

The Vietnam War — as seen through an officer's eyes

By Sue Krenek

Battalion News Editor

America's images of Vietnam are seen through the eyes of the enlisted man, a nightmare of rice paddies and Hueys, firefights and napalm.

Or the images are glamorized, fictionalized and Hollywoodized, enshrining Rambo as the epitome of the Vietnam warrior and making it possible for Robert Duvall in *Apocalypse Now* to destroy a village so he could capture a good place to surf.

Bryan Cole knows neither of these Vietnams.

As an Army captain assigned to a military assistance command unit from March 1969 to March 1970, Cole didn't experience the "heat of direct combat." Instead, the West Point graduate, who's now the associate dean for student affairs for Texas A&M's College of Education, acted as an adviser on personnel matters for Vietnamese troops and later directed in-and-out processing for American forces in the military assistance command.

Cole's experiences in Vietnam often bore little resemblance to those of the enlisted men. While stationed in Phu-Cuong, he lived not in barracks but in the town's only hotel, a decidedly spartan affair.

He tells of evenings spent on the roof, four stories up, playing cards and watching firefights around the village.

"It was a strange situation," he says, "that you could be a part of it and at the same time you were removed from it."

Often the officer-enlisted man distinction was far less defined.

Enlisted men in Vietnam were thrust in and out of combat situations in extremely short periods of time. After the war, they were often sent directly home — sometimes still covered in dirt from the jungles.

Advisers were subjected to the same sudden changes. The American advisers Cole worked with were responsible for advising Vietnamese units militarily, and he says it wasn't unusual for an adviser to get a radio call from a surrounded unit and be taken to join the

men in the field.

In these cases, the difference between a card game and a battlefield was a ten-minute helicopter ride.

Cole has faced many of the same questions and problems as other Vietnam veterans, but his military training gives him a different perspective on U.S. involvement in the area.

"It was a legitimate mission," he says, "but it was not carried out in such a way that we could fulfill that mission. What we were trying to do was good but the way we went about it was bad."



"Several basic principles of war were violated because of the position that we took as a nation. . . . This meant that it was an unwinnable war under those conditions. From a military standpoint it was definitely winnable. From a political standpoint it was an unwinnable war."

These restrictions on U.S. involvement, Cole says, are what make Vietnam different from any other U.S. war.

Restrictions imposed by the Vietnamese bureaucracy meant that U.S. units could not act without approval from the Vietnamese, and U.S. political restrictions affected military decisions as well as the troops themselves.

"We as a nation never declared war,"

he says, "and because of that there were a lot of political and military things that we could not do legally. It also left us without a national commitment."

That lack of commitment made morale a problem for many soldiers, but Cole says he simply continued to try to do his job.

"I think in a case like that it makes it difficult, but you have to, within your own mind and soul, resolve what you think is right and then do the best job you can."

Although Cole says he wasn't really affected by the national attitude toward the war while he was in Vietnam, returning home made him realize how far removed most Americans were from the reality of the war.

"My dad asked me to go to a golf association meeting," he said, "and I went out there and this guy I'd known all my life came up to me. I wasn't expecting accolades, but it wasn't 'Good to see you,' or 'Glad you're back' but 'You sure have a good tan.' And that was all the relevance it had for him."

Cole has experienced no psychological after-effects of his tour of duty in Vietnam, something he attributes to his military training.

"My classmates and the guys who have come out of the Corps or things like that have a different degree of intensity of training and, I think, a better understanding of what happens or what is to happen," he says. "They'd have a greater appreciation of what was expected and, again, the ability to deal with the reality once they got into it."

That reality is never far away for Cole. "It's still very much alive," he says. But he feels that America's experiences in Vietnam make involvement in future conflicts much less likely.

"If it does make us shy away from a situation in the future, that's good," he says, "because what it does is it makes us more cautious, and I think it also has been helpful from the standpoint of making us realize that we are not indestructible, we are not invulnerable, and therefore when we go into a situation we'd better know what we're getting into."★

Number of veterans who suffer from stress syndrome inconclusive

By Curtis Leonard

Reporter

For most people, the Vietnam War will probably be remembered as a dark page in American history. But for some, the war is more than just history — it is an experience they cope with every day.

The number of Vietnam veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome is hard to determine, says Dr. Merrill Lipton, a psychiatrist with the Texas A&M College of Medicine.

Because a person can develop symptoms many years after the traumatic experience has occurred, estimates of veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress are not conclusive, he says, adding that many veterans don't develop symptoms until they are in their 50s or 60s.

"It's only recently that people began recognizing post-traumatic stress disorder as something normal that can happen to anyone," Lipton says. "Post-traumatic stress syndrome is far more

common than was once believed."

Although most people associate post-traumatic stress syndrome with Vietnam veterans, veterans from such wars as World War II and the Korean War have been diagnosed with the disorder.

Lipton says many people have misconceptions about post-traumatic stress syndrome, which is a group of symptoms that result from traumatic events outside the realm of ordinary human experience.

Anyone can suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome — war experience is not the only cause. However, all traumatic experiences don't result in post-traumatic stress syndrome.

