

Arizona Historical Advisory Commission  
Arizona State Library  
1700 West Washington Street Suite 200  
Phoenix, Arizona 85007  
Attention: Teresita Majewski

December 3, 2015

Subject: Enhancing the Vietnam Memorial at Wesley Bolin Plaza

Dear Ms. Majewski:

Request is hereby made to enhance the Vietnam Memorial at the Wesley Bolin Plaza. The enhancement includes four stainless steel plaques 36 inches high by 30 inches wide with text entitled "Honoring Vietnam Veterans" which honors and explains the extraordinary service of those who honorably served in Vietnam. The plaques cost \$10,050.00 and were paid for by the Arizona Military Museum.

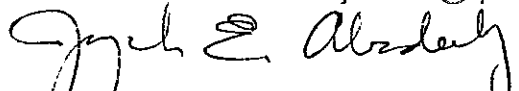
Sun Eagle Construction Corporation has offered to erect the concrete backing for the plaques approximately four feet high by 10 1/2 feet wide at NO COST. The wall and plaques would fit nicely in an existing planter immediately southwest of the statues at the memorial.

Jim Hartdengen, a former legislator, was the initial proponent of the Vietnam Memorial, and Oscar Urrea, President of In-Country Vietnam Veterans Association, added to the memorial several years ago. Both are supportive of this enhancement to the memorial. The reasons for the proposed enhancement include:

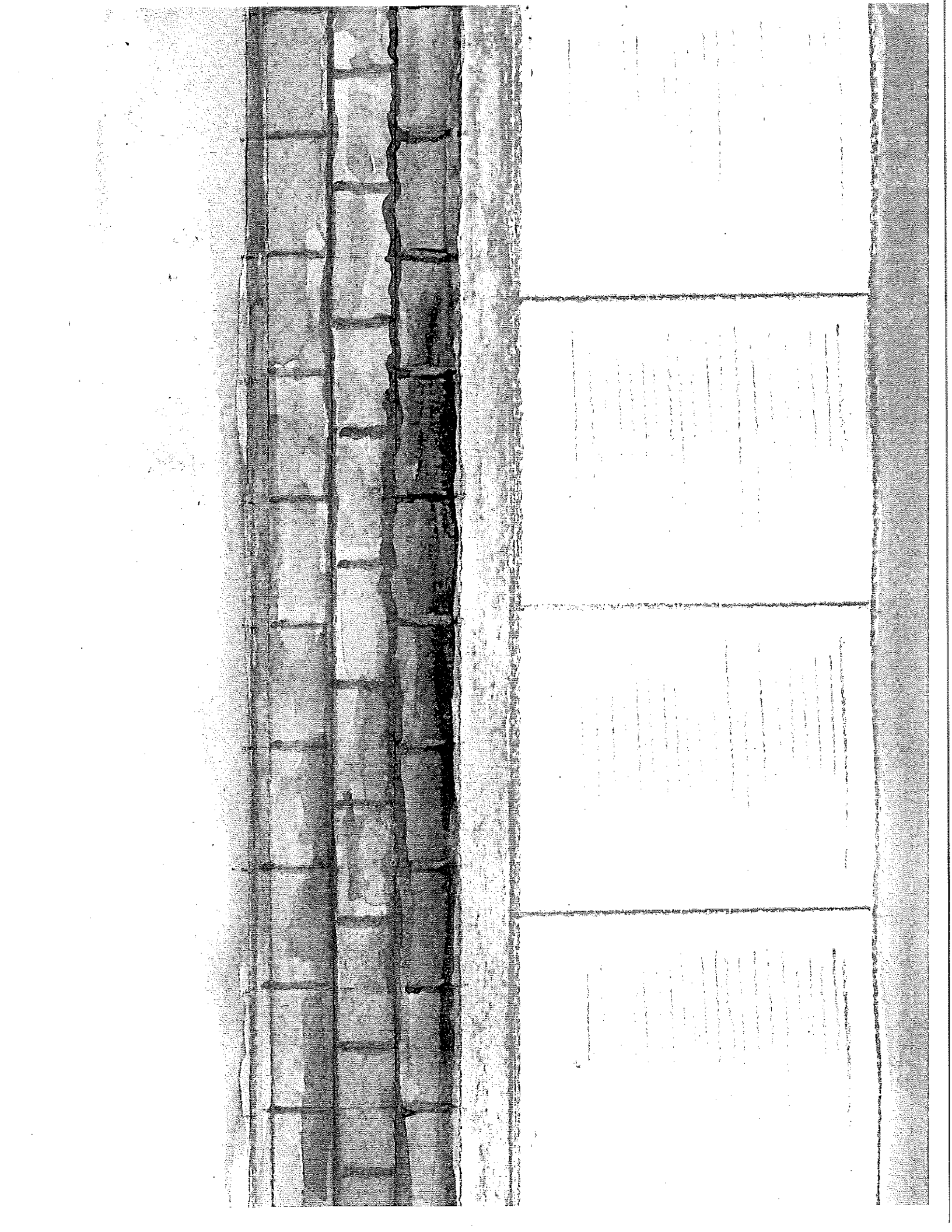
1. The plaques give a factual updated recitation of the Vietnam veterans' service,
2. The DoD Commemoration of the Vietnam War is emphasizing honoring our nation's largest group of living veterans until 2015, and
3. These plaques truly honor the service of Vietnam Veterans by putting their service in accurate historical context.

