his sister Carol. They were devastated by Carls loss but they treated me like their own. They told me that the Army had ask them to have CW2 Jim Moran escort Carl's body instead of me even though the Army was obligated to honor their original request. At a time when they were trying to deal with their son's death, the Army had placed them in the untenable position of first, having to decide whether to honor Carl's wishes or the Army's needs, and second, of deciding who would be allowed to come home from the war. Carl had written them and told them that I had a new baby girl. On that basis, they chose me. They were very relieved when I told them that Jim Moran had already come home. My time with them began a very important relationship that would continue until now. Twenty years later, that relationship would complete the most important lesson of my life.

March 11, 1971  
Fort Carson, Colorado

I was honorably discharged from the Army. I had the option of staying in. After Vietnam I considered working for the Army on a moral par with working for the mafia. I think many vets had the same frame of mind. They were proud of what they did, but ashamed of many of the institutions that they had been part of.

March 15, 1971  
Quang Tri province  
D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry  
Just east of the Laotian border and just north of highway 9

This would be the last of three great personal losses that I would mourn for years. W01 Steven R. Peck was killed flying a scout aircraft on a visual reconnaissance mission. Steve was a soft spoken, good hearted individual that everyone respected. He spoke Vietnamese and intended to live in Vietnam after the war. Like Ken Barger, and Carl Nacca, I had a lot of affection for Steve. He was a good friend who I had rescued twice after previous crashes. He used to joke that he always liked for me to be his chase, or rescue aircraft, since he knew that the chance of me picking him up three times was practically nil, therefore he couldn't get shot down if I was with him. He has been missed a lot. My take on things is that, Steve's copilot still carries a terrible burden, wondering if he had partial responsibility for Steve's death. He had no responsibility at all.

March 24, 1971  
Quang Tri province  
D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry

W01 James Ross was wounded, Sgt Harry Beckwith, Jim's observer and Spc.4 William Neal, Jim's crew chief were both killed when an RPG sheared off their tailboom. W01 Jerry Lay and his crew were shot down rescuing Jim. In another crash Captain David Coker, and Pfc. Robert Walters were killed. After several months in country Dave Coker was the only person I knew that still believed we were fighting the communists in Vietnam so that we wouldn't have to fight them in California. Dave was a very nice guy ; nice, in a very naive way. He should never have been in a war.

March 27, 1971  
Quang Tri province  
D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry

W01 Jerry Lay, his crew chief Spc.Cisz and gunner Spc. Martinez were all wounded, their Huey shot to pieces. A short distance away W01 Randy Fisher's Huey was also being shot to pieces. Randy became the unit record holder for most hits taken by an aircraft that was then still capable of flight. His brand new Huey was junked.

Late March 1971  
Denver Colorado

I was corresponding with friends still in Vietnam. I was also reading the military's version of the Lam Son disaster. It was, according to officialdom, a success that went off as planned. The reality was that the Lam Son operation was planned to be a South Vietnamese Army incursion into Laos, backed by U.S. air support, to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail and supplies to the south. The operation was also supposed to capture and destroy supplies in NVA base areas 604 and 611. No U.S. ground troops were involved inside of Laos. South Vietnamese forces were to set Fire Support Bases up around Tchepone, which was a hub for the trail, and along the route from Khe Sanh. When the NVA quickly kicked them off the FSBs it was officially called tactical movement in Laos. When they failed to set up new FSBs and began a retreat, or more accurately, a rout; the excuse was that they were only cutting the trail temporarily and withdrawing to sweep down through the A Shau Valley in South Vietnam, which was an NVA stronghold. Well, they didn't do that either. So then the official excuse was that the monsoons had began and air support was impossible in the bad weather. In truth, the operation had been planned to take place between the end of the northeast monsoon season and the beginning of the southwest monsoon season. Weather was improving. During the Lam Son operation, beginning January 30, 1971 and ending March 25, 1971, associated U.S. Army losses amounted to

108 helicopters destroyed, 618 helicopters damaged, 1187 Americans wounded in action, and 215 Americans killed in action. My friends were telling me that since Lam Son, all hell had broken loose. Daily, they were running into resistance and heavy, high caliber anti aircraft fire inside of South Vietnam that we had never experienced before. Lam Son was a success all right, but not for us. President Nixon addressing the nation on television April 7 would proclaim that Lam Son had proven that the South Vietnamese military was now ready to take the war over itself. Lam Son had proven the opposite. The deceit would never end.

