

# Trauma outlasts Vietnam

## Some veterans withdrew to avoid suspicions of society

By Cathie Anderson  
Editor

See today's special section for stories about the planned Vietnam memorial in Dallas, Aggies in Vietnam and A&M students who lived in Vietnam during the war.

Vietnam veterans survived the stress of combat in a strange war that enjoyed neither popular support nor public sanction. And when they came home — if they came home — it was either to the arms of unknowing relatives, the questions of forgetful friends or the insults of irate pacifists.

Gary E. May, a Vietnam veteran who is now a clinical social worker in Evansville, Ind., says the image of Vietnam veterans in the media provoked a fairly defensive relationship between society and the veterans, who were portrayed as guilt-ridden and violence-prone individuals.

"Knowing that people were suspicious of us and our mettle, many chose to not give anybody any further evidence for suspicion," May says, "so they consequently withdrew and just sort of stayed to themselves or played it very close to the vest. They didn't readily acknowledge that they were Vietnam veterans and certainly didn't voluntarily acknowledge it."

This was the case for John Velasquez, now commander of the Brazos

County Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 4692, and Jerry Forman, now a pressman for the *Bryan-College Station Eagle*, in the early days after the war.

Forman says that when he got home, he was asked for a news release for the local newspaper, but he refused to give it.

"It was just that at that point of the game, it seemed to me that there were a lot of people against it (the war)," he says. "It wasn't quite the same as the previous conflicts we'd been in."

"There was a lot of strong anti-war feeling. I was just glad to get out of it, and I didn't want to advertise (that I had)."

Velasquez says he refused to talk to anyone in the media about Vietnam until 1984, and he only did so then because he thought it would help people understand the war better.

"I am trying to get more Vietnam veterans in the VFW," he says. "The reason I'm having trouble is that a lot of them feel like I felt years ago. I finally just said that I'm going to try to go forward, not live in the past. There's a future ahead."

May, who worked with veterans in the Veterans Administration Vet Center Program for about 10 years, says he believes a decompression period could have helped veterans in readjusting to civilian life.

He says he doesn't think time is the critical element in the success of the decompression period.

"More important than time is what happens during that period," he says, "and that would include an emphasis on really appreciating and understanding as much as one could

what one had been through, the losses that had been sustained, both of friends, personal losses . . . things that had changed back in the states while you were over there."

May says this not only would have helped re-integrate the veteran into society but also could have helped clarify messages sent back to civilian society. He says the transition from battlefield to U.S. soil was so quick that "some guys accurately and very vividly describe returning home still in combat fatigues they had worn just hours earlier in a firefight in Vietnam."

"Family members would have known that Johnny was safe and

*"Vietnam veterans, like veterans of any war, are a ticking bomb of unresolved emotions. Nobody goes into a modern war without being wounded in some way."*

— A&M military historian Roger Beaumont

sound and back in Fort Campbell," he says, "but he can't come home for another three weeks because there is a mandatory debriefing time, which really acknowledges and solidifies the importance of what he went through."

This might have made the civilian population realize the importance of what these men had been through, May says. Instead they often re-

turned home to friends and former classmates who said things like, "Where've you been? I haven't seen you around for a few weeks."

Velasquez says that his experience resembled this one.

"Nobody said, 'Hey, congratulations, you're home, and what was it like?'" he recalls. "It was just like you went out of town for the weekend, and you came back, and nobody seemed to miss you."

"I'd tell them I was in Vietnam, and their reaction would be like, 'So what?'"

