

Doug Rawlings: Insights on viewing the Burns and Novick documentary on the Vietnam War

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REFLECTIONS ON EPISODES

EPISODE ONE

I began the evening in a funk. Shut down and somewhat angry. Here comes THE DOCUMENTARY. It was something like how I felt when I first heard in the late seventies that somebody was going to build a memorial to "my war." Fuck them. What do they know? Hell, what do I know? I have since become enamored with Maya Lin's magnificent Wall, so I thought, what the fuck, maybe I could become captivated, elevated, "cured," even "healed," by this documentary. After watching Episode One, I have become disabused of that notion.

First off, it has been 47 years since I ended my 411 day journey through that war, so I have survived what I first characterized as a "surreal" trip through stupefying violence, dread, and, to paraphrase Hannah Arendt, an evil made even more crippling through its daily banality. I came home, compartmentalized my experiences, got an education, got a job, and raised a family. I was in control. Maybe.

Now Burns and Novick have stirred up the pot. Now, after watching their bizarre cinematic flashback PTSD-infused jumble of images, I feel like I am looking back at my year in Vietnam through a kaleidoscope. Nothing makes sense. Maybe it shouldn't, but, damn it, I thought I had fixed up a comfortable narrative to rest in as I slide toward oblivion. Spirits have been awakened. Now, what to do with them?

I have joined many of my comrades in Veterans For Peace for a decade-long mission we have entitled "Full Disclosure" as a means to counter the revisionist history of the American War in Viet Nam spun out by the Pentagon and their minions. So I am committed to using my experiences to question cultural artifacts such as this documentary. First and foremost, why doesn't Burns frame the war as an exercise in hubris, cultural ignorance, and mendacious colonialism? There was no nobility in our government's motives nor in its policies. None. And why should we believe wholesale the comments of South Vietnamese quislings who portray the war as a struggle against communism? And where does this guy Marlantes get off referring to the violence we had to dish out in order to survive as some kind of "finishing school"? Of course there are some saving graces, like Tim O'Brien's philosophical musings on the "heroism" involved in just taking one more step down the trail. And the unflinching portrayal of the misguided "pacification" program with its feudal "strategic hamlets," another perfect example of our tone-deaf clumsiness -- removing villagers from their sacred villages to "protect them" behind barbed wire and sand bagged bunkers. Seriously?

So what did I expect anyways from an exercise in documentation that calls itself "a story"? A series of stories, actually, that loop back on to themselves, making the viewer question which one is true and which one isn't. Or are they both true at the same time? This kind of a narrative is a slippery slope that is greased by moral ambiguity, leaving the audience crumpled down at the bottom of the hill in a bit of a daze. Maybe that's it. Maybe we should just give up and accept the filmmakers' imagistic metaphor of a red plague creeping down Indochina that we brave band of lads were sent to dam up. But I can't. And I won't.

EPISODE TWO

Lots of people have written about Episode 2, which was more like a history lesson (albeit a flawed one) than the gut-wrenching first episode. I had read Sheehan's A BRIGHT SHINING LIE a few months ago and found this section pretty much a videocast of the book. I agreed with Sheehan's analysis of the immoral calculations of our government and then Diem's. He captured the lies spun to entice Catholics down from the north, the completely

insidious evil of General Harkins, and the stunning idiocy of trusting an army made up of lying generals and disinterested conscripts (the ARVN, he means, but wait! That sounds like another army over there). In any event, I did appreciate the demythologizing of JFK (he couldn't expect to get out of Vietnam and win re-election) as well as the gut-wrenching video of the self-immolating Buddhist monks and then the courageous resistance to the war building up on American and Vietnamese campuses. Here's a poem I wrote over fifteen years ago that tries to capture my disillusionment with JFK and his "best and brightest," as well as my plea to namvets to carry on . . .

CORDWOOD

"The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to
this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it --
and the glow from that fire can truly light the world"

--from JFK's Inaugural Address

(20 January 1961)

Late September.

It has been three decades

of oak, maple, ash

the dreaded birch

and elm

cut

split,

stacked

and stacked again

Meanwhile

over at Togus*

my thorazine brothers

tend to their own fall chores

shuffling through twenty years

of smoke and mirrors:

the smoke from JFK's

watchfires

nothing more than

sawed off barrels of burning

shit

the mirrors

beckon

threaten

to slit a wrist

Late September again.

Full moon.

Back to the woodpile

to work up a sweat

to clear my head

(fires are burning within fires)

to hold out against

the coming of another

winter's long night

*Togus is Maine's VA hospital

EPISODE THREE

Here comes the dread again. Having been fed on the misty legends of the Battle of Ia Drang Valley over and over again through basic and AIT, when I "arrived in country" in July of 1969, and then choppered up to LZ Uplift in the central highlands, I fully anticipated being overrun by hordes of NVA at any moment. We weren't. In fact, we were confronted by the NLF (out of respect for the Vietnamese, I now use that term instead of VC, which we used all the time. Not to mention the term "gooks"). Still, I was not prepared for the footage of that battle last night.

I was with the 7/15th Artillery, attached to the 173rd Airborne, essentially spending the bulk of my time at LZ's and then one firebase. As the Airborne guys filtered back in "behind the wire" every morning, I pitied them -- man, I thought, I'm glad I wasn't them. But pity is self-serving. And self-indulgent. What I felt last night was true compassion -- I put myself into their boots and quaked with fear. And also anger. The Ia Drang was a true FUBAR (fucked up) -- outnumbered by a factor of at least seven, these guys were decimated. And I get so tired of the military trying to pull something grand out of a self-made disaster -- bad intel and arrogance ("itching for a fight") cost the lives of many and the souls of those who survived. Want to know where PTSD comes from? There it is. And what do we hear last night? How brave "my men" are. Not how their lives, if they survived, will be

broken forever. And, of course, in case you didn't get the message the military wants you to hear, prior to covering the battle we have a mother reading from "Henry V" the famous speech on St. Crispin's Day that stirs up the "brave band of brothers" image that many think all of us carry with us after surviving an attack.

But then I have to give credit for an interesting choice of music underscoring the scenes last night. Episode Two began with the haunting, abstract, probing trumpet of Miles Davis as we pondered the implications of history. Episode Three starts differently. Bob Dylan is singing in the background: "My name it means nothing," implying for me the ultimate truth of being a soldier -- you are, first and foremost, an "asset" to be deployed. JFK, LBJ, McNamara and other "leaders" ad nauseum talk of numbers -- "give me 50,000;" "no, I want 100,000" (oftentimes throughout the documentary delivered via a tape recorder). Wait a minute. We are not Christmas toys to be played with (that's Kurt Vonnegut's metaphor); we are human beings with loved ones aching for our safe return.

And then later on we hear the plaintive voice of Buffy Ste Marie measuring us all against her "universal soldier." Her anger grows in that song in proportion to ours. And Phil Ochs saying it as it is: "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore." I was fully expecting to hear one of our favorites of the day: the Animals singing "We Gotta Get Out of This Place." That kind of lyrical pushback to the cold, calculating militaristic account of that war is much appreciated.

And, finally, finally, someone really does pull the curtain open on the travesty of the Gulf of Tonkin "incident" that propelled us into full-scale war. Kudos to the documentarians for that one. Once again, it comes down to posturing by presidents concerned about their images and ultimately getting reelected. Was it a coincidence that the August retaliation that showed how "strong" LBJ was came before an election? I think not.

On a personal note, as this episode unfolded I heard names of places I have not really thought of in decades -- An Khe, Pleiku, Qui Nhon, Bien Hoa -- that I stepped through on my journey through that war.

Two other passing thoughts: 1). Was it a mistake or a calculated design to name this episode "Crossing the River Styx" after a passing comment from a soldier or a politician when, really, it should have been "Crossing the Rubicon" -- Caesar's infamous remark as he brought Rome deeper into their war? Perhaps the Styx boundary, separating us from hell, is more appropriate. Interesting choice. 2). The running commentary of Bill Zimmerman is appreciated as he chronicles his own personal journey through the anti-war movement (demonstrating in front of Dow Chemical with forty people and then a year later joining thousands in protest against the war). I am sure my friends who were in SDS want more coverage of their heroic stance against the war, but Zimmerman's voice, so far, is a needed thread that young people today might need to help them weave the resistance into this narrative of war. Let's hope he is joined by others as the documentary continues on.

So, yes, I join with many of my fellow VFP members in our reservations about this documentary. But, as we also know, this work is providing us with an opportunity to further deepen and enrich our country's realization of how devastating the American War in Viet Nam was, and is, to us and the Vietnamese people. And, I might add, there are some amongst us whose participation in this conversation fifty years after living through it is taking its toll. Please be conscious of that.

EPISODE FOUR: "RESOLVE"

This is the story of 1966, a year that the producers of this film have designated as the time when doubt began to worm its way into the American troops. This doubt sows the breeding ground for what we now call "moral injury." You begin to realize that your job of killing others, or supporting those who are carrying out the killing, is not divinely ordained. You are not in a just war. In fact, you are being used by others who have much more pedestrian motives -- rank, saving face, gaining political favor. This is three years before I even set foot in country, into a war much different than early 1966. In 1969, we trudged into that muck and mire as reluctant

cynics. We were intent on surviving. Not attaining some fanciful glorious victory over the demonic communists. But not so for the 173rd Airborne in the Central Highlands in mid-1966. So, let's assume that Burns and Novick et al are somewhat accurate in setting off 1966 as the "turning point" in our slow awakening to the truth. So what?