Spring 1971  
Denver Colorado

I was learning that home would never be home again and that things would never be normal again. I was also learning that being a Vietnam veteran was something I was expected to be ashamed of. The most common description of the Vietnam veteran was baby killer. There were no positive adjectives for vets anywhere. Every single portrayal of veterans was negative. Without exception, the entertainment media only portrayed vets as either emotional cripples or criminals. News programs never failed to mention the fact that the person committing some crime or the other was a vet. Twice when I applied for jobs with large companies, Bell Telephone and Public Service Company of Colorado, I was told to my face that my mentioning my military service on the application disqualified me for any job. I received a form letter from the Governor of Colorado, one of the hawks that I had chased around Vietnam during the Cambodia incursion. His paraphrased letter read: "Thanks a lot for going to Vietnam. If you need anything at all, just go down to the state employment office." I was dumb enough to do that. They had no job for me, of course. I visited a college professor, that I had been friends with and who had invited me to dinner once or twice before I was drafted. I had heard that he was preaching against the war. I hoped to encourage him with my experiences. When I first came face to face with him, both his questions and his tone were entirely accusational. I was so shocked I couldn't respond. I just left. I would regularly hear people speak of veterans the same way they would talk about criminals, or fools. Without exception, when I did tell a few people that I was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam their only comment was that I must have been crazy. I stopped into a VFW hoping, I guess, to find someone that understood what I had been through. Two VFW members introduced themselves. They never ask one question about my service. They simply proceeded to explain to me that they had been in the big war. The war that *they* had won. Then I was ignored. After WWII the VFW lobbied hard and was successful at stopping the media from pointing out the fact that a veteran had been involved in a crime. After Vietnam the VFW did nothing to stop such practices. Some VFW posts refused membership to Vietnam veterans claiming that they hadn't been in a declared war. After WWII, the government made sure that any veteran who wanted to go to college could do so. WWII veterans were virtually given the choice of any school they wanted to attend. The government paid for tuition, books, and fees, provided housing for veterans and their immediate families, and a

monthly stipend. After Vietnam, as a married veteran with a child, I was offered a flat \$260.00 a month to go to college. John Wayne, a war movie hero who had dodged the draft during WWII, and who had never spent a day in the military much less in a combat situation, openly criticized the Vietnam Veterans Against the War as unpatriotic. The country followed his lead extending the criticism to most veterans. With the exception of President Bush, every President of this country, either during or since the war has turned his back on, and ignored Vietnam veterans. President Reagan, the self touted supporter of the military who got no closer to combat than making WWII training films, cut funding for the VA's Vet Centers and then refused to attend the dedication of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington. A friend of mine from Vietnam and I put over two months into developing a game that we hoped would be both fun and show people how politics in the military corrupts. When we went to offer it to game companies, they refused to even discuss such a game. They explained that the military and Vietnam were taboo subjects. As late as 1980, it was next to impossible to find anything about Vietnam or the military in a book store. Family members either bought societies view of me as a veteran, or were so uncomfortable with the subject that they would never speak of, or ask about, my experience. I assumed their silence meant the worst. The examples of the attitude of this society toward veterans could go on for pages. It was, and would be, the most devastating part of the experience of Vietnam. I was able to distance myself from the indifference and contempt of government institutions and the military. But I had to live daily with societies contempt for veterans. Home did not exist anymore.

Spring 1971  
Denver Colorado

I learned that Major Mack had been killed. Major Mack was the CO of Barkey, the Air Force FACs, based at Quang Tri. I didn't know him personally but I liked him a lot as did everyone else I knew. After completing their tour of duty, the FAC's would celebrate by doing aerobatics over Quang Tri at the end of their last flight. Major Mack's last flight was an orientation flight for his replacement. During the aerobatics their OV-10 Bronco mushed through the bottom of a loop and crashed just short of the runway. Major Mack was killed the last flight of his last day; the new CO the first flight of his first day.

Spring 1971  
Denver Colorado

The Army admitted that it had a severe drug problem among its troops in Vietnam. One study alleged that 1/3 of the troops in Vietnam were addicted to drugs. It was nonsense. Our unit had never had much of a drug problem. I hadn't heard of any other combat units that had a drug problem to speak of. The Army promoted the use of alcohol. In the past the Army had lied about, and covered up, any and everything that might be remotely embarrassing. Now it was embracing this scandal. I couldn't understand why the Army was acting so completely out of character. Then it dawned on me. In one statement, they had shifted the responsibility for the loss of the war in Vietnam off of career soldiers and politicians and onto the troops. After all, who could win a war when all you had to fight with were addicts and hippie pinko commi sympathizers. It was a brilliant move. The war wasn't the issue anymore: It's loss was. People at home much preferred to believe that individual soldiers were the cause of our problems in Vietnam, rather than the institutions that both their sense of national identity and physical security were dependent upon, or themselves. They were happy to go for the idea. We were addicts, losers, outsiders, pigeons and cannon fodder.

But most of all, we were fools. We had done, in good faith, what this society and its institutions had expected us to do. In return we had been humiliated and betrayed.

May 27, 1971  
Quang Tri Province  
D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry

Captain Paul Carter and W01 Jerry Foy were killed. Paul Carter, whom we called George, was a huge man. He was also one of the nicest, good spirited and trusted people in the unit. He always acted like he was glad to see me. I had rescued him once after he was shot down February 20. He has also been missed. I never knew Jerry Foy. I understand it was his first day to fly missions.

June 13, 1971  
Denver Colorado

The Pentagon Papers were released. Out of conscience, Daniel Ellsberg released the classified documents to the press. They showed that President Johnson had deceived Congress in order to get the authority to pursue the war in Vietnam. Johnson had manipulated American sentiment such that our own young men had been sent off to suffer and die, supposedly, to insure democracy for the Vietnamese: At the same time, Johnson himself, was demonstrating absolute contempt for the democratic process in his own country. Daniel Ellsberg was prosecuted. Not one single person admonished Johnson. We were cannon fodder.

