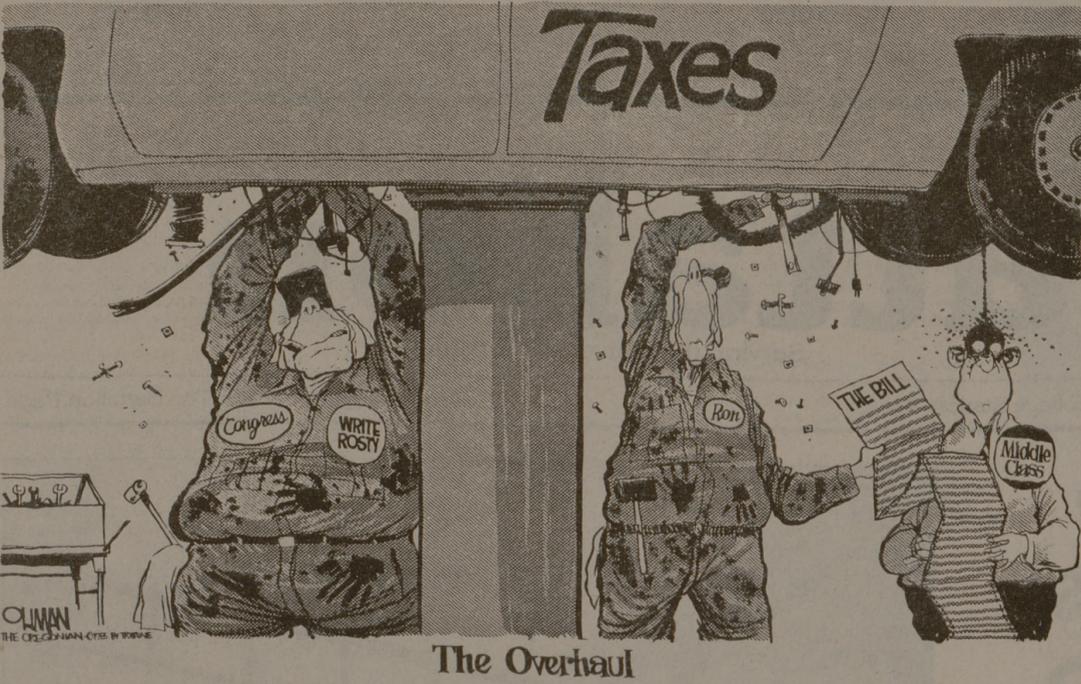
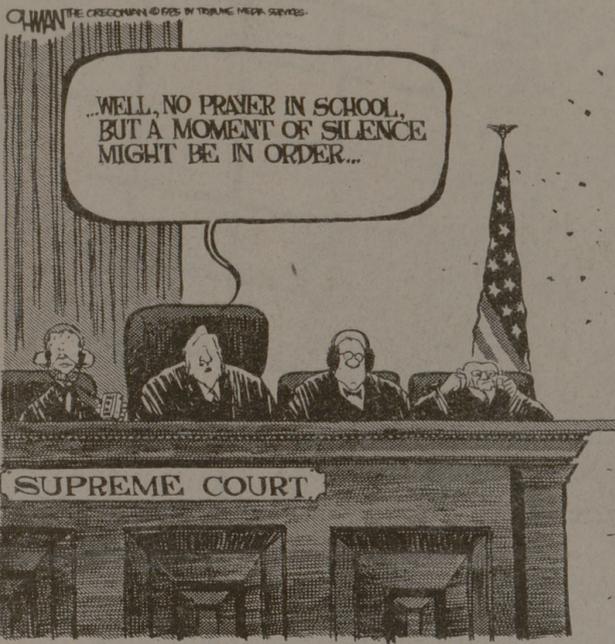


OPINION



The Overhaul



THIS IS JUST LIKE THE SOVIET UNION! YOU'RE ALL GOING TO...



Hollywood forgets 13 D's of Vietnam

April 30, 1975 — Saigon is captured by communist forces.

June 11, 1985 — United States is winning the Vietnam war. The Marines aren't winning the war. The Army, Air Force or Navy aren't winning the war either. No, they lost it 10 years ago. Now we've found a more powerful force to win in Vietnam — Hollywood.



Karl Pallmeyer

There has been a rash of movies about Vietnam: "Rambo, First Blood II," "Uncommon Valour," "Missing In Action," "Missing In Action 2" and several others that don't deserve mention. Sylvester Stallone, Gene Hackman, Chuck Norris and other armies of actors are winning the war. These movies are all the same: a few brave men travel to Vietnam to rescue American prisoners that are being held and tortured by the Viet Cong. They all seem to glorify war.