First off, this would be a good point for the auteurs to work in the aforementioned concept of moral injury. I understand that term as a means to capture that slow, remorseful process of recognizing one's complicity in what most religions call "evil." You realize that there is no excuse for your unwillingness or inability to stop human degradation as it unfolds before you. For breaking deeply held moral codes. And now you must accept the consequences of that debilitating malaise that worked its way into your head. Some of us have deflected that responsibility by attacking the commanders and officers and politicians who told us to follow their orders. But that excuse wears thin over time. Now, in 2017, the proverbial chickens have come home to roost. Even though the film makers do not overtly acknowledge this concept, its presence begins to cast shadows on their narrative.

As I watched the faces of the soldiers caught up in the moment or moments that will change their lives forever, those acts of quick reflex to survive or to avenge the deaths of buddies, I cringed. Doug Peacock, a medic with the Green Berets for two tours, captures "the horror, the horror" of it all in his memoir *WALKING IT OFF* when he writes about the staggering realization that "everything is permitted." You are nineteen, and you can end life, make life for another unbearable, and you can do it with virtual impunity. A person does not come back from that world unscathed.

At this juncture of the film, four episodes into a ten episode saga, it is evident to me that we are not watching a true documentary film. In my eyes, documentation is rooted in facts and, if at all possible, immutable truths. The documentarian's function is to get down to historical truths, to discover cause and effect, and to provide us with a trustworthy scaffolding to rebuild our memories as soundly as possible. No, we are watching instead a series of anecdotes, each one imbued with the earnestness of the teller. Who dares to question the grieving mother or disillusioned sister or duty-bound soldier? We are not being invited into a logical discussion of facts here -- we are being asked to bear witness. And that has its merits.

This realization of the film's mischaracterization as documentary does not totally diminish it in my eyes. Indeed, it enhances its importance when I realize what it is doing to me right now, late at night, here in my house, in my seventieth year. Each episode is eliciting some deeply held beliefs, bringing stuff to light that I can ponder and try to understand. Maybe even finally put to rest or at least into a perspective I can grapple with. I also understand that this film is not a therapeutic tool, but it does force me to explore my own complicity in war's terrible legacies. So, this is not history we are watching. We are watching theater. And we who lived through that war, whether "in country" or not, must see ourselves as players on a stage. We played roles back then, and we are playing roles right now.

The true value of this exercise in cinema, then, can be found in the telling -- as it reaches into our psyches and teases out our own anecdotes for yet another walk-through, we hopefully become more aware of others, we deepen our compassion for the "enemy," and we come closer to some real truths. And then we tell our own narratives to someone we love. Here's a poem I wrote in the seventies about my year in Vietnam that tries to do just that :

YOU SHOULD WRITE ABOUT IT

You should

write a book

about it.

Like that time
you held
that hand
or when the stars
burst into flares
Or how about when
the earth flew away
before your eyes?

And how about
that smell?

Maybe you should write
a manual
detailing how to
burn your shit
in diesel fuel
before breakfast.

Or maybe you
could write a song
about the 175's
and the 8-inchers
blowing away your eardrums.

Or perhaps a poem
to the girls
in their wooden faces
making love to the moon
bouncing behind your
shoulder.

Well, how about it?

It's been awhile.

I know you still got it
in you.

Write something
anything
god damn you

It won't kill you, you know.

At least not anymore than
it already has.

EPISODE FIVE

"This Is War. This Is What We Do."

This nightly trek to the TV screen is getting exhausting. Of course this medium that we have allowed into our homes these past five evenings, that we have chosen to bring us back into those years, is primarily visual, but it is the auditory barrage that is beginning to take its toll. The choppers, the 155's, the constant ripple of machine gun fire, and then woven through it all the music that held us together through the chaos of growing up in war.

Tonight it was Jimi holding forth --"Are You Experienced?" -- a song that I did not associate with Vietnam, quite frankly, but now makes perfect sense. Oh yeah, we were experienced. Fighting in the war and fighting against it, risking our lives and our futures, men and women alike stepping out of our comfort zones to confront the demons in the Pentagon and the White House who were intent on wasting us for their gain. It was indeed our "experience" that terrified them. We were going to come back from the jungles and the streets and the college campuses to haunt these bastards for the rest of their days -- McNamara shuffling out of power, discarded by the war mongers, represented the harbinger of times to come. Damn, we almost did it. We shook them to the core. Their children were looking them in the eye with a newfound spite. And the arrogant sons-of-bitches couldn't quite fathom that the real power was indeed out in the streets.

Granted, this episode is serving as a prelude to the game-changer in Vietnam -- the 1968 Tet Offensive -- but I also see it as the game-changer back home. As someone said during this hour, the anti-war movement had moved from protesting the war to stopping it. And then the episode eerily closes with the Stones' "Paint It Black" speaking volumes -- you want to paint it red, white, and blue, do you? Well, fuck you. We are going to paint it black; we are going to close down business. Damn it, we came close.

Another take away from this episode comes from the guy who has had the most air time so far -- Musgrave, the Marine from Missouri. What makes him perfect in his role as a kind of "Greek chorus" is his almost boyish, gee-

whiz look: let's face it, folks, he says as he seduces the camera, "this is Racism 101. Gooks, dinks, slopes, whatever, they were subhuman." Yes, there it is -- one of the core realities of this godforsaken war was its inherent racism. Remember Muhammed Ali's powerful rallying cry: "I ain't going. No VC ever called me a nigger." Racism at home was his real enemy, and he knew it; he was not going to have any part in exporting our brand of racism to another country.

And, whoa!, what is this? An army reporter sitting comfortably on a couch intones this observation: "yes, I witnessed atrocities committed by American troops." Specifically, he was referring to the infamous Tiger Force carrying out what were probably Phoenix Program orders. To kill everything that moved -- men, women, children, livestock. Perhaps as this episode is laying groundwork for the Tet Offensive, it is also preparing us for March 16, 1968 when the Americal Division slaughtered 504 Vietnamese villagers in My Lai. Is the American audience ready for this revelation? Sure, we saw the ditch with the bodies stretched out on the cover of LOOK MAGAZINE back in 1969, but to see it again

I suppose we can fault Burns and Novick for not lingering as long as we think they should over these truths of the war -- its racism, its mind-boggling brutality, its increasingly genocidal momentum as our desperate need for "victory" begins to become sickeningly macabre. Its use of chemical and biological weapons. Its parade of war criminals in grey flannel suits. But the very reference to these diabolical forces at play makes me feel that maybe, just maybe, this grand cinematic exercise is not going to be the total whitewash many of us thought it was going to be. For me, the jury is still out.

Here's a poem I wrote in the early eighties as I heard about a monument being built in DC in "our honor." I have since been to The Wall many times, and hold Maya Lin in the greatest regard for her masterful work, but, still, the notion of war memorials gnaws away at me

ON WAR MEMORIALS

Corporate America

be forewarned:

We* are your karma

We are your Orion

rising in the night sky

We are the scorpion

in your jackboot

Corporate America

be forewarned:

We will not buy

your bloody parades anymore

We refuse your worthless praise

We spit on
your war memorials

Corporate America
be forewarned:

We will not feed you
our bodies
our minds
our children
anymore

Corporate America
be forewarned:

If we have our way
(and we will)
the real war memorials
will rise
from your ashes

*The "we" in this poem are the Vietnam Veterans who have come home from the dark side of the empire to say:
No More War

EPISODE SIX

"Things Fall Apart"

485,600 American troops in Vietnam at the beginning of 1968; 510,000 at its close.

As any American veteran watching this series must be doing, I am guilty of -- waiting for the episode that tries to encapsulate "my year in country." That will probably be Monday night as 1968 dissolves into 1969 (I was there from July 2, 1969 to August 9, 1970). So I was totally unprepared for the chopper crew chief's crazed voice suddenly shouting out "LZ Two Bits." Holy shit, that's where I spent the last half of my thirteen months, as we labored to turn that LZ into a firebase (we started that during Tet 1970). And with Janis Joplin's voice crackling in the background. Too much.

But then I settled in and watched, listened to, breathed in the utter turmoil of 1968 (I was graduating from

college) as MLK is assassinated, as LBJ quits his party, as RFK is gunned down, as the cities erupt (including Rochester, NY, my hometown and Cleveland, Ohio, where I went to college). But, again, I was able to pretty much wrap myself in a cocoon of received language, as all of this footage was pretty much familiar to me. I was safely distanced from my feelings. Until the battle of Hue came on the screen. Not because I experienced anything close to this city fighting -- hell, I was never even in Saigon or any city for that matter -- but because the "documentary's" trajectory is advanced by intensifying the story of one young Marine, Bill Ehrhart, whose youthful patriotism had been alluded to earlier.

In 1976, Bill and Jan Barry put out an anthology of Vietnam veteran poetry, DMZ, that includes some of my poems. Over the years I have corresponded with Bill and another poet from the American war in Vietnam, Dave Connolly from Southie, who also published my poems. Both were approached by Lynn Novick to be interviewed. Dave said no, but Bill said yes. I respect both men's decisions. Dave has written that he thought the project was going to be too flawed from the get go, whereas Bill has written that participating in it was worth the risk, that lending his voice to the narrative would at least awaken the American public to the realization that many American veterans are still grieving over what they did over there.