Summer 1971.  
Denver Colorado

Nguyen Van Thieu, the South Vietnamese president, arranged a one man election for himself. Even the pretense that we had fought for democracy was gone. It had all been a waste.

August 12, 1971  
Quang Tri province  
D Trp.3rd.Sqd.5th Air Cavalry  
Area near the DMZ, north of Charlie 4?

AC W01 Larry Kelly, Pilot 1st Lt. John Thompson, Crew Chief Robert Nelson, Gunner Spc.4 Eric Kelly and troops, nine people in all, were killed when an NVA rocket struck their aircraft in mid air. I had been friends with Larry Kelly. He was a very nice, quiet person. His first mission was flown with me. That morning we had picked up dead NVA that supposedly qualified as prisoners. Larry was sickened and couldn't eat later that day. He had three daughters as I remember it. He had already served two tours in Vietnam as a clerk. Flight school cost him a third tour, and his life.

I had a relatively easy tour. At night I had a secure perimeter, a roof, fans and sometimes air conditioning, hot meals, showers and clean sheets. Combat troops in ground units had none of that. They lived, suffered and died in the dirt. I greatly admire them for what they were willing to endure. Many vets had experiences far worse than mine and routinely demonstrated extreme courage and loyalty. I've talked to a lot of other Vietnam vets. For the most part, the names and places and times of their stories are different. But the stories themselves are similar. And the moral of their stories is almost always the same.

I have a theory. The theory is that at the center of our existence is the need to feel self worth. There are two places from which we draw our sense of self worth. One is the way in which we view our own motives and actions. The other is the way in which we feel others view us and our actions. Vietnam left most of us confused about our own motives. Most vets went to Vietnam not knowing much, for sure, about the politics or the morality of the war. They went with two assumptions. The first was that they could rely on the integrity of their society, its government, and its institutions. The second was that by going they would at least maintain the respect of their peers. They went, endured terrible hardships, took terrible risks to their lives and their futures, suffered terrible losses and returned to find out that they had not only lost the respect of their peers, they had gained their contempt. They had risked everything and lost. They had risked everything and had been humiliated and betrayed, first by their government and military, and then by their society. It was devastating.

The hardships and horrors of the war left vets with depression, anxiety, nightmares and flashbacks. The values and lessons they learned, and the unjust accusations they endured left them alienated and humiliated. Their betrayal left them outraged.

### Awards and Decorations

Vietnam Service, Vietnam Campaign, Good Conduct, National Defense are acknowledged by St. Louis.

There is no record in St. Louis, nor do I still have a record of a Bronze Star for Service that I know I was awarded.

I understand that every pilot in the unit was awarded the South Vietnamese Air Medal but again I have no record of that.

There has been conflicting information about my being awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross, after my departure from Vietnam, for actions on February 20, 1971.

I was also awarded the Air Medal approximately 32 times. It is awarded for every 25 hours of combat assault time that is logged. Combat assault time differs from other types of flight time in that, as I understand it, it is flown with the intention of making contact with the enemy. I had over eight hundred hours of combat assault time.

## Terminology

AC	<p><u>Aircraft Commander</u> had absolute authority over any and everything that had to do with their assigned aircraft. That included who got on or off the aircraft regardless of rank, what the aircraft carried, where it would go and when it would go there. The AC had the last word regardless of his own rank.</p>
AH-1G	<p>The first helicopter designed and built solely as a weapons platform or gunship. It's official designation was the AH-1G Huey Cobra. It was most often referred to as a Cobra or Snake. It carried a crew of two, a pilot and a copilot/gunner. Cobras had a gross weight of 9500 lbs., a useful load of around 4000lbs., and a top speed of about 225 mph. Although the AH-1G could be fitted with various weapons systems, Charlie Horse Cobras normally carried 52 2.75 inch rockets, one minigun, and one 40 mm. grenade launcher ; or 33 2.75 inch rockets, one 20mm. vulcan cannon capable of firing 2000 rounds a minute, one minigun, and one 40 mm. grenade launcher.</p>
ARP	<p>Member of the <u>Aero Rifle Platoon</u> which was the infantry element of an Air Cavalry organization. They were also referred to as Blues.</p>
Assassins	<p>The name of Charlie Horse's Weapons platoon and it's members.</p>
Baggers	<p>The name of Charlie Horse's Lift platoon and it's members.</p>
Cal.	<p><u>Caliber</u> refers to the dimensions of a bullet. In reference to the diameter of a bullet a caliber is 1/100 of an inch. A 50 cal. bullet is 1/2 inch in diameter.</p>
Cannon fodder	<p>As defined by my dictionary: Soldiers, regarded as the cheapest material consumed in war, who's loss is of no particular consequence.</p>
Chinook	<p>A medium tactical heavy lift, tandem rotor helicopter officially designated the CH-47 Chinook. The "Hook", as it was nicely named, had a gross weight of approximately 40,000 lbs., and payload of around 20,000 lbs. Top speed approached 170 mph. It was generally used to move heavier loads such as artillery pieces, vehicles, downed aircraft and fuel and water pods. It had accommodations for 44 troops plus a crew of four. It was usually armed with two 30 caliber machine guns.</p>