The proponents of this project would like to unveil the wall and plaques in March on Arizona Vietnam Veterans Day.

If there are any questions please feel free to contact me at home: 520-868-6777 or cell: 602-509-8762 or email: joeabo@qwestoffice.net.

  
Colonel Joseph E. Abodeely, USA (Ret)  
President, Arizona Military Museum  
Board Director, Arizona Historical Society

RCvd 12-8-15  
LAAC Directors Office



# Honoring Vietnam Veterans

The plight of the South Vietnamese people and the valiant service of their military who fought for the duration of the war has never been fully considered or appreciated by the vast majority of the American public. The word "Vietnam" has many connotations—the history, the country, the era, the war, the politics—and it is a complex and emotional subject for many to address, and there are many perspectives. So, how did the Vietnam War become America's only "bad war"? The reason should not be because America "lost the war" since the military won the war in 1973. It has been said, "The first casualty of war is truth".

## SOME KEY HISTORICAL AND GEO-POLITICAL FACTS

- France had colonized Vietnam since the mid-1800s, and after WWII, the U.S. and France wanted to prevent the Communist takeover of Vietnam.
- On March 6, 1946, France recognized the Republic of Vietnam as a free state, but not an independent state, and agreed with the Vietminh to enter into negotiations on the future status of Indochina. The Vietminh wanted to unite all of Vietnam under Communist rule although the Vietnamese had never been a "united" people.
- By December 1946, the French Indo-Chinese War had begun as Vietminh and the French negotiations were unsuccessful.
- On June 5, 1948, France agreed to recognize an independent "State of Vietnam" within the French Union with former Emperor Bao Dai as its head, and on February 7, 1950, the United States recognized this "State of Vietnam" as an independent state within the French Union. During the same year, the Soviet Union recognized the Vietminh regime in North Vietnam as The Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Each regime claimed authority over the whole of Vietnam.
- In 1954, the French Indo-Chinese War ended in military defeat for the French Union Forces at Dienbienphu and in political capitulation at the Geneva Conference. The 1954 Geneva Accords drew a demilitarized zone and required phased regroupment of Vietminh Forces from the south to the north. But the Vietminh remained in the south later forming the National Liberation Front (NLF).
- Also, in 1954, the U.S. and several other nations signed the SEATO Treaty which obligated the U.S. to defend South Vietnam against Communist aggression. A treaty is "the supreme law of the land" and was one of the major reasons why the U.S. military acted in its national interest without a declaration of war by Congress.
- On Dec. 20, 1960, The National Liberation Front (NLF), a Communist Vietnamese political organization, was formed to effect the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government.
- On January 1961, newly elected U.S. President John F. Kennedy pledged to the world: *"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty."*
- In 1962, Hanoi published the Third Party Congress' multi-volume proceedings in English and mailed copies to many American university libraries. Volume I noted that the Communist Party passed a resolution for "our people" in the south to set up a "national united front" in South Vietnam under the leadership of a Marxist-Leninist party.
- Some alleged that LBJ either fabricated or provoked the so-called "attack" in the Gulf of Tonkin on the U.S.S. Maddox on August 2, 1964—but after the war, North Vietnamese Defense Minister Vo Nguyen Giap told Robert McNamara that the attack occurred.
- In August 1964, Congress enacted the Southeast Asian Resolution by a vote of 504-2 because of the Gulf of Tonkin incident which involved attacks on two U.S. destroyers. Congress joint resolution made clear the United States was responding to *"a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression"* by Hanoi; and this attack was another reason for the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.
- The 1965 State Department's February "white paper" titled "Aggression from the North" was called a "lie" by scholars who portrayed the conflict as a struggle within South Vietnam for "freedom" and "human rights."
- A 1967 Hanoi English-language translation of the NLF Program matched paragraphs verbatim with Hanoi's English translation of the 1955 Fatherland Front program. The NLF flag was a direct copy of Hanoi's flag except for adding some blue to the background. Hanoi wanted Communist domination over South Vietnam.
- There were several years of bitter fighting in Vietnam in which the average infantryman served 240 days under hostile fire in only one year while an average infantryman in WWII served only 40 days in combat in four years. The point is to emphasize that Vietnam veterans' service was extraordinary.
- Eventually, due to extensive U.S. bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor, the U.S. and its allies forced North Vietnam to sign the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973.
- South Vietnam got some concessions, the U.S. got its POWs back, and the U.S. promised to continue to resupply South Vietnam with weapons, ammunition, and equipment if North Vietnam renewed its aggression. The vast majority of U.S. forces left Vietnam in 1973 having won its involvement in the war then.
- In May 1973 Congress ceased all logistical support to South Vietnam preventing it from defending itself. Our Vietnamese allies fought valiantly as long as they could until they ran out of ammunition and supplies; North Vietnam took over South Vietnam two years later on April 30, 1975.