Bill was heavily involved in the fighting in and around Hue, being wounded but eventually choppered out, not because of his wounds, but because "his time in country" was up. He reflects on how minutes after leaving the street fighting he was flying over what seemed to be a tranquil countryside of rice farmers tending their paddies. He also painfully recounts how he joined his squad in taking advantage of a Vietnamese woman in the midst of the killing -- as an 18 year old kid, egged on by pressure from his peers, to even further deepen the moral depths he had sunk into. As Bill looks into the camera, we get the sense that he will never fully come to terms with what war had done to him. Moral injury rears its ugly head yet again. I only hope that the film will, in future episodes, also show what Bill did, and has done ever since, to lend his voice to the anti-war movement over the years. Both he and Dave have used their remorse as powerful weapons against what the poet Robert Bly calls "Americans' fantastic capacity for aggression and self-delusion."

Although Bill's personal account helps shake up the audience on one level, Burns and Novick make a serious mistake on another. They provide visual imagery and "confessions" from NVA officers about a mass grave outside of Hue that point to a horrific massacre of civilians by NLF and NVA forces. Yet they do not mention the March 16, 1968 My Lai and My Khe massacres of civilians by American troops. Perhaps they are waiting to "cover" that abomination until their episode about 1969, when it was revealed to the American public, but, still, not even providing a reference to it at this juncture can only make the film makers complicit in Bly's "self-delusion."

Finally, the episode comes to a close with a homecoming narrative from a young black Marine named Harris whom we have come to know throughout the series. He is the veteran who tells of his correspondence with his mom who is convinced that her son will survive, while he tells us that "death was stalking him." He does survive. He arrives at Logan Airport in Boston, in his uniform in 1968, to be shunned by taxi cab drivers at the airport. A police officer has to stop a cabbie and tell him to pick this guy up. Now at this point I was fully prepared for a story intended to reinforce the myth that returning soldiers were routinely spat upon and reviled by hippies and such. Not so. Our aging veteran looks at us, tweaks his bowtie, and says that that cab driver did not want to "take a nigger into Roxbury." It was too dangerous. Later on, the same Marine tells us that he refused to lift an M-16 against his fellow citizens as the National Guard was called out to "quell riots" in his hometown. To me, the virulent racism gripping this country in 1968 is embodied in this veteran's closing narrative as we continue to sink deeper into the "big muddy" of the American War in Vietnam. Where is the end to all of this? Is there any light at the end of this rabbit tunnel? "Go Ask Alice," Gracie Slick tells us. Indeed.

EPISODE SEVEN

"THE VENEER OF CIVILIZATION"

Every episode is replete with images of the killing machine grinding away -- B52's float like geese thousands of feet above the terrain lazily letting their payload out to nonchalantly ravage the countryside as F-4's swoop in and 155's and 175's pound away day after day. More ordnance than all of World War II let loose on a country the size of Massachusetts. By this time the viewer can't be blamed for being numbed by it all. But now, in 1968, the bodies start piling up like cordwood, and we are locked into an Hieronymus Bosch painting of our own design. To break us out of our stupor Burns and company flash street scenes from all around the world of student riots and police clubbings (the Beatles' "Revolution" screams away). Our chopper crewman from the previous episode recounts what it was like in an Australian hotel room (he was on R&R) to watch a cop who looked like his father beating on a kid who looked like him. From that moment on, he tells us, he was politicized. Note that the really bizarre part of R&R (I, too, went to Sydney) was going back. There was no excuse now -- you knew full well what you were heading into. There were reports of guys deserting at this point, but not many. Meanwhile, the voices of Simon and Garfunkel singing from "What A Time It Was" wafts out of the TV screen. We are trapped. It is 1968.

Tim O'Brien, the author of what I consider to be one of the finest renditions of the "Vietnam experience" -- THE THINGS THEY CARRIED -- tells us what it was like for a middle-class white kid getting his draft notice. Canada beckons. His parents avoid the topic. He waives. He finally admits to going into that immoral war out of cowardice. He did not want to embarrass his parents or have his family vilified by the townsfolk for having a son shirk his duty. He admits to "turning off a switch" in his mind -- the debate has ended. He will go. As he looks into the camera from beneath his beloved Red Sox hat, he shares the haunted look of Bill Ehrhart from Episode Six. A lifetime of almost crippling remorse stares back at us. Note: I received my draft notice sitting in a boarding house just off the campus of Ohio State in the fall of 1968, where I was half-heartedly pursuing an MBA, and I, too, consumed by self-centered personal travails, caved in. I would go as well. What strikes me at this point in the film is how the auteurs have distilled hours of interviews into a few precious moments of deep truth -- O'Brien connects with me almost as if an electrical charge has passed between us. I know that he knows that I know.

Khe Sanh by now has been totally decimated. And after all the blood and terror, the military packs up and leaves, deserts the landscape. Poof. Gone. A neighbor from around the block, brother of a woman whom my brother was engaged to, is on one of the first patrols leaving the encampment. He is killed. Surely, though, after all the bombing around the perimeter, the infamous "kill ratio" has to be in our favor. His death is slotted away, a digit lost in some bureaucrat's bloodless calculus. What is left of the NLF slip away to be wasted down country in the streets of South Vietnam as the Tet Offensive gears up. Images of these poor bastards working their way down the Ho Chi Minh Trail are striking as they capture one thing that we all shared -- the thousand yard stare.

Meanwhile, back home the debacle of the 1968 presidential election unfolds -- with so much footage to choose from, Burns and Novick cannot be faulted for using scenes from Chicago streets, but I have to tell ya, the shot of LBJ and Ladybird laying in bed watching the convention proceedings is classic -- quick! Think of John and Yoko holding their "bed-in" wearing, I swear to God, the same pajamas. Kids, it was truly bizarre being alive in 1968. And by now in the film, when the gentle music begins, and we are allowed to bear witness to clips of some young lad growing up in America, we know he is doomed. We just wait to hear of his particular fate -- blown to smithereens while riding on an APC or gunned down while walking point. There are now some 37,560 American deaths in January of 1969 and, of course, who knows -- in this racist war -- how many Vietnamese. The camera rolls on.

Speaking of "kids," I find Marlantes' account of "his" war particularly grating. I recognize his honorable intentions, leaving Oxford University to be as deeply engaged in the war as the lowest grunt, and, by all accounts, fighting bravely. But he typifies for me the stupid patronizing attitude of the officer class -- he is overwhelmed by the almost blind commitment of "his" 19 year olds, who, with no skin in the political game and virtually guaranteed to not reap any riches from this war, slog on under his command. I do not question his love and even allegiance to the men he fought alongside. I just remember being looked at by some "shake and bake" as if I were a piece of machinery to be used as he saw fit. Officers! Don't get me started

Burns and Novick packed a lot into this episode -- the iniquitous Phoenix Program, General Ewell's bloodthirsty

"Speedy Express" murder campaign, the burgeoning black market, the corruption prevalent in the ARVN and the dehumanizing impulses of your average GI let loose in a "Free Fire Zone." All there for us to see. But what to take away? An admiration for the heroism of Americans and Vietnamese caught up in a grotesque, immoral, unjust war, just trying to survive? Disgust at the venality of the old men in the background pulling the strings? A deep, abiding cynicism as we look into the future of our country? What? I dunno. Here's a poem I wrote in 1986 after visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC for the first time:

THE WALL

Descending into this declivity
dug into our nation's capital
by the cloven hoof
of yet another one of our country's
tropical wars

Slipping past the names of those
whose wounds
refuse to heal

Slipping past the panel where
my name would have been
could have been
perhaps should have been

Down to The Wall's greatest depth
where the beginning meets the end
I kneel

Staring through my own reflection
beyond the names of those
who died so young

Knowing now that The Wall
has finally found me â€“
58,000 thousand-yard stares

have fixed on me
as if I were their Pole Star
as if I could guide their mute testimony
back into the world
as if I could connect all those dots
in the nighttime sky

As if I could tell them
the reason why

EPISODE EIGHT: April 1969 to May 1970

"THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD"

AS OF APRIL, 1969 THERE ARE 543,482 AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN COUNTRY.

40,794 DEAD AMERICAN SOLDIERS TO DATE

Silence. That's the overriding theme of this episode although I don't think Burns and Novick intended it that way. Silence, as in Martin Luther King, Jr's admonition that "our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Does that not perfectly frame Nixon's so-called "brilliant" maneuver of celebrating the amoral, even cowardly, silence of the majority of Americans in the face of this war's immorality and in response to the righteous anger of young and old who raged against it? His infamous "silent majority" speech kicks off this episode. To counter this political maneuver, one activist (I refuse to use the word "protestor," which is like calling the NLF Viet Cong) seared our TV screen last night with this placard: "To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men --Abraham Lincoln." Amen, brothers and sisters. That says it all.

And then there is the silence of the film makers themselves, so far, when it comes to the incredibly important GI Resistance Movement (for an insightful documentary on that front, see "Sir! No Sir!") that began to rise up as Nixon tried to wind down the war. Where is that story? Just sticking in passing references to disgruntled veterans voicing their anger, as important as those voices are, does not do it justice. We need more. Maybe that focus is coming in the next two episodes. I suppose I may be accused here of falling into the trap of anyone critically analyzing a documentary -- let's face it, this exercise in filmmaking is indeed a zero sum game. You can't have it all. Something needs to be left out. I'm just saying, though, that perhaps less time on the plight of POW's and more time on the GI Resistance Movement would have been warranted. That said, I think the lead-in to Joan Furey's frustration and the camera's direct look into the horrors of triage and the bloody waste of American and Vietnamese youth, as she let loose her anger, is priceless. "Expected patients" -- i.e., those young soldiers, mothers' sons, determined too severely wounded to survive and, therefore, set aside by medics who are overwhelmed by the carnage coming their way -- is a term that will forever be burned into my memory. "As my guitar gently weeps," intones the Beatles throughout this section.