Crew Chief	The member of a helicopter crew that was responsible for the maintenance of the helicopter. Flying crew chiefs usually manned one of the helicopters weapons systems. They were vital members of the crew providing another set of eyes and ideas to the pilots.
CO	<u>Commanding Officer</u> . The person in charge of a particular army unit. In this paper I refer to both our Squadron CO and our Troop CO.
Corps	Geographically, South Vietnam was divided in to four areas of military responsibility, or corps areas. They were designated I, II, III, and IV Corps. All four corps were divided by an east west, or southeast northwest line that ran from the coast west to either the Laotian or Cambodian borders. I Corps, often referred to as "i" corps, began at the border with North Vietnam and had it's southern border near Chu Lai. II Corps continued on south to near Phan Rang and included the Central Highlands. III Corps continued on south to just south of Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital, and included most of the rubber plantation areas. IV Corps included the rest of South Vietnam including the Mekong River delta which was a flat usually flooded area that provided most of Vietnam's rice crop.
CP	<u>CoPilot</u> was the pilot who's authority was secondary to either the Pilot in Command or the Aircraft Commander during the flight operation of an aircraft.
Division	An Army combat organization of approximately six thousand personnel and various types of units. In Vietnam, a Division would have total responsibility for all ground combat operations in very large portions of the country.
Dustoff	The generic term and call sign for all army medical evacuation helicopters.
DMZ	<u>Demilitarized Zone</u> was an area dividing North and South Vietnam. Contrary to its name, it was one of the areas most heavily trafficked and fortified by North Vietnamese troops and equipment during the war.
Doves	Those politically active Americans who opposed the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.
Extraction	The removal of troops from a position on the ground by helicopter.
FAC	<u>Forward Air Controllers</u> were Air Force airborne controllers who found Targets and then directed fighter bomber airstrikes. Those based at Quang Tri flew the OV-10 Bronco. Their call sign was Barkey. Charlie Horse worked with them daily and also knew most of the pilots personally.

FSB	<b>Fire Support Bases</b> were artillery outposts generally equipped with one artillery battery of 105mm Howitzers, or larger, and at least an infantry company. They were most often isolated from other military bases.
Gunner	The member of a helicopter crew who's primary job was to maintain and man a weapon system. They were also responsible for assisting the crew chief in his duties. Flying gunners were vital members of the crew providing another set of eyes and ideas to the pilots.
Gunship	A helicopter, most often either a UH-1C with a crew of four, or an AH-1G Cobra with a crew of two, a pilot and a copilot/gunner. They were equipped to carry combinations of weapons such as rockets, miniguns, 20 millimeter cannon, 40 millimeter grenade launchers, or TOE anti tank missiles. They were generally regarded by NVA troops fighting in South Vietnam as the U.S.'s most lethal weapon. Charlie Horse flew the AH-1G.
Hawks	Those politically active Americans who favored the U.S. pursuit of the Vietnam War.
Huey	A helicopter officially designated the UH-1 Iroquois. It was the all around work horse of the Vietnam War performing tasks as troop transport, cargo, medivac, gunship, fire fly, command and control, and liaison aircraft. The Army flew UH-1 A,B,C,D, H and M models. Gross weight was up to 9500 lbs. with a useful load of up to 4000 lbs. Top speed was around 130 mph. It was usually armed with two 30 caliber machine guns.
KIA	<b>Killed in Action</b>
Lam Son 719	Running from January 30, 1971 until March 25, 1971 Lam Son was planned to be a ninety day South Vietnamese Army incursion into Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail and seize NVA Base Areas 604 and 611. It was a total failure. Cost to the U.S.; 108 helicopters destroyed, 618 damaged, 215 Americans killed and 1187 wounded.
Insertion	The placement of troops, by helicopter, on the ground.
Kamikazes	The name of Charlie Horse's Scout platoon and it's members.
Long Binh Jail	LBJ as it was known in Vietnam was the Army's stockade, or jail, for military criminals. It had a reputation for cruel and sadistic treatment of its inmates.
LZ	<b>Landing Zone</b> could be a huge area on a military base or a very small hole in the jungle. It was any place designated for a helicopter to land.

Medivac	The term could either apply to a type of Army helicopter who's job it was to rescue, treat, and evacuate wounded or the action of evacuating sick or wounded to an area of treatment. Army Medivac helicopter units call sign was Dustoff. They took very heavy losses.
Minigun	30 caliber, electric driven, six barreled gun that could fire at rates as high as six thousand rounds a minute. It was usually fired at rates of either two thousand or four thousand rounds a minute by helicopter gunships. An average machine gun, by comparison fires in the neighborhood of 750 rounds a minute. Many gunships carried two miniguns as well as other types of weapons.
NVA	<u>North Vietnamese Army or North Vietnamese Army regular troops.</u>
Observer	The term is usually used in reference to the crew member of a scout aircraft who's job it was to man a machine gun and look for enemy or signs of enemy activity while sitting in the left pilots seat. If they were qualified pilots, they were also copilots of the aircraft.
PIC	<u>Pilot in Command</u> was the pilot primarily responsible for the operation of an aircraft during flight.
Pilot	A term used to describe anyone trained to fly an aircraft and includes the designations of AC, PIC, and CP.
Pigeon	An innocent and usually naive person blamed for someone else's wrong doing.
RPG	<u>Rocket Propelled Grenade</u> . On the order of the American Bazooka or LAW it was a hand held weapon that fired a rocket with about a 5 or 6 lb. explosive warhead.
Scout	The term could refer to a member of a crew that performed scout missions, the scout platoon, or the aircraft used to fly scout missions. Charlie Horse scout helicopters had a crew of three, a pilot, an observer and a crew chief. They were generally armed with two 30 cal. machine guns and assorted types of grenades.
Slick	Nic name given to Huey helicopters that were equipped to haul troops and supplies. Slicks had a crew of four, a pilot, copilot, crew chief and gunner. They were generally armed with two 30 caliber machine guns.
TOC	<u>Tactical Operations Center</u> . Usually at Division level, it was the part of the Division that kept track of and directed the actual combat operations.