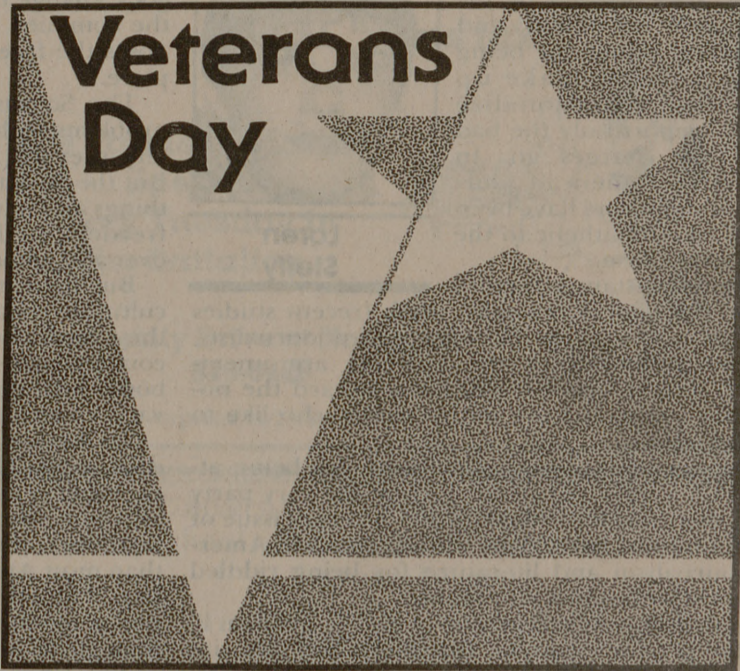
But Velasquez doesn't think that a decompression period would have helped him. "I don't think it would have done that much good because the general public, the media, shredded us," he says. "If we'd come home . . . and been stationed in an isolated area for a month or two and talked to social workers, well, when you get out, the people aren't going to feel any differently about you."

"Recently, about eight months ago . . . I started taking group therapy . . . where they have a bunch of Vietnam veterans meet at the VA Hospital and Outpatient Clinic on a certain day, and they want you to get your frustration out. I've been attending them . . . and maybe they know something that we don't, but after eight months, I can't see any good that it's done me."

Forman says he wouldn't have wanted to go through a debriefing either. "I was just ready to get out of there," he says.

He says the greatest feeling for him was when his plane from Saigon lifted off, and the pilot said, "We're airborne."

May says he believes that no one



would have chosen to stay, given the choice, but that such a period might have helped both the soldiers and their families.

Many veterans didn't experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder until they were out of combat for some months, May says. They notice they're having difficulty in just re-assimilating into civilian life, he says.

These veterans feel they have nothing in common with peers, former classmates, spouses and others who weren't exposed to combat during that era, May says.

He says the psychological effects of combat probably were delayed because of the time-limited tours of duty that the men were given during the Vietnam War. Researchers then believed that prolonged exposure to combat was one of the main reasons for the disorder, May says, so time-

limited tours began during the Korean War and certainly were the order of the day for Vietnam.

"That seemed to have the desired effect," May says. "The incidents of battle neurosis or shell shock or whatever term was applied during the combat situation were diminished during Korea and during Vietnam, but what we saw especially with Vietnam was that delayed effect."

Although the psychological effects of combat have been known since the time of the Napoleonic Wars, Dr. Roger Beaumont, a Texas A&M military historian, says that still not enough research has been done on it.

Beaumont says that by rotating soldiers through units, the military reduced them to parts in a machine. Soldiers went into units as individ-

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# Three veterans agree Vietnam gained nothing militarily

By Cathie Anderson  
Editor

"It ain't much of a war, but it's the only one we got."

The Vietnam conflict, the "not much of a war," as it was termed by the upper echelon of the military during the '60s, managed to keep U.S. armed forces fighting for 12 years and the United States in turmoil for 25.

John Forman, a Vietnam veteran who is now a pressman for the *Bryan-College Station Eagle* says the end results of the war weren't worth what it cost.

"I think it has made the United States paranoid because every time we start going into an area of sensitivity, you always hear . . . 'Well, let's not get bogged down in another Vietnam,'" Forman says. "You hear that just about any time we try to influence another country, like Central America right now is the classic example."

Gary E. May, a Vietnam veteran who is now a clinical social worker in Evansville, Ind., says he hopes the country has learned the "importance of knowing as a nation what the hell it is we're doing or what we're proposing to do before we set about doing it."