## MEDIA "SPIN" INFLUENCED THE PUBLIC AND THE WAR

Vietnam was the first televised war to "inform" the public as it reported the brutality of the war every night in the evening news. The post WWII baby-boomers' idealism was shattered by images and horror of war brought into their homes as they saw the blood and napalm while eating dinner. Some draft eligible men ran off to Canada or took other actions not to get drafted.

A cultural revolution in the U.S. was also going on at the same time involving civil rights, women's liberation, and farm-workers' rights which all complemented the anti-war fervor of the times. The media, the anti-war protestors, and the counter-culture-types fed off of each other as they maligned the Vietnam War and its service men; and very few anti-Vietnam War protesters had any idea they were echoing Hanoi's propaganda and were Communist dupes—NOT heroes.

### Ho Chi Minh

The media presented Ho Chi Minh as a hero—a "freedom fighter" and the George Washington of his country—but he actually was an ardent Communist who spent two decades as a paid agent of the Communist International traveling around the globe doing Moscow's bidding. Nationalist Vietnamese patriots who resisted Ho's demands were often either murdered or—prior to the French withdrawal in 1954—betrayed to French colonial authorities for French francs.

### Walter Cronkite and the Tet Offensive

The 1968 Tet Offensive was a series of attacks by Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces at various locations in South Vietnam to incite a mass uprising against the South Vietnamese government. The offensive failed miserably as U.S. forces and Vietnamese allies actually won, but Walter Cronkite erroneously reported that the enemy won the 1968 Tet Offensive:

*"Who won and who lost in the great Tet offensive against the cities? I'm not sure. The Vietcong did not win by a knockout, but neither did we. The referees of history may make it a draw. It seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could."*

Cronkite simply misstated the result of the battle. Not all Americans were against the war, but the Tet offensive of 1968 and the Battle of Hue were the turning points, and Walter Cronkite, "the most trusted man in America," through the power of television, enhanced the negative perception of the war.

During the months and years that followed the Battle of Hue, which began on January 31, 1968, and lasted a total of 26 days, dozens of mass graves were discovered in and around Hue. The death toll of the victims was estimated between 2,800 to 6,000 civilians and prisoners of war and included women, men, children, and infants. The Republic of Vietnam released a list of 4,062 victims identified as having been either murdered or abducted.

Victims were found bound, tortured, clubbed to death, and sometimes buried alive.

The media did not emphasize the Hue massacre as much as they did My Lai.

### My Lai

The My Lai incident involved an American infantry unit gathering civilians and executing them in March 1968. The unit had suffered severe casualties in the area, and this was "payback". It was a horrendous war crime and was presented as typical of Vietnam soldiers' service when it was not routine for infantry units to do mass executions of civilians. The death, destruction, and the killing of innocent civilians in the Vietnam War should not be an iconic image and legacy of Vietnam veterans' service any more than the killing of innocent civilians which occurred in Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Iraq, or Afghanistan should be. Innocent people are killed in all wars. We now call it "collateral damage". The My Lai incident became a rallying cry for the protestors, and television strongly influenced the results of the Vietnam War.

### The Pentagon Papers

The Pentagon Papers were published in 1971 when support for the U.S. role in the war was steadily eroding, supposedly confirmed that the U.S. government had instigated the conflict. Daniel Ellsberg, a U.S. Marine Corps officer from 1954 to 1957, worked as a strategic analyst at the RAND Corporation and the Department of Defense. He was an early supporter of U.S. involvement in Indochina, and he worked on the preparation of the 1967 classified study-- the *Pentagon Papers*-- of the United States political and military involvement in Vietnam from the end of World War II.