"While the death of a relative may be very traumatic, it is not outside the realm of ordinary human experience and therefore cannot result in post-traumatic stress," Lipton says.

However, he says, rapes and hostage situations are among the many different traumas that can cause post-trauma-

tic stress.

The symptoms associated with the disorder were diagnosed as other problems until 1980 when they were grouped together and labeled. It is usually treated with individual or group therapy and medication.

Research has shown that people who are brutalized by other people have a higher rate of post-traumatic stress than those suffering from trauma as a result of some natural phenomena, Lipton says.

Lipton is currently conducting research on preventing post-traumatic stress, and says that a decompression period, or a period of rest, before returning home may be one prevention method.

"It is very important to convey the message that having emotional problems or post-traumatic stress is nothing to be ashamed of — it's a common problem and there's help available," Lipton says.★

Aggie KIAs

Maj. Bruno A. Hochmuth '35
Col. Leonard D. Holder '42
Lt. Col. John S. Bonner '44
Lt. Col. Edward L. Williams '49
Lt. Col. Elden Golden '50
Sgt. Graham H. Howison '51
Capt. Royal Clifton Fisher '52
Capt. Heriberto A. Garcia '52
Maj. Teddy J. Tomchesson '52
Capt. Russell W. Condon '55
Maj. Hadley Foster '55
Capt. Julius J. Johns '55
Capt. Richard E. Steel '55
Capt. Dalton M. Estein '56
Maj. John M. Kessinger '56
Capt. Ernest McFeron '56
Capt. Condon H. Terry Jr. '56
Capt. Charles C. Jones '57
Maj. Tedd M. Lewis '57
Capt. Foy Manion Mathis '57
Capt. James C. Caston '58
Capt. Don Thomas Elledge '58
Lt. Cmdr. Robert D. Johnson '58
Capt. Donald D. Blair '59
Maj. Allen G. Goehring '59
Capt. Donald R. Hawley '59
John F. Martin '59
Maj. Allan L. Smith '59
Lt. Ronald D. Stewart '59
Lt. Billy J. Coley '60
Capt. William F. Cordell Jr. '60
Capt. Floyd W. Kaase '60
Capt. Byron C. Stone '60
Maj. James M. Vrba Jr. '60
Lt. James C. Thigpin '61
Capt. Gerald J. Walla '61
Capt. Gregory K. Whitehouse '61
Capt. Thomas H. Ralph Jr. '62
Lt. James L. Reed '62
Capt. Ralph B. Walker II '62
Capt. Charles F. Allen II '63
Donnie Ray Dehart '63
Capt. Johnny L. Garner '63
Lt. George Gutierrez Jr. '63
Lt. James R. Hottenroth '64
Capt. George L. Hubler '64
Lt. Colin E. Lamb '64
Capt. Thomas A. McAdams '64
Capt. Henry G. Mundt II '64
Lt. John B. Price '64
Warrant Officer Wesley W. Carroll III '65
Lt. John C. Dougherty '65
Lt. John Hernandez '65
Capt. Charles D. Jageler '65
Aubrey G. Martin '65
Richard A. Oman '65
Lt. Jose C. Santos '65
Lt. Victor H. Thompson III '65
Capt. Albert A. Tijerina Jr. '65
Lt. R. Bryson Vann '65
Capt. Jack Patrick Blake '66
Capt. Joseph Bush Jr. '66
Lt. Michael R. Callaway '66
Lt. Clyde W. Campbell '66
Lt. James A. Dimock '66
Sgt. Larry K. Kaiser '66
Capt. Carl E. Long '66
Lt. James E. Neely '66
Capt. Eugene C. Oates III '66
Lt. Stephen R. Tubre '66
Maj. Elbert A. Welsh '66
Sgt. John T. Whitson '66
Lt. Layne Hale Connevey '67
Cpl. Converse R. Lewis III '67
Lt. John E. Russell '67
Lt. Andrew D. Smith '67
Cpl. Tom M. Boyd III '68
Lt. Marvin S. Arthington '68
Lt. James M. Butler '68
Lt. Richard E. Harlan '68
Capt. Steven B. Johnston '68
Capt. James E. Morton Jr. '68
Lt. Michael D. Noonan '68
Lt. Kevin A. Rinard '68
Lt. Rayburn L. Smith III '68
Lt. George T. Taff '68
Spec. 5 James Ned Woolley '68
Lt. James H. Cartwright '69
Sgt. Jeffrey E. Cowley '69
Lt. Robert H. Johnson '69
Spec. 4 Sanderfird Jones '69
Pfc. Bill Kildare '69
Capt. Walter S. Mullen '69
Lt. Vincent C. Anderson '70
Chief Warrant Officer Phillip R. Pannell '72

The remains of the following, once listed as MIA, have been returned:

Maj. William Eugene Jones '62
Lt. Col. Irving B. Ramsower II '57
Capt. George P. McKnight '58

The following are listed as KIA. Their bodies have not been recovered:

Lt. Col. Walter VanCleave '48
Lt. Donald J. Matocha '66