

Photo courtesy of Texas Aggie

On the cover:

Maj. Robert Norlan Daughtrey, Class of '55, was one of four former students held captive in North Vietnam during the war. This photograph, taken by the North Vietnamese, was widely circulated in the United States during the war to demonstrate the plight of the prisoners of war.

Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader:

After a number of interviews with veterans, relatives of MIA's and researchers, "Scarred Legacy" seemed the most apt name for this issue on the Vietnam War and its aftereffects.

While the section focuses on veterans of the Vietnam War, we remember on this Veterans Day all those who have served in U.S. wars.

The idea for these articles was conceived by Scott Sutherland, Summer 1986 city editor for *The Battalion*. This section features:

- A story on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Dallas, which is having its groundbreaking ceremony today.
- A profile of four Aggies who were prisoners of war and sketches of 12 Aggies who are still missing in action.
- An article about post-traumatic stress disorder.
- A look at the lives of two A&M students who were in Vietnam at the time of the conflict.
- A different look at the war, from an administrator's point of view.

We would like to thank our sources, particularly the relatives of those still missing in action, the former prisoners of war and the veterans. The interviews stirred up painful memories for many of our sources. We can only hope that our supplement serves to bring everyone closer to an understanding of what war means, as we know our sources would wish.

— Kirsten Dietz
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Reflections on Vietnam

If war is hell, what is a police action? From 1950 to 1975 the United States was entangled in the longest and bloodiest conflict in its history, yet war was never declared — officially. Nor has it ever ended — unofficially. The accords signed in Paris may have led to the withdrawal of U.S. troops, but a new struggle took the soldiers' place. Vietnam was more than a military fiasco, it was a foreign policy labyrinth — getting in was much easier than getting out.

More lives were lost in the Vietnam conflict than in all other American wars combined. America's much-vaunted military power was brought to its knees in the jungles of Southeast Asia. But the greatest casualty of all was the collapse of our sense of national purpose. We had one of the greatest military forces — some would say *the* greatest — in the world, but the country's collective heart wasn't in the fight. Vietnam was too far away, and despite the continued warnings of staunch anti-communists, the domino theory seemed too obscure to pose a real threat to this country.

Yet while our hearts may not have been in the fight, our troops and dollars were. Both were lost in vain. For the United States, the Vietnam "war" was a fatal foreign policy mistake, at best a military and social embarrassment.

But while the nation tried to wash its hands of the Vietnam War, the soldiers still had their hands full fighting battles that paid no attention to the unwritten rules of warfare. It was a war of Agent Orange, the Tet Offensive and napalm. It was a war where the loss of sanity was as frequent as the loss of life and where the enemy looked just like the allies. It was a war perpetuated by promises that just a few more bombing runs would wipe out the communists and democracy would triumph.

Not only did soldiers in Vietnam face the trauma of the battlefields, they also were confronted with the trauma of a homecoming that offered little recognition and no appreciation for what they had done.

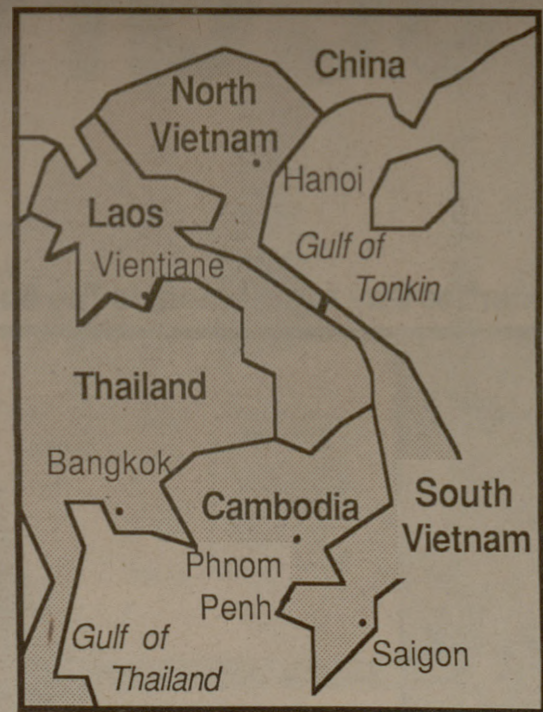
Unlike World War II, in which soldiers had long troopship rides home that eased the battle tension, Vietnam veterans were given no such decompression time. In what was labeled foxhole-to-front-porch transport by some sociologists, soldiers often were whisked home in less than 48 hours.

In one report, a veteran remembered that on the day he got home, his mother told him to wash up, and he found he still had dirt from the Vietnam jungles under his fingernails.

The United States the veterans left to keep the dominoes from falling was not the same one they returned to. By the late '60s, support for the war had become almost nonexistent. Instead of getting a traditional heroes' welcome, thank you or even apology, the Vietnam veterans were returned home silently and dumped on their doorsteps, unnoticed by a country that had become disenchanted with everything they stood for.

To those who opposed the war, the soldiers were the point men of violence without purpose — "baby killers" was the popular term. To others, especially veterans of other wars, they were failures who had caused America to lose the first war in its history.

If no official recognition was granted to



Graphic by Kirsten Dietz

the returning veterans, what was being done for the soldiers labeled missing in action and prisoners of war who were still over there?

The Paris agreement, Chapter 3, Article 8, states that "the parties involved would return captured military personnel and foreign civilians, help each other to get information about those missing . . . in action and work to facilitate the exhumation and repatriation of the remains (of the dead)."

Between Feb. 12 and April 1, 1973, the Hanoi government returned 591 prisoners. But today, more than 2,400 American soldiers remain missing in Southeast Asia.

While these figures are lower than the number of MIAs unaccounted for after World War II (79,386) and Korea (5,717), MIAs in Vietnam present a special problem. Because the United States did not win the war, American authorities have not had access to the areas where the missing were last seen alive or were thought to have disappeared or been captured.

In 1973, the Nixon administration declared that all missing Americans in Southeast Asia were presumed dead, ending efforts to locate them. But in 1982, President Reagan declared that the search for American MIAs holds the highest national priority and vowed to use all the government's resources to locate the missing.

While some progress has been made, negotiations have been slowed by the two governments' intense distrust of each other. The Hanoi government denies any Americans remain in Vietnam despite the more than 100 reports of MIA sightings.

Texas A&M, proud of its rich military heritage, made a sizable contribution to the ranks of American forces deployed in Vietnam — but not without a cost. The jungle battlefields claimed 110 Aggies. Twelve are still listed as missing in action, bringing the hell of Vietnam a little closer to home.

What, then, is a police action? For America the hell is over. For those still missing in Vietnam, and their frustrated families in this country, the police action has become a perverse purgatory where they may never be forgiven for their country's sins.

— By Loren Steffy