"I hope that one of the things we've learned (from Vietnam) is that we just don't commit troops to a situation because it seems expedient for whatever measure, either for politics, for economics, for world affairs — whatever that is — or for anything else. It's serious business."

John Velasquez, a Vietnam veteran who is now commander of the Brazos County Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 4692, says that during the war, he didn't know why American troops had been sent to Vietnam.

"I really didn't have a complete understanding as to what we were doing there except that we were involved," he says.

Velasquez says it's difficult for him, knowing that 50,000 or 60,000 Americans died in the Vietnam War and over 2,400 still are missing in action in Southeast Asia.

"Too many politicians — it was a political rally," he says. "It was the guys up in Washington running the show, and it wasn't the field generals and the field sergeants out there in Vietnam doing it. Washington was running it."

"I feel it was just a great loss. We didn't win anything. We didn't even break even. The Communists took it (South Vietnam) over."

Velasquez says he considers himself lucky because he was 23 years old when he went to Vietnam.

"I felt a whole lot older than some of your 18- and 19-year-olds, and they looked toward me more as a leader because of my age group," he says. "Some of those boys just barely got out of high school, and three

*"It was just a great loss. We didn't win anything. We didn't even break even."*

— John Velasquez, Vietnam veteran

months later, they're in a combat zone.

"They responded good, but the American people never gave them a chance. They never gave them a chance to prove themselves."

While these three enlisted men agree that the United States accomplished nothing militarily in Vietnam, they disagree about whether the public understands this conflict and what it meant.

Forman says he believes people understand what happened enough to be fearful of a similar incident happening again, but Velasquez says he doesn't think the public really understood the war or the Vietnam soldier.

May says he believes that people would say they "semi-understand" the war. "I think people's understanding of it is

quite variable because there wasn't even a sort of national consensus on why . . . we were there in the first place," he says. "Even the politicians haven't been able to consistently articulate any kind of good that came from it, so I think people would say that they are quite confused and uncertain about what it was all about but not so confused and uncertain that they're troubled on a day-to-day basis about it."

Both Velasquez and May also are concerned that the recent glamorization of the war will move the public even farther away from the truth about Vietnam.

May was especially appalled at the image that the movie, "Rambo," had given the war.

"If there's anything that I think brings dishonor to those of us who served honorably there (in Vietnam), it's having Sylvester Stallone shooting an M-60 from the hip and just blowing people away at will, and not recognizing the reality of that," he says. "Not only is that a disservice to us Vietnam veterans, but I think it's also in more profound ways a disservice to this country's youth because they grow up with that stereotypical, romantic image of what war is like."

# State to request review of decision on oil lease profits

AUSTIN (AP) — Land Commissioner Garry Mauro said Monday the state will ask the Texas Supreme Court to review a Texarkana appellate court ruling that Mauro said would give \$2 million to Exxon Corp. and South Texas rancher Clinton Manges instead of the Permanent School Fund.

The attorney general's department said the state's appeal to the Texarkana court ruling was being prepared and would be filed before the Nov. 28 deadline.

"It would be unconscionable for the opinion to stand," Mauro told a news conference.

Mauro said the Texarkana decision gives away half of the settlement made in 1983 in a suit filed against Mobil Oil Co. by the state on 28 oil wells in Duval County on the ranch operated by Manges.

Mauro said the case involves the Relinquishment Act of 1919 in which the state owns the mineral rights and someone else owns the surface rights.

Those owning surface rights act as

the state's leasing agents and are given half of the proceeds.

"In the lawsuit in question, Exxon was asked to help the state win the case and refused," Mauro said.

"Now they want to share in the profit and that's not fair," he said.

He said Manges had agreed not to oppose the state's claim on Mobil, but he also said, "If Exxon receives its share, then Manges will expect his share."

Mauro said the lawsuit involves about \$2 million that should go to the Permanent School Fund but if the Texarkana court decision stands, Exxon will get \$700,000 and Manges \$1.3 million.

"It's one thing for the state to share equally when its Relinquishment Act agents have acted in the best interests of Texas," Mauro said. "In this case, the state's agent did nothing for the state, but still wants to be paid as if it had."