Translational lift	An aerodynamic flight condition related to helicopters. With about 20 mph. of air movement across a rotor system, the power requirement needed to lift a given load is decreased by about 30%.
Troop	An Army Cavalry unit comparable in size to a Company which would be about 200 to 250 personnel. Also a "troop" which is a term used synonymously with soldier.
USARV	<u>United States Army Vietnam</u> was responsible for all Army units operating in Vietnam.
VC	<u>Viet Cong</u> could refer to the communist revolutionary organization, made up of south Vietnamese who opposed the South Vietnamese government, or its individual members.
VR	<u>Visual Reconnaissance</u> . A very benign term for a very dangerous mission. Although VR missions were flown by teams of four aircraft by Charlie Horse, the scout members of the team took far and away the heaviest losses. During a VR mission the scout worked at or below tree top level at very slow speeds, trying to find enemy units or signs of, and information about, enemy units.
XO	<u>Executive Officer</u> . Was the officer who was second in command under an Army units Commanding Officer.

## Army Organizational Structure

Squad	In the infantry, usually ten enlisted personnel under a staff sergeant.
Platoon	In the infantry, 4 squads under a lieutenant.
Company	In the infantry, headquarters section and 4 platoons under a captain.
Battery	In the artillery, headquarters section and 4 platoons.
Troop	In the cavalry, headquarters section and 4 platoons under a major.
Battalion	In the infantry, headquarters and 4 or more companies under a lieutenant colonel.
Squadron	In the cavalry, headquarters and 4 or more troops under a lieutenant colonel.
Brigade	Headquarters and 3 or more battalions under a colonel.
Division	Headquarters and 3 brigades with artillery, combat support, and combat service support units under a major general.
Army Corps	Headquarters and two or more divisions with corps troops under a lieutenant general.
Field Army	Headquarters and two or more corps with field army troops under a general.

**Army Rank Structure**  
**Vietnam War**

**Enlisted personnel**

E-1	Private Recruit	(Pvt.)		
E-2	Private	(Pvt.)		
E-3	Private 1st. Class	(Pvt.)		
E-4	Corporal	(Cpl.)	Specialist 4	(Spc.4)
E-5	Sergeant	(Sgt.)	Specialist 5	(Spc.5)
E-6	Staff Sergeant	(Sgt.)	Specialist 6	(Spc.6)
E-7	Sergeant 1st Class	(Sgt.)	Specialist 7	(Spc.7)
E-8	Master Sergeant	(Sgt.)		
E-9	Sergeant Major	(Sgt.)		
E-10	Command Sergeant Major			

**Warrant Officers**

W-1	Warrant Officer	(W01)
W-2	Chief Warrant Officer	(CW2)
W-3	Chief Warrant Officer	(CW3)
W-4	Chief Warrant Officer	(CW4)

**Commissioned Officers**

O-1	2nd Lieutenant	2nd Lt.
O-2	1st Lieutenant	1st Lt.
O-3	Captain	Cpt.
O-4	Major	Maj.
O-5	Lieutenant Colonel	Lt. Col.
O-6	Colonel	Col.
O-7	Brigadier General	Brig. Gen.
O-8	Major General	Maj. Gen.
O-9	Lieutenant General	Lt. Gen.
O-10	General	Gen.

## Vietnam War Dissent Overview

Twenty five years after the official end of the Vietnam War prowar and anti war sentiments still run strong. Few Americans remain untouched by the events of the Vietnam war. Those directly involved still look for reasons to justify their positions of twenty five years ago. Those not so directly involved, find the sentiments of the others effecting U.S. foreign policy decisions today. Of the various assumptions Americans have about their government that matured during the war, two are still strong and influential. One is that both U.S. motives and capabilities are always suspect and should therefore always be challenged. The U.S. government is not to be trusted. The other is that, even though mistakes were made in Vietnam, our motives and our mission were just. The U.S. government is to be trusted.

### History

The first dissenting opinions about U.S. policies toward Vietnam began in 1945 within the government itself. The State Departments Far East Division favoring pressuring France to grant autonomous rule to Vietnam. The State Departments European Division favoring support of Frances moves to recolonize Vietnam. Most Americans had no knowledge of, or interest in, Vietnam.