"Silence," wrote Francis Bacon, " is the virtue of fools." The persistent, unrelenting attempts to keep the truth from the American people of the inhumane consequences of this country's wars makes murderous fools of us all. Hats off, then, to those journalists, independent and corporate, who loaded on to choppers and dug in with

the soldiers to capture their stories. In the telling of the personal, the more universal truths began to seep out. This film would not have been possible without them.

The military brass scrambling to silent voices like Ron Ridenhour's for a year until the courageous journalist Seymour Hersch uncovered the My Lai and My Khe massacres. That kind of silence. American textbooks not celebrating the courage of Hugh Thompson and his crew as they dropped their chopper down between the murderers led by Captain Medina and Lieutenant Calley. That kind of silence.

Almost purposefully blanketing this eerie moral silence that has insidiously wrapped itself around our national psyche are the bombs blasting away, the M-60's rattling on, and the American and Vietnamese cities burning in the background. Yet all is not lost. At this point in their narrative the filmmakers provide a welcomed sardonic voice to their portrayal of the war -- suddenly, in late 1969 and early 1970, the Nixon crowd comes up with a marketing ploy -- let's "celebrate" the American POW's by making hundreds of thousands of POW bracelets for kids to wear and an equal number of the POW/MIA flag to fly over all town halls across the land. One astute journalist says in the film, "It is almost as if the Vietnamese kidnapped 400 American pilots and the war is being fought to free them." Even our so-called "terms of peace" (you know, our promise to stop the bombing and withdraw all the invading soldiers) are dependent upon the total release of all American prisoners and the return of all the remains of killed GI's. The hubris here is staggering. What of the Vietnamese casualties of war? Should they not be accounted for as well? To this day, there are countless Vietnamese NVA and NLF soldiers whose remains are still buried under triple canopy jungle. Yet our refusal to provide reparations to the Vietnamese people after the war was one hundred percent contingent upon all American remains being found. The Vietnamese can't find their own, let alone ours. No wonder the black POW/MIA flags still flutter.

If silence is to rule the day, then there is no means for truth to wend its way into our consciousness. This is by design, of course. As Aeschylus warned us some one hundred generations ago, "Truth is the First Casualty of War." If Americans are convinced that their stiff upper lip brand of silence in the face of collective murder is the true face of patriotism, then we are condemned as a nation to follow the path of empires that preceded us. To break that crippling silence we must face facts. The difference between killing (as in self-defense or to rightfully defend our nation) and murder (as in slaughtering by bomb or by bullet defenseless, innocent civilians) needs to be held before us as a true measuring stick of our nation's role in world history. As a basic fact. Thus, the importance of the veterans' and civilians' voices that are building to a crescendo in this film -- even those who have not come to realize the difference. Look into the eyes of the young soldier who actually murdered women and children at My Lai as he looks into the eyes of his interlocutor. Listen to the voices of grieving American veterans and Vietnamese villagers who know, deep in their hearts, that they have been the players in one of history's most grotesque "theaters of war." If this film is to be counted as some sort of success (and I think the jury is still out on that one), then it must be measured in its contribution to breaking the sound of silence in our classrooms and town halls when old men and women try to throw away the lives of our children and grandchildren in yet another grand scheme called war. This exercise in reliving the past and calling forth old ghosts will be labelled another curious artifact if we don't do something with it. If we don't face our murderous ways.

A few Veterans Days ago, I met up with an old buddy from the war in Washington, DC. It was his birthday, and he was going through a divorce after years of marriage (his son was born when he was in Vietnam). I had never been in DC on Veterans Day before, so I wasn't really prepared for the almost gaudy display of what the historian Andrew Bacevich calls "cheap grace" (the grace we bestow upon ourselves without earning it) as Americans waddled around literally wrapped in the American flag. Almost as if their willful ignorance to the real meaning of war, their silent acceptance of murder being committed in their name, was some kind of badge of honor. My buddy wore his "Vietnam Veteran" hat so was constantly barraged with "thank you for your service" remarks. My VFP t-shirt with the Eisenhower admonition that "I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can" did not elicit the same response. I wrote this poem soon afterwards:

WALKING THE WALL: A SONG

for Don Evon

Note: My time in Vietnam started in early July, 1969 -- Wall panel number W21-- and ended in early August, 1970 -- panel W7, line 29-- a walk of about 25 paces past the names of the dead. I call this "walking The Wall."

Got to tell you that you're making me nervous

Every time you thank me for my service

I know you're trying to be nice and kind

But you are really, truly, fucking with my mind

Trust me, it's not that I really care what you think

You who have had too much of their kool aid to drink

You who don't know shit about what service really means

You who need to know that nothing really is as it seems

So take a walk with me down the Wall some late evening

And listen to the ghostly young soldiers keening

But don't waste your time thanking them for their service

They may tell you the truth -- all your wars are worthless

EPISODE NINE

A DISRESPECTFUL LOYALTY

MAY 1970 TO AUGUST 1973

We have reached the penultimate evening of what has become a ten round bout pitting character against character in the story of America. More than one interviewee has called the American War in Vietnam a game-changer in American history (one says that it drove a stake through the heart of this country that we have not yet recovered from). At least Burns and Novick have not relegated the story of the war's impact on the Vietnamese people to a side-bar issue, but, still, the film is becoming more and more "our story." Oftentimes it has come down to the flag-waving patriot vs the anti-war activist.

This Hegelian model is put into play (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) but without the satisfaction of a genuine resolution in sight. No light at the end of any tunnel here. And the preponderance of evidence as the jury of American generations stirs on their couches is definitely leaning towards the flag-waver's narrative. Shots from drug-addled "hippies" frolicking at Woodstock are immediately followed by shots of American soldiers suffering in Vietnam. We know who is the sympathetic character here. The work of the SDS and the general student anti-war movement has been neatly packaged away as frivolous youthful indulgence as the real men of America, the construction workers, hammer street activists into silence. The voice of rural America is captured by a singer/songwriter mom whose son was killed in Vietnam telling an activist that his right to contest his government was won with the blood of her son, and she does not deny him that right, but, by God, if he comes near her door again, she'll blow him away with her God-given, second amendment pistol.

And the ubiquitous Karl Malantes recounts having his car assaulted as he is leaving Travis Air Force base by sign-carrying neer-do-well's. There is even footage of long-haired placard-wielding women and men at the gates. But hold on here. This blatant attempt to advance a myth should not go uncontested. Sure, the anti-war voices were there, but did anyone see them assaulting anyone in uniform? Marlantes claims that this attack on him and "his" men happened again and again. Not so, writes Jerry Lembcke in his book *THE SPITTING IMAGE*. As Bill Ehrhart has written elsewhere, we who returned from war may have been ignored and even avoided, but we were not assailed. Perhaps some veterans years after they returned home yearned for ticker-tape parades, but most of the guys I knew just wanted to be invisible and regain some semblance of their lives. I am sure there were isolated incidents of anti-war demonstrators losing their cool, but I, personally, and every namvet that I know, claim the opposite. In fact, we were welcomed into the anti-war community. In August of 1970, I wore my uniform from Fort Lewis in Washington state, where I processed out of the army, to San Francisco airport by myself. I was not even confronted by anyone, let alone assaulted. Pitied perhaps but not reviled. And then Judy, who met me in San Francisco, joined me, and we went down to Los Angeles and ended up hitchhiking across the United States, on the road for three weeks or so, down to Mexico and back up to Ohio. Not once, not once, did anyone upbraid me for my "service" in Vietnam.

And finally there is the excruciating portrayal of Jane Fonda as, first, a soldier's wet dream and then a wide-eyed naif traveling through North Vietnam and exclaiming that American POW's are war criminals and should be executed. Phew. I can see why she has spent the rest of her life apologizing for those remarks and regretting her callousness. The viewer is left with the impression that the flag-wavers have every right to dismiss her and her ilk as insensitive know-nothings. Perhaps Burns and Novick's audience might not have been so ready to condemn her if they saw footage of her and Donald Sutherland and a host of Hollywood types on their FTA tour (*Fuck The Army*) being cheered on by soldiers weary of the war. She used her fame to try and stop the war and to bring the troops home, so she should at least receive some credit for that.

It is too bad that it has come down to this. What could have been a riveting history lesson, which the film mightily struggles to be, has devolved into "us vs them." Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr are rolling in their graves, for a golden opportunity has been missed. Both of these legendary peace activists preached a basic lesson to the masses of their followers -- real peace activism cannot involve an attack on an individual human being; rather, it is an attack on a system of oppression. Burns and Novick have certainly given us enough images of the system in America, the system in South Vietnam, and the system in North Vietnam all working behind the scenes, hidden from the very people whose lives they have put at stake, and all falling victim to the blind thrashing around of institutions gone amok. But those portrayals are quickly replaced by more visceral accounts of personal anguish. The filmmakers always seem to be pitting one agonizing anecdote of this character or that character against each other; people that we all recognize now after these nine episodes struggle to tell us what has happened to them as survivors of that war, and, by analogy, to us as a nation, and, I suspect, what the filmmakers think awaits us all in the future. Remember that they appointed themselves the Sisyphean task of using their art form to "heal" America: they have tried to become the ultimate peace-makers here. And I am afraid they are failing. But that might turn out to be a good thing. Maybe we need to have the wound opened up again and again until we finally come to terms with what we, as a nation, have done and then accept the responsibility we have to help heal the Vietnamese people and, in turn, ourselves.