"That's not right, that's not what the law says and I'm sure that the Texas Supreme Court won't stand for it."

# Callers in Beirut say French hostages freed

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — Two anonymous telephone callers to Beirut newspapers said Monday night that two French hostages had been freed by their Moslem kidnapers, but the reports could not be confirmed.

One of the callers indicated the captives might be taken to Damascus, Syria, and reliable sources in the Syrian capital said the freed hostages had arrived there and identified them as Marcel Coudari and Camille Sontag.

One of two communiqués distributed earlier Monday by the Revolutionary Justice Organization said some of the group's French hostages would be freed within 48 hours as a goodwill gesture made possible by Algerian and Syrian mediation. The group, believed to be composed of Shiite Moslems, claimed that France had made promises on unspecified demands.

Shortly before midnight an anonymous telephone caller told the independent Beirut newspaper *An-Nahar* that two French hostages had been freed in Moslem west Beirut Ramlet al-Baida residential district at 7:30 p.m. (11:30 p.m. CST).

The second communiqué signed by the Revolutionary Justice Organization said the release would take place at 7:30 p.m. at the Hotel Beau-rivage in Ramlet al-Baida near the headquarters of Syrian army officers, but reporters at the hotel said no hostages had appeared there.

At 7:55 p.m., French diplomat Guy Letrange arrived at the hotel with three bodyguards in a bullet-

proof green Peugeot embassy car. A bodyguard stepped out and told reporters French Ambassador Christian Graeff had instructed them to take delivery of any freed hostages.

"We will wait," said the man, who identified himself as Jean-Claude Bourdette, the head of Graeff's bodyguards.

The leftist Beirut newspaper *As-Safir* reported late Monday that it had received a telephone call from a person claiming to speak for the Revolutionary Justice Organization and it said he asked if the paper had received the report from *An-Nahar*.

*As-Safir* said an editor told the caller, "Yes we did. But can you tell us the names?" of the hostages.

It said the caller, speaking Arabic, replied, "Not right away. You will know tomorrow. Go take their pictures in Damascus."

If the hostages were turned over to Syrian officials they could have been sent overland to Damascus.

The two communiqués from the extremist group were sent to the Beirut office of a Western news agency. They did not say how many hostages were to be freed.

The Revolutionary Justice Organization, thought to be loyal to Iran, has claimed responsibility for kidnapping three Frenchmen and two Americans in Moslem west Beirut.

Nineteen foreigners — including eight Frenchmen and six Americans — are missing in Lebanon and various groups have claimed responsibility for the abductions. American David Jacobsen was released Nov. 2

by another Shiite group, Islamic Jihad.

In Paris, a spokesman for Premier Jacques Chirac said the government was encouraged but was taking "the most discreet attitude possible" in

comments on the captive Frenchmen.

Among Frenchmen the Revolutionary Justice Organization claims to hold are two television crewmen

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# Registrar: Phone system worked well on 1st day

By Jo Ann Able  
Staff Writer

Although some Texas A&M students attempting to register by phone Monday complained they received only busy signals, the registrar's office said more than 1,800 calls were received by the registration phone system by 3 p.m.

Donald D. Carter, associate registrar, said this is not the number of students who actually registered or who attempted to register, only how many calls were received.

He said some calls received came from students who are not classified as seniors or graduate students, and are not yet eligible to register.

"If you're a junior, you can call in and the system will answer, but it won't let you register," Carter said. "That's still counted as a call received."

"We don't know how many of these calls are clogging up the line — juniors, sophomores and freshmen who are thinking, 'Hey, I'll go ahead and try to get in early.'"

He said these calls are causing a lot of extraneous traffic on the lines.

Carter said the new system seems to be working fairly well so far.

"Since 1961, I've been through every registration system, either as a student or a staff member, and this appears to be the optimum way to register," Carter said.

Registration procedures were further disrupted Monday by problems with local telephone service. A repair service clerk for GTE said repairs were being made at a switching station and on some cables that had been cut.