Even with the huge U.S. financial support for the French Indo China war and the subsequent U.S. involvement in Vietnam through the 50s and early 60s few Americans still had any clear knowledge of, or opinion about, Vietnam. Until the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August of 1964 Americans understood little and cared little about Vietnam. Only a few argued against U.S. policies toward Vietnam. Only two Senators, Morse and Gruening, voted against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. The press enthusiastically promoted the story of Vietnam as simply the U.S. versus the evil communists. But with the passage of the Tonkin resolution and Johnson's escalation's of military involvement Americans began to see that Vietnam was effecting them personally. And they began to pay attention. With American interest came widened news coverage which broadened American perspectives on the war. I think it is safe to say that as the American public learned more and more about the issues of Vietnam the less they supported U.S. military involvement. Both Presidents Johnson and Nixon knew that and would use Americans lack of understanding about Vietnam to avoid resistance to their policies. Both would, at best withhold information, and at worst lie to the American public in order to manipulate support for themselves. That tactic would come to be known as the credibility gap and would in the long run undermine mainstream support for their policies. Both would rely on American prejudices, fears, and misconceptions about Communism, Vietnam and warfare in general. Both preferred to spout clichés aimed at American prejudices rather than preferring to deseminate facts.

By early 1966 Americans were beginning to show obvious doubts about both US involvement and Johnson's methods. Senator Fulbright, a much respected Senator whom

Johnson had relied on for support in the past, was now opposing his policies. Other members of Congress who had voted for the Tonkin resolution were following suite.

From this writers perspective, anti war sentiment would develop into three separate but interrelated camps. The least vocal and least visible was the general American public. It would give up support for the war the slowest but would be the most influential in ending U.S. involvement. Today it is rarely thought of as being a part of the anti war movement. The second was the visible and vocal camp which included leaders of foreign governments, Civil Rights leaders, political leaders, with it's most obvious member being the vocal but less strident student groups. Most notably absent from this camp, were religious leaders. The third is the camp most remembered as being the anti war movement. It was the most visible and most vocal. Made up of the militant anti war protesters, it's members included, among others, the more strident student groups, Black Panthers, SDS, Weathermen, and Simbeonese Liberation Army. Because of it's methods, which destroyed its credibility, it probably damaged the anti war movement much more than it helped. Of all three camps, students are probably the most remember today as being the largest group involved in the anti war movement.

In 1966 students, for the most part, had yet to reject U.S. commitments to Vietnam. I was on campus in 1966. Occasionally some intellectual would stand in front of the Student Union building and argue against the war. They were generally ignored and occasionally booed. Denver had a very minor anti war parade. A few of my friends wanted to attend it and planed to throw eggs at the anti war protesters. None of the those friends would later inconvenience their lives with any national service much less be in the military or go to Vietnam. That general attitude of youth in 1966, resulted from their notion that our efforts in the war proved that the U.S. stood for truth, justice and the American way.

By 1967 most poles showed that the majority of Americans believed our involvement in Vietnam was a mistake although the majority were not yet ready to withdraw. There were various reasons for the growing anti war sentiment. There seemed to be three primary arguments against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. One was that the war was just plain immoral and that we should get out immediately. Another was that the war was not winnable under any circumstances and therefore it was a useless waste. The other stemmed from disagreements with the way it was conducted. Many believed that if the U.S. was not going to totally commit itself to the war and win quickly, we should get out. By the end of the war both pro war and anti war factions in the U.S. would agree that the way in which the war was conducted was wrong.

By early 1968 Americans as a whole were discouraged with the war but still clinging to the idea that we could and should win. The Tet offensive changed that. Tet was the beginning of the end. Public opinion in the U.S. turned against prolonged involvement in Vietnam. After Tet, politicians would no longer place emphasis on policies aimed at winning the war. They switched their emphasis to policies aimed at extricating the U.S. honorably from Vietnam. Anti war sentiment had been adopted by the American general public. In 1968 both the Republican and Democratic candidates for president ran on platforms of ending the war. 1968 would also see student protest flare; most visibly with riots at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Over the next four years support for the war would continue to wane among the general public. Student protest

would wane and then flare in response to events in Washington and Vietnam. After the January 1973 signings of the cease-fire agreements the general public wanted no more of the Vietnam issue. Except for a few die hard demonstrators, the anti war movement was all but dead.

The intensity and depth of the anti war movement and sentiment varied from hardly noticeable to impossible to ignore. It started out quietly, grew in intensity, would wane with indications of our successes which equated with ending the war, and then flare with disclosures such as the My Lai massacre in 1969, the U.S. incursion into Cambodia in 1970, or the Christmas bombings of North Vietnam in 1972. In general, average Americans continued to be the least visible and vocal. Students the most visible. The movements intensity and depth was also effected by such things as draft call ups, exemptions, the draft lottery system, and the end of the draft. Traditional American allies would also become involved in the anti war movement. Anti war demonstrations outside of the U.S. were not uncommon. Many countries adopted policies which urged and encouraged American disengagement.