By 1969, Ellsberg concluded that the war in Vietnam was unwinnable and he secretly photocopied portions of the report and gave them to *The New York Times*. Beginning on June 13, 1971, the *Times* published a series of daily articles based on the *Pentagon Papers* as did the *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, and other newspapers, and the *Pentagon Papers* were read aloud in the public record in a Senate subcommittee hearing.

The Pentagon Papers showed that former presidents had not fully disclosed to the public about the degree of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, from Truman's decision to give military aid to France fighting the communist-led Vietminh, to Johnson's development of plans to escalate the war in Vietnam as early as 1964. This confirmed many people's suspicions about the active role the U.S. government had taken in building up the conflict.

(Remember that the NLF was formed on Dec. 20, 1960, four years earlier).

Ellsberg was indicted on criminal charges including conspiracy, espionage, and stealing government property. The trial began in 1973, but ended in a dismissal of the charges after prosecutors discovered that a secret White House team (dubbed "the plumbers") had burglarized Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in September 1971 to find information to discredit him. The failure to disclose military secrets was "much ado about nothing", but it aided the anti-war movement.

#### Gen. Loan Executing the Vietcong Officer

During the war the media published photos without explanation which supported the anti-war movement. The famous photo of National Police Chief Brig. Gen. Nguyen Ngoc Loan executing the Vietcong officer on February 1, 1968 was taken by Eddie Adams who later said that General Loan "shot him in the head and walked away. And walked by us and said, 'They killed many of my men and many of our people.'"

The Viet Cong lieutenant had just beheaded a South Vietnamese colonel and killed his wife and their six children. Adams' photograph became a symbol of the excesses of the war. But for the rest of his life, Adams was haunted by the photo and felt it was misunderstood. Adams said: "If you're this man, this general, and you just caught this guy after he killed some of your people...How do you know you wouldn't have pulled that trigger yourself? You have to put yourself in that situation...It's a war."

#### The "Napalm Girl"

The "napalm girl", Kim Phuc, was the naked girl running from an airborne attack in the devastatingly iconic Pulitzer Prize winning photo shot during the Vietnam War. It was June 8, 1972, when Phuc heard the soldier's scream: "We have to run out of this place! They will bomb here, and we will be dead!" Seconds later, she saw the tails of yellow and purple smoke grenades curling around the Cao Dai temple where her family had sheltered for three days as North and South Vietnamese forces fought for control of their village.

Part of the propaganda was that the U.S. Air Force dropped the bombs. The truth is the South Vietnamese Air Force conducted the mission because South Vietnamese troops called for an air strike on that location to kill the North Vietnamese who were there.

The "napalm girl" was an unintended casualty of war.

#### General William C. Westmoreland v. CBS

CBS aired the program--*The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception*--on January 23, 1982, to prove that General William C. Westmoreland deliberately misled President Johnson, the Pentagon, and Americans as to the actual strength of the VC/NVA just prior to the 1968 Tet Offensive to give the false impression that the U.S. was winning the war. It was the first big smear of a public figure attempted by CBS, but the U.S. and South Vietnam actually won the 1968 Tet Offensive.

George Crile produced and Mike Wallace narrated the program based on allegations by former CIA analyst and well-known left-winger, Sam Adams, whose claims had already been investigated and dismissed by the House Select Committee on Intelligence in 1975. CBS proceeded with production knowingly using a discredited source. It featured paid, coached, and rehearsed "witnesses" and Dan Rather deliberately provoking General Westmoreland to make him angry and appear "guilty" under his questioning.

After its controversial airing, *TV GUIDE* ran a major article titled "*Anatomy of a Smear: How CBS Broke the Rules and 'Got' Westmoreland.*" Professor Leonard Magruder, then teaching at Suffolk College in New York, wrote a detailed analysis of the lies. He sent copies to CBS executives, reporters, other networks, and major newspapers.

General Westmoreland received a copy of Professor Magruder's work and sent it to his lawyers, who were working on a \$120 million libel suit against CBS. The general had tremendous support from fellow Vietnam veterans and Americans who raised thousands of dollars for his defense fund.

General Westmoreland made a public statement on December 27, 1983, listing some of the exhibits in his lawsuit which were extremely damning to CBS, but because the cost of a lawsuit was prohibitive, he settled for an apology from CBS, much to the frustration of his many supporters.

He was magnanimous saying that "I do not believe it is fair to judge the media by the isolated actions of some of its irresponsible members." This major media attempt at smearing General Westmoreland failed miserably and showed despicable media conduct even after the war.