I went to see "Rambo, First Blood II" the other day and it scared the crap out of me.

I remember watching a war movie on television once when I was very young and remarking that it must be great to fight for one's country. I also remember my father, a veteran of World War II, telling me how he hoped I would never have to. I was taught and brought up to believe that war is not honorable or glorious; war is hell. While I was watching "Rambo" I realized that many people are not fortunate enough to have had a father wise enough to tell his children about certain facts of life and death.

The most horrible thing about "Rambo" is not on the screen but in the theater. In one scene Sylvester Stallone is being chased through a village by a group of Vietnamese and Russian soldiers. Stallone begins shooting arrows with explosive tips into the village and into the bodies of his enemies. On the screen a group of grass huts are engulfed in flames and a person, also engulfed in flames, rolls around on the ground. In the theater a young boy, about half my age, squeals with glee. On the screen the pieces of a Vietnamese

soldier are blown throughout Creation after being hit with one of Stallone's exploding arrows. In the theater a young man, about my age, laughs maniacally. On the screen there are many, many acts of violence. In the theater there are many, many people of all ages actually enjoying themselves. Outside the theater there are many, many more people of all ages waiting to get in.

These people don't seem to realize what war is. War is not special effects, make-up, sound effects, music and award-winning cinematography. War is not a bunch of actors who, once the director yells "cut," can get up and go fight another cinematic battle. War is dying and destruction and disease and dirt and dismemberment and disability and disappointment and disarray and despair and disaster and discard and deception and death.

We left Vietnam ten years ago, and ten years is a long time. I am only 21 years old, but I remember something from the war. I remember Henry Blood, the name on my sister's P.O.M. bracelet. I remember watching the television and reading the newspapers with her, trying to find out if Henry Blood was coming home. I remember her receiving a letter from Henry Blood's widow, telling about his missionary work in Vietnam, how he was captured in 1968 during the Tet offensive, how he was treated in a Viet Cong prison camp and how he finally died of starvation. I remember the Vietnam war. Some people are too young to remember. Some people choose not to remember.

Stallone and several others are using the movies, a powerful medium of education, to give a false impression of war, particularly the Vietnam war. The Vietnam war has had a huge effect on America. Of the three million Americans who served in Vietnam about 58,000 lost their lives. At home another war was fought; many lost their homes, many lost their faith, many lost their lives.

Our country learned a costly and valuable lesson in Vietnam. We learned a lesson we should not forget.

Karl Pallmeyer is a senior journalism major and a columnist for The Battalion.

Life smells better without the cigar

By ART BUCHWALD

Columnist for The Los Angeles Times Syndicate

When someone gives up smoking he or she wants the whole world to hear about it. I know you weren't ready for this, dear reader, but I have given up cigars. I am a born-again nonsmoker — a confessed sinner who can now walk into any crowded room without stinking up the joint.

Don't go away. I want to tell you the story of my conversion. It doesn't do any good to stop smoking if no one will listen to how you did it.

First, I have to give credit where credit is due. I couldn't have done it alone. I got some help from that Big Nonsmoker in the sky.

It all began six months ago when, after lighting up one of the six or seven cigars I smoked every day, I suddenly heard loud coughing in the heavens. Then a thundering voice boomed, 'PUT OUT THAT DAMNED CIGAR.'

I didn't pay any attention because I was sure He wasn't talking to me. After all, I had been smoking for over 40 years and He never raised any objections before. So I continued for another week. Then my chest started to feel lousy and I became hoarse.

I looked up and said, "What's going on?"

The voice came down and said, 'I THOUGHT I MADE MYSELF CLEAR. WHAT KIND OF MESSAGE DO I HAVE TO SEND YOU?' "Okay," I said. "I'm willing to deal. Let's just say I cut down to two or three a day?"

He would have none of it. 'THE NUMBER IS NON-NEGOTIABLE.'

"How about one petit corona after dinner?"

"DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND ENGLISH?" the voice said. To make His point He shoved a hot coal down my throat and I started to gasp for air.

Yes, He was responsible for my quitting, but He didn't give me that much help once I gave it up.

After I went cold turkey I had to face the prospect of earning a living. I could smoke a cigar without writ-

ing, but I couldn't write without smoking a cigar. In the beginning I just stared at the paper. To get going I tried typing exercises such as "Now is the time for all good men...for all good men...for all good men...for all good men to light up a Monte Cristo Havana No. 3."

My mind would work in curious ways. I would want to write about the MX missile system, and the only thing that came out was "Puff the Magic Dragon." The song "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" droned in my head, and the Marlboro Man kept riding across my computer screen.

