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Hello Dr. Capps:

I enjoyed the article on your class in the LA Times yesterday. I had heard of the class for some time but never quite received the "briefing" as I did Sunday.

I was in the Corps for two stints, total of seven years, 22-months in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, all classified work.

Getting out of the Corps in late 66 (little known historical fact: the Marines have been in Vietnam since 1952) I had no trouble readjusting. The primary reason being that my structure of friends were still in the Corps. I didn't have to bury myself immediately into a "civilian structure", I had the twilight world of half-military and half-civilian life style. Another factor was being in my middle twenties, perhaps the maturity of realizing that all was not damnation and death in Vietnam. All told, about 10% of all troops saw combat in Nam, in fact that is standard for all Western world armies, 10% combat, the rest support: cooks, typists, clerks, MPs, truck drivers, etc.

And while the average age of a "grunt" in Nam was about 19 (WW2 was 26), the men that ran those grunts, Sgts., Lt.s, Captains were about 24 thru 29. This group of personnel saw the war thru different eyes. If the grunts were the assemblyline personnel, the senior Sgts and Junior Officers were the foreman. Total reliance of people who were 18 and 19 years old for perspective beyond their personal emotions can be deceiving. One wouldn't interview too many 19 year old nurses for a meaningful perspective on the medical profession, at least beyond a reasonable factor.

For several years I was associated with "Soldier of Fortune" magazine. Once a year we have a reunion. This was the first real meeting ground of Nam vets after the war. It also plays hosts to South African, Rhodesian and other veterans of various conflicts.

A phenomena started with our first reunion in 1979. Individuals would come to the conventions, stand around for several days not really talking to anyone and eventually come forward and meet someone, get drunk perhaps, and then spill their hearts out about avoiding the draft and feeling nothing but acute remorse now.

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Another phenomena is the non-fighting man who was a cook, typist etc in Nam, never heard a shot fired in anger, had it easy (at least relatedly..), and now claims to be a "Nam vet" with the implication of being in combat and all the trauma that entails.

Ironically, the Marine Corps was composed of 2/3rd draftees the day it landed on Iwo Jima in Feb. 1945. In 1969, perhaps '68, the height of the Vietnam war, the Corps was 2/3 volunteer. Somewhere between 40,000 to 60,000 men shipped over each year for a second tour in Nam with the Corps.

So here we have the "great patriotic war", WW 2, with armies composed mostly of draftees and the misery of Nam with (at least the Corps) composed of volunteers.

The Vietnamese soldier was not one-third the soldier of the Jap in the Pacific as far as training or ferocity nor half as unrelenting at the North Korean or Chinese faced by our soldiers in Korea. So what makes the whole thing so bad for our troopers? The shells were as bad, the bullets were as dangerous, the heat and oppressive humidity and rain and muck were the same...

I offer my thought, and the thoughts of literally hundreds of other Vets I've spoken with, that the real enemy was met when these troopers got home: the American civilian who spat, punched and, yes, it happened, overturned wheelchairs of Vets.

Most Vets have personal stories about encounters with fellow "citizens", that is where a lot of anger lies.

Anyway, just wanted to touch base and pass on a few thoughts to assist you...possibly.

Semper Fidelis,

  
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