There is just too much in this episode to go into. But here are a few take-away's for me. First off, finally, the veteran anti-war voice is given its due place in the movement to stop the war as the VVAW guys are portrayed as the force they became to confront the flag-wavers. I wish now that I had joined them in DC. Instead, I had joined the Socialist Workers Party in Boston and bussed down to the nation's capital to participate in the ill-fated May Day actions. We were to "take and hold a bridge" into the city. Instead, we quickly broke ranks and ran through the streets and were dispersed. Today, I hold my brothers and sisters who were in VVAW in the highest regard.

And we are also rightfully forced to witness the Kent State and Jackson State uprisings that show students under attack; and then there is My Lai and the trial of Calley and company, an ordeal that further tore apart the country. We are barraged with heart-rending images again and again.

But then there is the saving grace of the incredibly brave and articulate Eva Jefferson confronting Spiro Agnew on the "David Frost" show -- you, Mr. Agnew, she rightly points out, are trying to make our parents afraid of us; you are trying to divide us. The audience erupts in applause.

And Bao Ninh is brought in again and again to poetically, powerfully represent the Vietnamese perspective, humanizing the people of his country while righteously condemning the very act of war itself. And the easiest duo to really revile in this whole enterprise -- Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger -- are hung on their own petards as taped conversation after taped conversation unveil their self-serving, duplicitous agendas that led to the slaughter of countless human beings.

And the dope-infused days of the war as savvy soldiers, reluctant to put their lives on the line for an immoral war, find some mind-numbing solace in the powerful drugs available to them. One factoid touted in the film is that 40,000 American soldiers became addicted to heroin. This number I cannot personally vouch for. But my year in country was riddled with dope from the get-go. As one young soldier tells us that within his first week in country, he was given some primo dope, and so was I. Heroin was available for \$5.00 mpc a cap; opium-laced cigarettes were neatly placed into decks of ten; huge rolled joints of marijuana (Bong Son bombers) were thrown over the wire in sand bags. Juicers versus dopers became a serious dividing line. You identified yourself as a doper by the way you laced your boots although the sunglasses you wore day and night were a dead give away. The lifers went nuts over our obvious disdain for their regimen. We did, however, get our acts together when we pulled night guard in the bunkers or when we convoyed out to other bases. But given a few hours of down time, the dope came out.

And did you catch the graffiti adorning soldiers' helmets like bumperstickers? Imagine how the lifers took that. We didn't care. Generals were getting uptight as their sacred army, their band of dutiful "sons," were openly defying orders. The end was near, and they knew it way before the Washington types got the hint. Tim O'Brien brings us back to My Lai, pointing out another layer of the American GI's disaffection, as he reminds us that American soldiers "blew children's brains out." Of course some good general lambasts the likes of O'Brien and the scruffy John Kerry for his testimony that atrocities were not the rare aberration, but one only needs to read Nick Turse's well-documented account KILL EVERYTHING THAT MOVES to find the lie in the general's apologia.

And, yes, even though the filmmakers did not interview Daniel Ellsberg, his contribution to ending the war was explored. Not only did America get its wake-up call, but this revelation of his -- the Pentagon Papers -- set in motion Nixon's own demise as he scrambled to put the lid on all "leaks." I loved Yo Yo Ma's musical background here, with sounds that made me think of someone scraping his or her fingernails down a blackboard. The vortex is spinning and the void is beckoning. America is losing its grip.

And the resistors in Canada are pitted against the POW's suffering through the ordeals of the Hanoi Hilton. Sly smiles of well-fed, relaxed deserters in Montreal flip to the malnourished, depressed American pilots as they wonder if they will ever come home. And then the jubilation of all when they do get off the plane, the ultimate "freedom bird." And on and on. We are indeed being battered here, but we need to be. As I said earlier, I don't think this film passes muster as a documentary, but it sure is a powerful creative piece of art that needs to be seen again and again. So I'll leave here with a personal note.

Nick Ut is brought front and center to our TV screens as he should be. He provided America with one of the most iconic photos of all time, which he won a Pulitzer Prize for, as he captured Vietnamese children fleeing a village mistakenly napalmed by South Vietnamese pilots. We have seen that picture multiple times over the years, but it was just this past fall that I found out that the little girl, Kim, was nine years old when she was scarred for life. My granddaughter was nine this past fall. I wrote this poem below out of deep remorse and with a glimmer of hope -- perhaps, just perhaps, there can be some forgiveness bestowed upon us if we accept our responsibility for the suffering we have caused, and if we live our lives struggling to put an end to war.

THE GIRL IN THE PICTURE

for Phan Thi Kim Phuc

"Whatever you run from becomes your shadow."-- traditional

If you're a namvet, a survivor of sorts,
she'll come for you across the decades
casting a shadow in the dying light of your dreams,
naked and nine, terror in her eyes

Of course you will have to ignore her --
if you wish to survive over the years --
but then your daughters will turn nine
and then your granddaughters nine

As the shadows lengthen.

So, you will have no choice on that one night
screaming down the Ridge Road, lights off,
under a full moon, she standing in the middle of the road,
still naked and nine, terror in her eyes

Now you must stop to pick her up, to carry her back
home to where she came from, to that gentle
village where the forgiving and the forgiven
gather at high noon. There are no shadows.

-- Doug Rawlings

Translated into Vietnamese by Lucy Do

BÉ GÁI TRONG BÚC ẢNH

dành tặng Phan Thị Kim Phúc

“Bất cứ thứ gì bạn chạy đi đều trở thành cái bóng của bạn” – châm ngôn

Khi anh cựu chiến binh, người sống sót sau những ngày bom đạn
hình ảnh ấy sẽ theo anh qua bao thập kỷ,
chiếc bóng hằn lên ánh sáng trong những giấc mơ đen
chín tuổi, tràn truồng, mắt nai sơ hãi

Anh tất nhiên phải cố quên cô bé ấy --
để tiếp tục đòi mình trong những trang kế tiếp --
nhưng đến lúc bé gái con anh lên chín
hay đứa cháu ngây thơ vừa tròn chín tuổi

Khi bóng xế đêm dài

Và một đêm anh không còn lựa chọn
tiếng kêu thét trên đường đê trong đêm tối không đèn
dưới ánh trăng rằm cô bé đứng giữa đường
vẫn chín tuổi, tràn truồng, mắt nai hoảng sợ

Giờ anh bế bé lên nhẹ nhõm
đưa em về lại mái ấm thân thương
ngôi làng hiền hòa, nơi kẻ vị tha và người được ân xá
hòa hợp cùng nhau giữa buổi trưa đứng bóng . Đời không hắt bóng

EPISODE TEN

THE WEIGHT OF MEMORY

So this is how it ends. Where the beginning meets the end. Maya Lin's remarkable monument to the war -- The Wall-- begins with the first American death in Vietnam, then marches up ten feet and then panel after panel

descends eastward into the ground only to rise back up again in the west, climbing, panel after panel to ten feet and then dropping down to meet the beginning, recording the name of the last American to die in that war. Death marches on, looping back on to itself. And this is to capture only the 58,300 American names of those killed; if the Wall were to include the names of the Vietnamese killed, it would stretch out for another nine miles. Visitors can reach out and touch a name, but all they take away is their own reflections. There but by the grace of some unknown force goes I, thinks the veteran; other visitors walking down that path are also ambushed, met by more than they ever could have imagined..

This episode begins with Tim O'Brien reading from his book *THE THINGS THEY CARRIED* and ends with O'Brien reading from the same passage. His exquisite melding of the literal and the figurative captures the crushing banality of this war and its deadly universality. The soldiers on both sides, on all sides throughout history, have carried, will carry, the same things into war -- their past lives and their last breaths along with the trivial baggage of daily life. The only thing they are missing is their futures.

Meanwhile, the living stumble on -- POW's return home, politicians squabble over what they think is important, working stiffs get up and go to work, children move on to learn, and then unlearn, the basic truth of life on this planet -- it all must come to an end. Should we, those who have survived this war, both the veteran and his or her loved ones (there are eight women's names on The Wall), "Let It Be," as the Beatles implore us to do? "This is Saigon signing off" is the last directive issued from CIA headquarters in Vietnam. Henry Kissinger tells us "to move on," as if we were some loiterers gathering around, clogging up the flow of his version of history.

Or should we bear this horrible weight to our own graves? To what end? Who, after all, gets to hold the mirror of these years up to our faces? Who writes *THE ILIAD* again? How, possibly, could anyone get it all right? Despite the attempt to glorify this war, it ends in disgrace for the United States and utter disaster for the Vietnamese. Their land and their lives have been wasted on a level that boggles the mind. And as the crushing truth of this moment in history disappears into the mists around Dak To, we hear of a "Bridge Over Troubled Waters" and the futile attempts of Burns and Novick and company to build it for us. It is not to be. But that does not mean we should give up. Their attempt has failed to complete its mission of healing, but it has succeeded on many other levels. It has opened many doors that we should not back away from if we want to insure that all those young men and women whose names are on The Wall have not died in vain. We owe that to our children and grandchildren.