Finally, in desperation, I looked up to the heavens and said, "How long do you expect me to keep this up?"

The voice came down, 'TRY CHEWING GUM.'

I was skeptical, but the first time I shoved a stick of gum in my mouth it worked. I found out if you have to keep moving your jaws all the time, you don't miss having a wet stogie between your lips.

Well, it's been all uphill since then. After my decompression period I discovered the beautiful world of nonsmoking. My lungs are now getting all the oxygen they so richly deserve and my brain cells seem to be relieved they don't have to absorb soot from morning until night.

What is even better is I am now a member of that band of brothers and sisters who can walk into a restaurant or get on an airplane and say loudly to the hostess, "No smoking section, please!"

I have to admit that like all born-again nonsmokers I look down on those who are still hooked. I don't get angry with them but I do something worse. I bore them. I tell them my story from beginning to end — how I was once a seven-a-day Dunhill man, but through the intervention of a higher spirit became a six-pack Doublemint gum fan. Then I warn them that we nonsmokers not only consider ourselves holier than they, but believe we have a mission to either convert all smokers, or persecute them until we drive the tobacco demons from their souls.

Everyone pays the price for functional illiteracy

"Billy, please read this sentence in your reading book for the class."

Ricky Telg  
Guest Columnist

A request such as this would seem commonplace in elementary and junior high schools around the country. This case, however, is different.

"Billy" is not a child; he's an adult. But he can't read. "Billy" is a member of one of the fastest growing minorities in the United States. He's a "functional illiterate."

Since 1957, the United States has slipped from 14th in the world in literacy levels to 49th. This year, an estimated 2.3 million adults join the ranks of 23 million other Americans who are categorized as illiterate.

In many cases, the functional illiterate, one who may know the alphabet and small words but can't read well enough to read a book or write letters, has found the waters of society's "mainstream" too rough to navigate in.

Jobs are difficult to find because reading and writing are prerequisites for most places of employment. Even everyday chores that most people take for granted, such as filling out a job application or reading the ingredients of a recipe from a cookbook, become tedious and frightening to those who cannot read. One 40-year-old woman never knew which public restroom to use until she learned that "women" had more letters in it than "men."

The rampant illiteracy rate is not only hard on the individual, it's also hard on society. Studies have shown a correlation between illiteracy and both crime and unemployment. In Texas, 88 percent of prison inmates and 63 percent of welfare recipients do not have a high school diploma.

Why does the illiteracy rate continue to climb?

Television viewing has become the leading form of entertainment in America since the 1950s. This "intellectual babysitter" has taken the place of reading in many households. The television

brings news, sports, weather and important information into homes, thus making a newspaper unnecessary. Why read it when you can see pictures of it and hear it? Children have taken to the television as a second mother. Pre-school age children watch an average of eight to 10 hours of television a day. This glut of television watching extends into their adolescent and adult years. It doesn't leave much time for reading.

Parental and family influences also contribute to the rise. Some parents allow education to take a backseat to other important activities, such as athletics, band and drama. In Texas, participation in high school football has been stressed so intensively that boys sacrifice their studies to be better players.

Perhaps the most startling factor in the decline in literacy in the United States is inadequate teaching. High school graduates wishing to major in education are averaging 391 on the verbal portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test college entrance exam. That average is 33 points below the average of those entering all other fields.

Ross Perot, whose reforms for Texas education were approved by the Legislature last year, has suggested that most teachers' colleges in Texas be closed because they graduate functional illiterates who, in turn, teach others to be functional illiterates.

A priority placed on quality education would reverse this disturbing trend. The debate continues over whether to make teachers take competency tests. The teachers don't want to. Some feel it is an insult to have to take an exam after they have their college diploma, but the exams need to be given.

If Perot's assessment about the colleges is anywhere near correct, how many functional illiterates will be passed to the next grade before it is noticed? With the tests, those teachers who fail could be "weeded out" of the system before they could do damage to their students.

Former President John F. Kennedy once said, "Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in edu-

cation... The human mind is our fundamental resource." But when that resource is not used, everyone suffers.

The price of illiteracy is a cost paid by everyone. More than \$12 million are spent annually in Texas for adult education. Those millions don't include the benefits received by illiterates on welfare, or the cost keeping someone who can't read in prison.

Something must be done to squelch the rise in illiteracy. Better quality education, competent teachers and a more involved parent-child relationship are just suggestions. But people will need to take a stand against this potential menace. If not, how many more "Billys" will there be?

Ricky Telg is a junior journalism major.

The Battalion

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Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the Editorial Board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Communications.

Letters Policy

Letters to the Editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the address and telephone number of the writer.

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