The motivations and methods of the anti war movement also varied from one extreme to the other. On the one hand people were motivated by their sense of morality, or their fears of pointlessly losing loved ones, on the other hand many feared for their own safety, felt the need to go along with the masses of their peers, simply were not going to inconvenience their lives by going into the military, saw a chance for notoriety, or just plain enjoyed the turmoil. As the motives varied so did the methods. Some would do no more than mention to others their desire for the U.S. to leave Vietnam. Others quietly looked for and voted for political candidates that they hoped would stop the war. Some registered as conscientious objectors and went into the military to become unarmed combat medics in the thick of the fighting. Others simply left the United States. Many would intentionally find ways to flunk their draft induction physicals. Those with money could stay in school and take advantage of student draft deferments. Student protest starting with anti war signs, sit-ins, and draft card burnings, turned to riots culminating most notably with the shootings at Kent State and Jackson State in 1970. For some, stridence and arrogance went hand in hand with criminal activity. Most notably involved were the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and the Weathermen. Not to forget our most beloved and prosperous traitor, Hanoi Jane Fonda Turner.

In general the anti war movement was made up of both patriots and traitors. The most courageous and the most cowardly. The most unselfish and the most selfish. The quietest which included the average American to the loudest which included the SDS and the Weathermen. Instead of staying true to only the problem of the war, over time the militant anti war movement confused itself by trying to deal with almost every societal and moral issue it could find. The anti war movement ended up not only a protest against the war, but a protest of everything in this society that didn't meet someone's ideal. The militant anti war movement became it's own worst enemy as far as ending the war was concerned. It ended up lacking any credibility in the eyes of both moderate and reasonable Americans. Ironically, like the government it protested, it became hypocritical by using violence to pursue it's own brand of peace.

Additionally and unfortunately for the lives of many, the media would only confuse the American public. The media's focus would not be on the issues of the anti war

movement; but rather on their inappropriate means and methods. Johnson, Nixon and the other proponents of the war could stand in front of the TV cameras and say whatever they wished anytime they wished, always with an air of credibility and dignity. The news coverage of the anti war movement most often was focused on those whose very nature implied questionable motives and a lack of reason, rather than on the issue itself. But the issues didn't sell advertising space while the inappropriate actions of the most visible opponents of the war did. And so the much need credibility and perspective Americans needed to see in the anti war movement was lost, thanks in large part, to the self serving participation of the media

When I returned from Vietnam in 1971 I was very bitter about the war. I had watched personal friends and loved ones die because of deceitful policies, and sanctioned incompetence and arrogance. Whether the U.S. involvement was started with just cause was not the issue for me anymore. The issue was the manner in which the war was conducted. It was a waste. It was a criminal waste. I was ready to join the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I planed to attend the first VVAW rally I could find. After finding that rally, I learned that the VVAW were demonstrating along with NOW, the Chicano movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement. I stayed away in disgust. Lives thrown away daily by the hundreds, because of a deceitful and wrong headed national policy were not, in my mind, to be demeaned with comparatively trivial social issues.

As well, in the rest of American society, protest against the war would be confused and diluted by being mixed with issues that had nothing to do with Vietnam. The anti war movements credibility was also suspect. The movement had become hypocritical by advocating peace while resorting to violent methods. For me, and I believe for main stream Americans, the anti war movement had made the mistake of becoming the anti everything movement and as such had become the anti nothing movement. While Americans could find little noble in U.S. actions in Vietnam, neither could they find anything noble in its opposition.

### Opinion

From my perspective the seeds of dissent were planted at the end of WWII. The U.S. had won and won big. Not only that, the immorality of the German and Japanese governments had been proven to the world with the disclosures of their atrocities. The United States was not only powerful it appeared noble. Perhaps coming from the U.S.'s Judeo Christian background where success also means Gods approval, we believed we were right in Gods eyes. Korea didn't disprove that. We hadn't won, but we had saved South Korea and we were still the good guys sacrificing to keep others free from tyranny. Americans believed through the 50's and early 60's that although we had our problems, our government represented truth, justice and the American way. We might be wrong on occasion but our motives were pure and we were not corrupt. We were noble. We would be getting involved in Vietnam with, and because of, those very basic assumptions.

The primary reason, Americans were willing to fight in Vietnam was not because they were against the ideology of communism. Most Americans were against the cruelty, deceit, and lack of personal freedoms that they believed, with good reason, communism

represented. Rather than believing so much in democracy as an ideology they believed in what it had come to stand for, freedom of choice, compassion, and honesty. Presidents and officials of the government played on those sentiments in order to persuade Americans to send their love ones to fight in Vietnam.

Doubts about our nobility surfaced with the assassination of President Kennedy. At the same time the U.S. was beginning its open warfare in Vietnam the Warren Report was completed. It claimed that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone to assassinate Kennedy despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary. Many Americans began to suspect that all was not well in Washington. But there was nothing they could do about it and there didn't seem to be an immediate threat to them personally. None the less the seeds of doubt had been planted.

Between 1966 and 1971 events at home as well as in Vietnam would further challenge the notion that the United States was innately good, liked by God, and ordained to save other countries from themselves. At home Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were both assassinated. Both men had come to stand for the ideals of truth, justice and the American way. To a large extent, belief that those ideals were viable died with them. Americans would find few, if any, believable idealists to replace them. Within the United States violence surrounding both social issues such as civil rights and the war in Vietnam would be nearly continual. Shootings of student protesters at Kent State and Jackson State created more doubts about the morality of U.S. methods and it's costs. The release of the Pentagon Papers showed that regardless of his motives, President Johnson had deceived Americans in order to pursue his own objectives in Vietnam. The exposure of his own lack of faith in, and disregard for, American traditions of democratic processes further demoralized most people who were still arguing that our intentions were noble. By 1971 the attitude of youth and many mainstream Americans was distrustful and cynical. More and more common was the notion that the war was a sign that the U.S. stood for little besides the ambition, arrogance, incompetence, obstinence, indifference to suffering, and lack of integrity of it's political and military leaders.