To that end, Veterans For Peace has mounted a campaign to bring more voices to the table. Our Full Disclosure project includes an opportunity for anyone who was directly impacted by this war to write a letter to The Wall. We promise to deliver that letter to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Memorial Day. Over the past three years we have delivered 371 letters. At 10:30am on each Memorial Day we lay our letters, your letters, at the foot of The Wall in envelopes inscribed with "Please Read Me" across the top of each envelope. And people read the letters before the National Parks Service collects them and archives them for future generations to read. And they weep. And hug. And carry out of that memorial a richer, deeper sense of all that has been lost.

In some form or fashion each letter seems to say to those who died so young, "I am sorry. I am sorry that I did not do more to save your lives." And we, the survivors, emerge from the experience of delivering these letters, from having written some of them, with a redoubled commitment to abolish war from this earth. You can join us by sending your letter to rawlings@maine.edu before May 15, 2018.

Here are some excerpts from previous letters:

> "...Here is the ultimate haunting question, I think: Did you die in vain?

Never mind if it was heroic. Forget if you should have been there or not.

The fact is that you were there -- and you died there. So, did it serve any greater purpose? When they

folded up that flag and handed it to your loved one, was there anything they could take comfort in?

I cannot answer that.

All I know with certainty is this: Beginning with that war -- maybe even on the day you fell -- I knew there was something terrible about this whole business, no matter what Walter Cronkite or any Senators or the President had to say.

War should never be glorified, or worse, glamorized. It cheapens life, I think, to try to convince anyone that killing and being killed is anything but horrific.

So if you did die for a cause, let it go down in history as this -- a lesson in the sanctity of every life and the horror of every war. For that lesson, I thank you.

May you now rest in peace."

--- Gail

> "To Terry and Allen,

On this Memorial Day in 2015, I respectfully pay homage to you, my fallen brothers.... I lost a lot in Vietnam: a year of my life, my transition from student to adulthood, experiencing the birth of my son, my trust in my government and its leaders, and my generally positive outlook on life was transformed into a cynicism previously reserved for someone much older than I was when I returned home. You, my Brothers, lost everything. I'm sorry for that.

I still wake up thinking about Vietnam -- 45 years after I was there. I keep coming to the same conclusion: that all of the deaths of the Vietnam War were a waste. I hate that thought. But I can't escape it....

Terry and Allen, you did not die defending the United States. You did not die defending our freedom, our honor, our republic, our liberty. I hate it that you died for nothing of value and that your lives were wasted. I weep for you and the others on The Wall. I weep that you weren't given the chance to live."

--- Don

7th/15th Arty

> " Dear Wayne,

It has been 53 years since I started my undelivered letter to you, almost twice as long as you lived.... Our greatest loss might be what the 58,000 of you might have achieved for the nation and mankind.

Now we are still engaged in wars undertaken for mistaken purposes. Due to our technology and weaponry, our deaths are very low compared to Vietnam or WWII (we kill the enemy remotely), but many of the living are returning without limbs, or with scrambled brains, or with PTSD and other nightmares, and we do not have any clear idea why we went there, or are still there.

Our record makes me wonder if yours was not the better fate after all."

---- Again, rest in peace, Wayne (Sgt, 10th Special Forces Group, Airborne)

> "Vietnam is just a country. We made it into an American Epoch....I am 71, now. I still think about it; too often. My fault....I did go. I did help make some Oriental people dead. I was part of it all.... I was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines south of Marble Mountain.... On that pre-Christmas operation in 1968 at the south end of our AO a name was added to this wall. He was a second lieutenant, platoon commander, who was new to the bush. His opportunity to become seasoned ended as he was shot skyward on top of an exploding 105 artillery round. The company command team wore your body fragments during the rest of the operation....

Your down payment was exceeded by the Vietnamese in the numbers of lives lost. But you are all part of the terrible waste of unlivable lives. Only a small divot in the whole human endeavor but you could possibly become the first check point to ending the whole insane war business. What a nice memorial that would be."

---- I salute your loss, with a heavy heart.

Semper Fi. Always faithful.

Sincerely, Ronald

> "October 21, 1967, my first visit to Washington, DC, and my first organized protest of the American War in Vietnam..... By March, 1968, I dropped out of college and found a ride to San Francisco in search of a berth on a merchant ship bound for Vietnam.... We crossed the Pacific in 21 days....We made Qui Nhon, a port city about half way between Saigon and the DMZ.... I was struck by the manner of a US soldier at the gate, brandishing his automatic weapon with a stagger or swagger of someone stoned or drunk.... The cruise back home was a grim and lonely affair for this 21 year old sailor....I resumed my anti-war protests with greater fervor. In January 1970 I refused induction into the army of Richard Nixon and became a fugitive from justice until I surrendered to the US Attorney in Detroit in January 1975...."

---Sincerely, John

>" DEAR AMERICA

Remember me?

I was the girl next door.

Remember when I was 13, America, and rode on top of the fire engine in the Memorial Day parade? I'd won an essay contest on what it meant to be a proud American.

And it was always me, America, the cheerleader, the Girl Scout, who marched in front of the high school band . . . carrying our flag . . . the tallest . . . the proudest . . .

And remember, America, you gave me the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award for patriotism, and I was only sixteen.

And then you sent me to war, America, along with thousands of other men and women who loved you.

It's Memorial Day, America. Do you hear the flags snapping in the wind? There's a big sale at Macy's, and there's a big parade in Washington for the veterans.

But it's not the American flag or the sound of drums I hear - I hear a helicopter coming in - I smell the burning of human flesh. It's Thomas, America, the young Black kid from Atlanta, my patient, burned by an exploding gas tank. I remember how his courage kept him alive that day, America, and I clung to his only finger and whispered over and over again how proud you were of him, America - and he died.

And Pham He was only eight, America, and you sprayed him with napalm and his skin fell off in my hands and he screamed as I tried to comfort him.

And America, what did you do with Robbie, the young kid I sat next to on the plane to Viet Nam? His friends told me a piece of shrapnel ripped through his young heart - he was only seventeen - it was his first time away from home. What did you tell his mother and father, America?

Hold us America . . .

Hold all your children America. Allen will never hold any- one again. He left both his arms and legs back there.

He left them for you, America.

America, you never told me that I'd have to put so many of your sons, the boys next door, in body bags. You never told me . . ."

---- Peggy (Captain and a nurse in Vietnam)

> "Dear Vietnam Memorial Wall,

I served 29 years in the US Army/Army Reserves and retired as a Colonel. I also was a US diplomat for 16 years.....in 2003, I resigned from the US diplomatic corps in opposition to another war, the war on Iraq....I will continue to work for peace around our world...and continue to challenge our own country to end the threat it poses to our planet in our politicians' thirst for war."

Peace ole Wall,

--- Ann

> "Dear comrades with whom I served and the Vietnamese people who suffered at our hands:

...I started watching the war more closely, the dead women and children, young girls in a society that values chastity who turned to prostitution to survive.... Fellow soldiers were suddenly not there any more, not only the dead but also those who left us maimed and in one case a vegetable with shrapnel in his brain. It was not the threat of death that ate away at me, even when a bullet creased my ear.... It was seeing us decent but lonely and disoriented young American men finding the worse we can be as human beings, doing things that violated the very core values that our parents, churches and schools instilled in us...things that can never be undone...."

--- Ken

> " I wrote book reports in middle school to learn about the 'facts' of our arrival to the US. From family, I understood that we fled Cambodia as a matter of survival, not choice..... My mother had lived much of her life under war and uncertainty. The US government had been bombing the countryside and destroyed her home.....I remember feeling deep anger towards the US government and at my classmates' ignorance surrounding this significant and devastating aspect of US history....

Our family has been here for 33 years....Let us acknowledge how our communities got here and commemorate the misguided rationale and collective human costs of this war as well as the acts of resistance demanding that humanity do better.

To a more just and peaceful future."

In solidarity,

--- Valerie

> " Dear Joe Brown,

My promise to you still stands that I will not forget you.... I started measuring my life in multiples of yours and others who were killed in Vietnam.... Measuring my life in multiples of yours keeps me aware of the importance of each day. This is your gift to me for which I can never fully repay you. Thank you Joe Henry Brown. Rest in Peace."

--- John

>" Dear Richard, millions of Vietnamese, and all the rest who died in Vietnam,

...all I can do is sit, think and stare at your photograph, my mother's cousin, my second cousin totally unknown to me who died at only 20 when I was just 6. I think of the sadness our family, like so many others, felt when they received the tragic news of your death....I want you to know, the world to know, and the truth to be told and shared, that even though you died in vain, and you did, ...you really did, just like all the rest who perished, to know that 50 years later ... that there are a group of Americans all over this nation that still care, that give a damn, that want the truth to continue to be told...."

In loving kindness,

---Julie

>" It's not easy to look into a mirror these days. The years and life have left baggage under my eyes, sculpted lines on my face and left grey ashes in my hair. But I can do it.

The Vietnam War Memorial is an unforgiving mirror that I turn to for self appraisal. Did I live a good life? Did I do right? Did I make the right decision? Why am I alive and my peers are not? Am I a good man? Am I a coward?

I chose to oppose the war and avoid the draft.... I still don't know if my decision grew from roots of fear or conscience.... So I return to have those names judge me or help me judge myself and to be reminded of lessons learned....Did I do enough? Not nearly. But I still have the chance to do good. There is meaning to our lives because we can make a difference."

---B.

>" Greetings,

... When I was 12, my oldest brother Pancho really rocked the boat when he quit school shortly after his 18th birthday and joined the army.... Dad was proud.... Unlike many of his fellow infantrymen, Pancho survived the combat zone and returned home.... When he came home from Nam he was sick at heart, and lost, in a country that seemed to blame him and his fellow soldiers for an unjust war.... now he found himself surrounded by strangers, in a family that didn't know how to bring him back to wholeness.....