#### THE LEGACY OF THE SO-CALLED "PEACE MOVEMENT"

In May 1973, right after the U.S. got North Vietnam to sign a peace treaty, Congress gave in to pressures from the so-called "peace movement" and made it unlawful to spend appropriated funds on combat operations on the ground, in the air, or off the shores of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia. It forfeited the U.S. victory that the military won and betrayed the people the U.S. had repeatedly pledged its honor to protect.

Although the South Vietnamese still had planes, tanks, and rifles, they had very little fuel, spare parts, or ammo. They literally ran out of ammo in battle. The Communists launched a conventional military invasion behind columns of Soviet made tanks to conquer South Vietnam in 1975. The media portrayed Vietnam veterans as having lost the Vietnam War.

So, what was the human cost? The Communists took Laos and Cambodia at the same time. There was also Communist aggression in Angola, Central America, and Afghanistan—all direct consequences of the perception that America had lost its will during "Vietnam." These conflicts cost more than a million additional people's lives.

The Yale University Cambodia Genocide Project stated roughly 1.7 million Cambodians (more than 20% of the population) were killed by the "Red Cambodians" (Khmer Rouge) under Pol Pot. A *National Geographic Today 2004* story captured the reality of the "killing fields" of Cambodia, noting that to save bullets, small children were simply picked up by their legs and bashed against trees until they stopped quivering. This was another consequence of the so-called American "peace movement."

In "liberated" South Vietnam, some class enemies were executed outright, but many more were sent off to "reeducation camps." After being allowed to see one of these camps because of his own anti-war credentials, a *Le Monde* correspondent termed it "*Le Goulag Vietnamien*." Hundreds of thousands of former South Vietnamese government and military personnel died in these camps and tens of thousands perished in the "New Economic Zones."

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees had estimated that several hundred thousand South Vietnamese who fled their country in overcrowded and unseaworthy boats in search of freedom drowned or died of thirst or starvation, and one can only estimate how many men were forced to watch as their wives and daughters were gang-raped by pirates (and then often killed or carried off never to be seen again). The total deaths directly attributable to "liberation" in South Vietnam and Cambodia certainly exceeded two million.

The "peace movement's" so-called quest for "human rights" in Vietnam based on the belief that the Vietnamese people would settle their own affairs and human rights would flourish, was a fantasy.

The human rights group, Freedom House, ranks every country in the world annually on the basis of its political and civil liberties. For decades after "liberation" the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was at the bottom of the "Dirty Dozen" or "Worst of the Worst" lists. At one point it was described as "less free than China, about as free as North Korea." This was the legacy of the American "peace movement".

#### HONORING VIETNAM VETERANS

Some writers, media members, and so-called historians still present distorted history and lies about the Vietnam War calling it "orthodox history" claiming with glee that "America lost the Vietnam War". They emphasize the 58,000 dead and disregard the fact that Vietnam veterans saved the rest of South-East Asia from Communist domination.

The Vietnam War was truly a fight for the freedom of the South Vietnamese. "Support our troops" should have applied to Vietnam veterans.

Approximately 3.4 million Americans served "in theater" (off the coastal waters or flying from Thailand) during the Vietnam War. However, research based on Veterans Administration claims and other documentation indicates that approximately 13 million Americans claim to have served "in theater" during the war. A Vietnam era veteran's service in Germany, Korea, or CONUS should be acknowledged and appreciated, but it is NOT service in Vietnam or its theater of operations.

Dysfunctional Vietnam veterans, veterans ignorant about the reasons for the war, those who did not serve honorably, or those who are not proud of their service, often perpetuate the negatives of Vietnam veterans' service.

All veterans want to have his/her service recognized and appreciated. Vietnam veterans were denied this. The very best way to honor Vietnam veterans is to tell the truth about the war.

The truth about Vietnam veterans service in the Vietnam War is—that the war was legal—that most Vietnam veterans volunteered and are proud of their service—that Vietnam veterans actually fought for freedom and their service was extraordinary—that U.S. forces won the 1968 Tet Offensive—that My Lai and other acts of misconduct were exceptions and not the rule—that the U.S. won the Vietnam War in 1973—that Congress broke its promise to continue logistical support to South Vietnam and allowed the North to prevail—and that Vietnam veterans are true heroes.

It is appropriate to honor the dead, but the best way to Honor living Vietnam veterans is to tell the truth about their extraordinary service, their fighting for freedom, and their defending the people of South Vietnam. Honor the living Vietnam veterans. They'll appreciate it.

**Colonel Joseph E. Abodeely, USA (Ret)**