Meanwhile in Vietnam the idea of a noble cause was fast disappearing. Tet in 1968 had been a disaster for the U.S. Just before Tet most Americans were still clinging to the notion that they could rely on the integrity and competence of their government and it's institutions. Early on in the war most Americans had taken for granted that they were being told the truth about what was going on in Vietnam. As the war progressed more and more information became available that created doubts about both the reasons for our presence there, and the credibility and competence of our leadership. Just before Tet Americans were told that the Communist were near defeat. Victory was in sight. There was light at the end of the tunnel. We were winning and that things like the coming Tet offensive were not possible. Then Tet came along. The Viet Cong backed by NVA regulars staged an offensive that Westmorland had just denied was possible. Contrary to the notion that Americans became disheartened because they began to see that we couldn't win the war and so turned against it; I believe that what happened was that Americans learned that they couldn't rely on the integrity or competence of their government and it's institutions. Americans were not only doubting the credibility of our government they were consequentially doubting that we were really there to save the Vietnamese from the deceit, cruelty and oppression of the communists. The change in national sentiment wasn't

because Americans found out at Tet that we couldn't win the war. What happened was that years of a policy of deceit caught up to Americas leadership. Contrary to the notion that Tet proved that Americans lacked resolve, it proved that Americans, with all their faults, had integrity and compassion and expected it in their leaders, whom they had good reason to doubt.

The disclosure of the My Lai massacre in 1969 would reinforce the convictions that the Vietnamese were not being saved from anything. Americans were moving farther and farther away from the notion that we were the good guys in Vietnam or anywhere else. As such they were less and less willing to sacrifice their loved ones.

Also in 1969 the peace talks would deepen the cynicism. Americans hoping for a settlement at the Paris peace conferences between the U.S. and North Vietnam were to witness months of bickering over the shape of the table that the peace talks would take place around. In the mean time thousands suffered and died in the war. It was hard to believe that the officials running the war, and responsible for the lives of American loved ones, were anything but petty bureaucrats.

Disclosures of the U.S. bombing campaign in Cambodia, which was a huge undertaking and yet was kept secret from Congress, further eroded faith in Nixons credibility. It also undermined confidence in Congress's ability to make proper decisions when it became apparent that they obviously didn't have the facts. With faith in Nixon's integrity and U.S. policy makers intentions questionable, Nixon widened the war into Cambodia in the spring of 1970 compounding American doubts. In early 1971 obvious deceit about the success of Lom Son 719 in Laos further eroded American support. Finally President Nguyen Van Thieu engineered himself a one man election in 1971. The last notions that we had fought for democracy for the Vietnamese were gone. Americans were left without ideals to justify the war. In 1973 there would be one last glimmer of hope for American morale. Nixon appeared to find an honorable way out of the war. Americans were, for a short time, proud of their President and their own judgment in supporting him. Then Watergate intervened. Nixon was forced into a humiliating resignation and Americans were again left to doubt both their personal and national judgment. American disenchantment with the war would continue on until 1975. Perhaps the most truly humiliating lack of action which represented the change in Americas self image, was the way the U.S. dealt with the final North Vietnamese assault on South Vietnam. Even though the assault was a blatant violation of the treaty we had signed with the North Vietnamese, we turned our backs and did nothing. There was, in reality, no honorable peace. All the years of losses and suffering Americans had endured while their leaders sought an "honorable peace" were for nothing. Americans would be left doubting the integrity and competence of their leaders and their institutions. But more importantly they had been shamed and would be left doubting their own national judgment, character, and direction. Americans couldn't argue that we were the good guys anymore. Americans had been demoralized in every sense of the word.

From the beginning, starting in 1954, anti war and pro war factions ran the gamut from those who simply sympathized with each faction to those who actively promoted the goals of each faction. In general, as time went by, the rhetoric of each side became more strident and their methods became less ethical. By 1971 the White house was organizing people to pursue blatantly criminal means of defeating their opponents. The strident and

most visible anti war groups had also turned to blatantly criminal ways of protesting not only the war, but anyone who opposed their views. Both sides believed that anyone who disagreed with their goals or methods were enemies of America. By the end of the war the truth had been lost to both sides in their desperation to have their own way.

Thirty years later, that loss of truth, is still breeding shame, anger, distrust and cynicism. Americans are still avoiding the issue of the war in Vietnam and its consequences. Perhaps Americans are afraid that the truth will prove that we are not noble after all. Or perhaps they have just given up on believing that there is any truth at all to be found. I suppose national skepticism has a healthy side if it keeps people from suffering needlessly. But the Vietnam war pushed many Americans past skepticism to cynicism. And I think that the associated lack of faith in the ideals of truth, justice, the American way, and of American nobility, has perhaps been our greatest loss.