My middle brother had recently been drafted, and was evading the draft by traveling back and forth across the country.... It was becoming increasingly evident that this war was a mistake, and Danny was not interested in dying for it....

We were back in the suburbs of Washington, when we got the news of Pancho's motorcycle accident and death. Danny was living with us again at that time....

It was a painful and lonely time for all of us, and a time when none of us could hide from the ways that our family felt broken..... Recognizing my oldest brother as a war casualty was a radicalizing moment. It shook me awake and I was filled with pain and loss.... How do we honor our war dead? I honor my brother by doing whatever I can to discourage more young people from losing their lives and souls in yet another US instigated, unjust war.

SUPPORT OUR TROOPS. BRING THEM HOME NOW."

---Nancy

>" To All My Relations whose names are on this wall:

...I promise you all... that I will endeavor to continue my efforts, along with others of like mind, 'til breath leaves my body, to end the use of war for any purpose on the Earth."

--- Tomas

>" ... I remained an interested spectator (of the war) until 1966 when I moved to Chicago for graduate school. There I joined SDS, eventually becoming quite active. In the fall of 1967, I met, along with other SDSers, with representatives of the 'enemy' -- the National Liberation Front -- at the Montreal Expo.... Later that Fall, I attended the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal in Copenhagen where I heard testimony about brutal US interrogation techniques, as well as the use of napalm, fragmentation bombs, and Agent Orange.

From then on, for better or worse, I became a staunch militant against this terrible war."

---- Howie

>" Hey Mac,

It's now nearly 52 years since we threw our hats into the air in jubilation at our 1963 USNA graduation.... On the evening of January 4, 1966, I received the call from my parents. On a January 2nd bombing run over Quang Ngai province your plane had gone down....The following week I submitted my request for reassignment to Vietnam....

In 1998... I returned to Vietnam to participate in a transformative bike ride from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City -- the 'Vietnam Challenge' was organized ...to bring together disabled and able-bodied athletes to participate in extraordinary athletic events. My fellow travelers were veterans from both sides of the war, former mortal enemies, most of whom had suffered terrible injury during the war....

While I have written that your death, Mac, prompted my 'service' in Vietnam, it has been just as responsible for who I have become. At every vigil, every protest, every Congressional visitation, you, along with the 58,000 other Americans and 3 million Vietnamese, are with me."

In lasting gratitude,

--- Dud

>" To your name on the Wall and in your memory: I didn't go to Viet Nam....I went from Officer Candidate to Seaman Apprentice, to deserter, to Courts Martial, to detention, to awaiting handcuffs for transporting to what I was told would be a brig in Viet Nam....

And now when I remember The Wall, and your names, and your innocence, I honor you and I cry for you.... But know that we are many who now insist on full disclosure vs. a patriotic gloss-over in telling your truths and shouting your questions. We will keep talking about what happened to you, and about what happened in Viet Nam....Most importantly, your names and souls live wth us."

With humility,

--- Jack

>"And truth to tell, there ought to be another wall, a wall bearing the names of those who came home from Vietnam, but ultimately didn't survive the war. That wall would need to contain an even greater number of names, to include all those who committed suicide or who, because of drugs or alcohol, or depression or reckless driving, died as a result of self-destruction....

And finally there are the people of Vietnam, of Laos and Cambodia, who died in the millions in what they know as the 'American War.' And people in Southeast Asia are still dying from Agent Orange and from mines and bombs the US left behind. Some Americans have accepted responsibility for that and they work to help clean up the mess our country left behind. Most of them are Vietnam vets. I honor them."

--- Marion

>" We who served in Vietnam and came home stand before our Wall as survivors, and we are drawn inescapably into the world of our comrade spirits. Entering the aura of the dead, our faces melt in tears. It is not strange or exceptional to witness two aging men hugging each other, sobbing, shamelessly, inconsolably. They are still grieving the fate of a fallen brother, reliving the horrors of their war, crushed by the heaviness of the wound of survival they will carry to their graves. Me too. I have seldom wept as powerfully, as involuntarily, as profoundly intimately, exposing my most deeply buried existential sadness, as when I have stood before the Wall."

--- Michael

>"Dear So Many:

It has been nearly 44 years since I first saw the hills around DaNang, since I saw the jungle at Chu Lai and the mud of the Mekong Delta. I was in the Navy, on the Westchester County LST 1167. I tried in my own way to honor your life. When the second Bush administration chose to go to war with Iraq, I marched, I wore 'no war' buttons....I tried, I still try to help get your message out that you were real, that you were young, that you had futures, that you were 'so many' left behind. I worry now that the wall is becoming a memorial to the Vietnam War and not you all who are on it. I worry now that as we, the people who remember, age out, the people left behind, the people rewriting history, will think or promote Vietnam as an honorable endeavor. I worry now that people will misconstrue your honorable, brave service and your forever sacrifice with an honorable cause.

So I am now asking you, 'so many,' to come haunt the hearts and minds of the young today to stand up and say no. Say no to a life ended too soon; say no to 'so many' with PTSD or TBI; say no to fighting an 'enemy' more misunderstood than threatening; say no to the war profiteers. If we don't go, they can not war. So I am praying to you 'so many' please come change the course of this country so that this time we can choose NOT to go, not to war.

With that just remember

You 'so many' are never far from my mind and you are always in my heart. May God Bless You and Keep You."

--- Jim

>"To Whom It May Concern:

I immigrated to the US under political asylum with my mother and brother shortly after the fall of Saigon. After the war, my father, who was a Captain in the Army of Republic of Viet Nam, ... had to report to a Vietcong reeducation camp where he was a prisoner for nine years.... My father came to the US with severe PTSD, and I grew up with that.

I have spent my entire life processing and healing from the American war in Vietnam. In the past few years, I have been writing poems which serve, to me, as a sort of letter to those lives lost in the war and the pain and suffering as a consequence of the war.... Hopefully, these poems reveal the devastation, still felt today, of the war and the necessity for peace."

Best and warmest wishes,

--- Teresa (hoa binh)

> " I was 15 when you brave young men and women started to be deployed to Vietnam, but I was 25 when some returned, you did not.....I am so sorry for what you suffered, so very sorry. At 15, I didn't know much but I knew

this, we should not go.... Nothing about this war was right, nothing was won or really accomplished, as if winning even matters. Love matters, this is what matters, and I hope before you died I hope you were loved."

--- Deb

>" I am a veteran of the anti-war movement, not a military veteran.

As I reflected on the privilege and circumstances that kept me physically safe during the war and emotionally protected from personal loss, I remembered the death of my across-the-street neighbor in Indianapolis.....

In the last 15 years, I have had the incredible good fortune of visiting Vietnam many times to work on repairing war legacies....As the best memorial to him and all the others lost on all sides, I will continue to work in friendship with Vietnam and towards social justice in US policies and practices."

--- Trude

>" As the war in Vietnam began I was a student at the University of Illinois....When the teach-ins about the Vietnam War began in 1964 I attended them for the same reasons I attended large folk singing concerts: they spoke to my increasing concerns about American politics....(E)xempted from the draft as a husband and then as a father, (I) began working as a civil rights activist and as an opponent of the war. I have carried these values with me ever since.... I pay tribute here to those who died in the Vietnam conflict and to those who wish to insure that we retain an honest and accurate vision of that war."

In solidarity,

--- John

>" On July 18, 1968 at grid square YD 385 157 in Quang Tri Province, Republic of Vietnam, I dug up the grave of a North Vietnamese soldier.

I was, on that day, running the point element of a patrol of the First Cavalry Division which was then operating in the mountains of western South Vietnam. After hours of heat, leeches and wait-a-minute vines, I walked the patrol into a concealed bunker complex. It was unoccupied.

That man's grave remains vivid in my memory but over time that memory has been overborne by a desolate realization. These mandatory desecrations of soldiers' graves reveal what the US Army truly thought of its Infantry: expendable, 120 dollar a month privates, fit to endure any hazard, any degree of protracted misery, and any task however polluting and soul-corroding."

--- Jon

>" Do I love you? YOU BET.

Do I think the war was worth it? HELL NO.

Am I angry? HELL YES.

When I heard that a black granite wall was being constructed in Washington, DC to memorialize those who sacrificed the most during the Vietnam War, I felt nothing but anger. If anything, I felt that the memorial fund should have been used to put the lying war profiteers behind bars for the rest of their lives. Why shouldn't THEY, who start the wars, be punished?

IF WE DON'T END THE MADNESS OF WAR, THE MADNESS OF WAR WILL END US ALL."

--- Mark (US Navy Corpsman/3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, Vietnam 1968)

>" This letter, posted at The Wall on Memorial Day, 2015...is framed in remembrance and respect for the two friends I knew best whose names are inscribed on this black granite memorial: Frederick Richard Ohler and Robert Randolph White, both killed in 1968 when all three of us were serving in the US Army in Vietnam. I was the one who came home.

I share these thoughts with all the rest of us who survive today -- those who fought in a war that nobody wanted, which few try to justify any more; and those who protested and helped end a tragic policy that took the lives of 58,000 other young Americans, and more than three million Vietnamese.... (P)lease know that we continue our efforts, however feeble and inadequate, to learn and apply the lessons of your sacrifice. Forgive our failures, but know that we are trying, in so many ways, to mark and honor your untimely departure and to atone for the suffering, to help heal those who lost so much -- Americans, Vietnamese especially, and people of goodwill around the world who labored mightily to stop the madness of that war.

