

Fall of South Vietnam remembered

Vietnam vets coping with memories

By CYNTHIA GAY
Staff Writer

For millions of Americans, the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air ended 10 years ago in Vietnam.

For 580,000 Vietnam veterans, the past 10 years have been spent coping, readjusting or trying to forget the memory of war.

George Calloway, a member of American Legion Earl Graham Post No. 159, Bryan said that area groups believe the best way to honor these soldiers is to encourage gradual involvement in the community and to take care of their health needs.

"We just want them (the veterans) to be a part of any activities that we carry on," Calloway said. He said the American Legion works on a national level for legislation to provide benefits for veterans.

Post Commander W.T. Cantey said it has not been easy for the American Legion to convince Vietnam veterans that this organization can help them and their families.

"We have had a little problem getting some of them to believe it," Cantey said. "(The veterans) feel they got a raw deal."

Calloway said his local post has gained more Vietnam veterans as members in the past year than ever before.

"(Vietnam veterans) are not as outgoing as you might expect," Calloway said. "I think they are opening up (now)."

John Thomas, assistant professor of rural sociology, said most Vietnam veterans could not find a place in our society without redefining their personal values because of the mood of unrest in the 1960s.

"The 60s represented a significant change in our social institutions, our social values," Thomas said. "When the soldiers came back, there was a different America here."



Left: Members of the Vietnamese Student Association play Taps for their countrymen that died during the Vietnam War.

Photos by

ANTHONY S. CASPER

Bottom: Nguyen Dung carries a torch to Tuesday night's ceremony commemorating the fall of Saigon.



Thomas said many of the soldiers arrived in Vietnam asking, "Why am I here?"

"They found out what death and destruction and war is all about," he said. "(In the United States, the veterans) saw politicians debating and they saw the American public rioting. The question of patriotism got lost in all that."

A Texas A&M student who lived in Saigon during the Vietnam War said she has trouble understanding the trauma many American soldiers had to combat upon returning home. She said she was 9 years old in 1975, and she remembers the local schools being bombed repeatedly at that time. She thought nothing of it.

"You walked down the street," she said. "You saw dead bodies. You either helped, or you walked by."

Thomas said the Vietnam veterans who have not fit back into the American society by now are loners or retreatists.

"Rather than trying to grasp the situation, they retreat from it," Thomas said. "As time goes on, the effects of the war in Vietnam will be pretty much like Korea. It will mellow out."

Students remember the Vietnam War

By ED CASSAVOY
Staff Writer

Students walking to their classes Tuesday saw the face of "The Killing Fields." It was not a movie, but the voice of some of the survivors of the Vietnam War.

The Texas A&M Vietnamese Student Association held a demonstration by the statue of Lawrence Sullivan Ross in front of the Academic Building.

The purpose of the demonstration was to protest the 10th anniversary of the Communist takeover of South Vietnam.

Lined up in a quasi-military formation, about 40 students were headed by a student carrying the flag of South Vietnam.

Tu Gia Nguyen, a senior nuclear engineering student, said the group was trying to make Americans understand the war in Vietnam.

"Ten years ago, the Communists

said they were going to help us," Gia Nguyen said, "how can they say that?"

"They have concentration camps in Vietnam," he said. "They have more jails than schools for the children."

Son D Nguyen, a freshman transfer student, explained his reasons for being a part of the protest.

D Nguyen said he came to the United States five years ago, having spent three years in the reunited Communist Vietnam before escaping to a refugee camp.

"My father (a soldier in the South Vietnamese Army) has been in jail since 1975," D Nguyen said, "I don't know where he is. My mother is still left here."

"In the Asian tradition, the man must help his family and parents, but my mother told me to go," he said. "My mother was afraid for my life, for my future."

D Nguyen said he was saddened

by what the Communists had done to his country.

"During the war, we didn't have much food to eat," D Nguyen said, "but we had freedom."

After the unification of Vietnam, D Nguyen said many personal freedoms were lost. He said living in the United States has made him thankful for those lost freedoms.

"Here in the U.S., we can tell President Reagan to go to hell if we want," D Nguyen said.

D Nguyen said the 100 members of the Vietnamese Student Association were united in the belief that their future was still tied to the fortunes of Vietnam.

D Nguyen said he wants to unite all Vietnamese, and sometime in the future return to his country to fight the Communists.

"We want a resistance front," D Nguyen said. "The battle is not over."

Nguyen Nguyen, a senior electrical engineering major, said the present Vietnamese regime tries to kill people's minds and destroy their hearts.

"The people that were left behind (after the war), suffered the worst," Nguyen said. "But 10 years, looking back, it is now everyone's war."

"It is now our turn to tell our side of the story," he said.

The students carried placards saying: "Vietnam, the Killing Fields," and "The end of the war, the beginning of the Holocaust."

The discussion continued even as they gathered up their books and rolled up their flag.

Vietnamese students talked among themselves or answered questions from curious listeners.

Many of the Vietnamese nodded when Nguyen summed up the feelings of many of the demonstrators when he said, "They call it Ho Chi Minh City, but it's Saigon to us."

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