Rest in peace, my friends. Look over us and our frail efforts, comfort us with the knowledge that your spirits guide us, and help us persevere as we strive to make your ultimate sacrifice a loss that was not in vain."

--- Chuck

>" One of our first confirmed kills in Viet Nam was a 12 year old Buddhist monk. Our artillery was firing near a village and one round was fired with the wrong data.... As a combat veteran I have memories and perhaps a few remnants of damage from the stress of warfare. I sympathize with my fellow veterans who have PTSD but I never forget one thing about my service. I inflicted more stress than I suffered. We dropped 8 million tons of bombs on a nation smaller than California....So on this fiftieth anniversary year I calculate that the 12 year old Buddhist would be 62 years old. Perhaps he would be a wise old man, a blessing to his village, but we'll never know. His voice was silenced but we can communicate his death by being honest witnesses. By being voices for peace."

Sincerely,

--- Robert

>" None of us can quite get it right. We keep trying to figure out what our relationship to you should look like.... It may be impossible. But we keep trying. For your sake. For ours.... You see, we care about you. We want to keep you in the conversation. We want you to know that we still think you can offer us a great deal.

Personally, I wonder this: did any of you cross paths with me from July of 1969 to August of 1970? Up in II Corps, up in the Central Highlands, down by the Bong Son River. Do you remember? I went one way, you the other. I survived, you didn't....

I'll be back, again and again, to walk alongside you for a short while. I will listen for your voices. I will touch your names and force myself to swing back through these many years and put myself in the place and time where and when we may have met. I promise you that I will take this opportunity to meld our spirits together, knowing that I grow stronger, in the doing so. And I will use that strength to abolish future wars. To stop the killing of innocents. In your name. That's the least I owe you. And the most. Rest in peace."

--- Your brother, Doug

>" Dear Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall:

You're a wide granite gash in the earth, like the war itself, a man-made construction set within the order of nature..... Speaking to you is speaking to the dead, and like a good hospice caregiver must do, one first needs to respect the dying and the dead. Addressing you is different than addressing the flag. Your dead were all part of a massive historic enterprise; but the simple fact at the root of all religion is we die alone and the ultimate providence of those named on your surface remains an eternal mystery.

I was in Vietnam as a 19-year-old kid.... I made it home without a scratch and without a bit of trauma.... I led a charmed existence with violence and horror going on all around me that never touched me. I know friends who suffered terribly.... I'm a Vietnam veteran with survival guilt. It's my lasting bond to the names on your reflecting surface...."

--- John

>" I am the daughter of a US Marine who was killed on the beach-head of Guam July 22nd, 1944.

In 1967 after graduating college, I joined the US Navy Nurse Corps... And then began working at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in California.... I thought that I would become part of the healing process for the wounded; I thought that I would be able to undo the destruction of war and conflict in Southeast Asia. We had an amputee ward at Oak Knoll where the guys had their limbs attached to meat hooks, their raw, open wounds hanging oozing infections so bad you could smell the sweet, sticky odor when you came into the unit....

Like many others, Vietnam became a turning point in my life. It became personal, and I couldn't live with myself and continue to be part of this death and destruction -- done in my name, by my government. GIs and veterans were organizing a march for peace in the San Francisco Bay Area. 1968. And so I joined them....

The nightly news had stories of the US dropping flyers on the Vietnamese, urging them to go to 'safe hamlets.' So, along with a couple of friends, we loaded up a small plane and dropped flyers over multiple military installations in the San Francisco Bay area, announcing the GI and Veterans March for Peace -- and thousands showed up on October 12th, 1968. We spoke out against US involvement in Vietnam; we demanded to 'bring the boys home.' We spoke about the old men in Washington sending the young to die. And we thought we'd stop the war. We really believed that the American people and the US government would listen to us.

The fact that the war continued, that so many millions of Vietnamese and thousands of American soldiers lost their lives continues to haunt me and make me question what else we could have done. How could we have stopped this insanity?

To all who have suffered, to all the family and loved ones who died and had their lives changed from the American War in Vietnam, I am so sorry we couldn't have done more. We tried -- and we'll continue our struggle for peace and justice in this world in your name."

--- Susan

>" In early 2003, as war with Iraq became more and more likely, two friends of mine and I attended a founding meeting in Chicago of a group that called itself Labor Against the War. To my surprise, the meeting was held at the union hall of a local union of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. One of my traveling companions was a Teamster steward. The Teamsters are not noted for opposition to the government in its conduct of United States foreign policy. I sought out a couple shop stewards and asked them what was going on.

'It was the Vietnam vets,' they told me. ' They hit the mike at our local union meeting and said: We have seen this movie before.'

In the prose poem, 'The People, Yes,' written by Carl Sandburg, a little girl attends her first military parade. She asks who are the marchers. Those are soldiers, says her adult companion. The little girl reflects. Finally she says, I know something. The response is more or less: Yes dear. What do you know? She answers: 'Sometime they'll give a war and nobody will come.'"

---Staughton

>" I'm writing in support of the Vietnam War Full Disclosure Movement. Born in 1943, I was of draft age, though I did not go. I had a 1-Y classification based on significant myopia....Returning from study in West Berlin in 1966, I became engaged in the anti-war movement.... Despite my intellectual opposition to and activism against the war,

it was not until 1972, however, that I returned my draft card....I expected blowback from this moderate action, but never heard a word....

But of course none of this compares to what was being experienced by those who did go to Vietnam, whether willingly or through the draft. Or did not ever return. Still -- and this persists fifty years later -- I cannot talk about the war without choking up. It is my own private echo from that time, a sort of shadow PTSD that, like the real thing, is always there, mostly submerged amid the hurly-burly of life, but never quite forgotten by that part of my brain that remembers how bad it was, how insane and twisted, how unconscionable....."

--- Bernie

>" Shortly after sunrise, about 0645, on 5 March 1968, our 29 person Platoon was beginning to 'Fall In,' to go outside the wire on yet another Counter Tet 'Search and Destroy' (S&D) Mission.... 4 Star General William Westmoreland, after his WWII heroics, served with the 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team, in the Korean War, and later, commanded the 101st Airborne Division, in the late 50's. He was running the whole show in Viet Nam, and he used our 101st Airborne Grunts as BAIT, in small unit actions, to get the Viet Cong to tip their hand (location wise) by ambushing us. Westy's theory was to use massive Air Power and Artillery to punish the elusive VC Guerrillas, and PAVN troops, when we could draw them into making 'contact' with us...."

EDITOR'S NOTE: what follows is a detailed description of how Bill's platoon got caught up in such an ambush. I pick up the narrative here:

" I dropped into a prone position, and turned to my left. Just as 4 VC were charging out of the plantation's thick overgrowth, straight at me, but they were looking to their right, down where the bulk of my Platoon was. I shot those 4 Freedom Fighters with 2 bursts, the first, about 14 rounds, the 2nd burst, about 5 rounds. It seemed like the first 10 rounds went through all 4 of them, instantaneously.

I rationalize those deaths to this day.

There were zero graceful, dramatic, chest grasping deaths, among these four men.... I don't care who you are, 'Thou shalt not kill' will forever weigh upon you..... I have spent the past 48 years opposing WAR and fighting for Equal Justice and Peace...."

--- Bill

>" I don't know how to start this letter because I never gave you a specific nickname, and it feels inappropriate to call you by your first name. Most of the time I just refer to you as 'my grandfather.' I was told about this letter project today in one of my college classes, and I immediately wanted to write to you. I don't really know why. I know you won't answer me. Maybe it's because I feel like when I put these words down on paper you might be able to see them, and you might know that I'm writing to you.

You should know that Nanny, your wife Helen, stands up every Thanksgiving and thanks you for your sacrifice. Sometimes she cries. Everyone is always trying to hold in their tears anyway. Fifty-two years have passed since you died, but you haven't been forgotten..... I think you would be proud of your family for carrying on your story. I know that they are proud of you. I'm proud of you.

Sometimes I find myself wondering what life would've been like if you hadn't died in Cambodia. Would Uncle Bob have spent all that time in prison? Would Uncle Steve be able to keep a job or a wife? Would Uncle Andy still self-medicate? How would Aunt Kathy be different if she had ever had the chance to meet you? How would my mom be different if she wasn't constantly trying to piece together a father she can't remember?

Would I even be alive today if you had lived? Would you have taught your grandsons to love the outdoors, fishing, and hunting like you did? Would you have come to our football, field hockey, and soccer games? Would you have sat me on your lap and read me stories? Would you look like the picture that's been on my wall since I can remember? Would you smell like aftershave or soap? What would your voice sound like when you told me that you loved me?

I wonder if you thought that it was worth it in the end. Did you whole-heartedly believe in your mission and purpose for being there? Did you regret being there in your last moments? Did you regret anything in your last moments? I wonder what your last thoughts were. Did you think about your mom and dad? Your wife? Your four small children? Your unborn baby? Was there anything that you wanted to say? Was there anyone there to say it to? Could you have spoken, with the bullet in your neck? Did the person who killed you see your face? Did they even think for a second, before they pulled the trigger, about the hole they would be blasting through the lives of the people that you knew and loved? Could they have fathomed that your death would shatter a family for two generations? Did you ever think about that?

I know it wasn't your intention to end up on a wall. I don't think it was anyone's intention. My mom always says that there's a reason for everything. I think there are some things that you can't find reasons for."

Love,

Your granddaughter Linsay

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