



2001

The Good War v The Bad War: An Analysis of Combat Veterans' Experience in World War II and Vietnam by Removing Social Stigma

Shelley R. Stafford

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_interstp2

Recommended Citation

Stafford, Shelley R., "The Good War v The Bad War: An Analysis of Combat Veterans' Experience in World War II and Vietnam by Removing Social Stigma" (2001). *Senior Thesis Projects, 1993-2002*.
https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_interstp2/76

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the College Scholars at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Thesis Projects, 1993-2002 by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.

Shelley R. Stafford
College Scholars Senior Project
Honors Program Senior Project
Dr. Piehler, Dr. Appier, Dr. Broadhead
May 2001

**The Good War v The Bad War: An Analysis of Combat Veterans' Experience in
World War II and Vietnam by Removing Social Stigma**

Conceptual Outline

- I. World War II: The “Good War”
 - A. How does society construct and image of a good war?
 - B. How does this construct reflect upon the returning veteran?
 - C. How does the stigmatized veteran respond to society?
- II. The War in General
 - A. World War II and civilians
 - B. World War II and returning veterans
 - C. The wounded Veteran
- III. Interviews (Method the same as for Vietnam, noted in Section X)
 - A. George Boggs III
 - B. Bert R. Manhoff
 - C. Frank Dauster
- IV. Once home
 - A. How were veterans treated?
 - B. How did veterans view themselves?
 - C. How did veterans view their combat experience?
- V. Conclusion: The construct of a good war in the eyes of the veteran versus the eyes of the civilian society to which he returned.
- VI. Vietnam: The “Bad War”
 - A. How does society construct an image of a bad war?
 - B. Generally, how does this construct reflect upon the returning veteran?
 - C. How does the stigmatized veteran respond to society?
- VII. The War in general
 - A. Confusion of public
 - 1. Slow, steady entrance into combat position
 - 2. Optimism of government vs. lengthiness of war
 - 3. Instead of economy boom, recession
 - B. Confusion of veterans
 - 1. Patriotism, yet undefined objectives
 - 2. Limitations by politicians on military strategy
 - 3. Shallow reporting=rewritten government releases that contradicted the time and reality of Vietnam
 - C. Patriotism and duty
- VIII. The Split Generation
 - A. Fathers’ World War II Generation
 - 1. Came of age in DRASTICALLY different era

- a. Depression
 - b. War as a solution, positive thing
 - c. All young men served
 - 2. Cold War against Communism
 - 3. Militaristic “We can win anything” optimism
 - 4. Upwardly mobile adulthood=ease of Vietnam generations’ youth
- B. Early (up to 1968) volunteers and patriots
 - a. Perceived Communism as imminent threat during youth
 - b. Grew up listening to glorified war stories
 - c. Optimistic view of war and America’s world leadership
- C. Late (after 1968) volunteers and draftees
 - a. Knew older brothers, uncles who had served in Vietnam
 - b. Saw visual images of the war on television
 - c. Heard civilians questioning the involvement and strategy
 - d. Low draft # or deferment=decreased pressure to serve/gave options to otherwise willing volunteers

IX. Combat and Military Service in Vietnam

- A. Strain of guerilla warfare
 - 1. Who is the enemy
 - 2. Training
 - 3. Nighttime attacks and ambushes
- B. Strain from divided United States
 - 1. Anti-war movement
 - 2. Socio-economic and racist implications of soldiers in combat
 - 3. Final years and the imperative to end the war
- C. Strain from general lack of objectives and attainable goals
 - 1. Win the hearts and minds of the people objective
 - 2. Defensive position only
 - 3. Constant rotation of troops=new and old soldiers together
 - 4. Loss of surprise and force due to political mechanics

X. Interviews

- A. What was the motivation for military service?
 - 1. Patriotism
 - 2. Nothing else to do
 - 3. Anti-communist
 - 4. Drafted
- B. How did they perceive the enemy?
 - 1. Close contact
 - 2. Dehumanized (or humanized)
 - 3. Civilians as the enemy
- C. How easily did they adapt to combat?
 - 1. Justification for actions in combat?
 - 2. Personal moral code vs. Learned acts of war
- D. Upon returning home, did they maintain military ties?

1. Veterans organizations
2. Friends in the military
3. Continued service

E. Upon returning home, how did they interact with civilians?

1. Jobs
2. Benefits
3. Mood of the nations towards the military

XI. Once home

- A. How were veterans treated?
- B. How did veterans view themselves?
- C. How did veterans view their combat experience?

XII. Conclusion: The construct of a bad war in the eyes of civilians vs. the eyes of veterans

XIII. Overall comparison of World War II and Vietnam:

While veterans of World War II and veterans of Vietnam were treated drastically different by the societies to which they returned, their shared feelings of isolation and unrest evolved from returning to societies whose constructs of the wars in which they fought were created to reflect the civilians' shared involvement in the war, and not the involvement of the veterans. The combat experiences of veterans in the "Good War" and in the "Bad War" are the same, and in their eyes, there is but one type of war that exists. War is neither good nor bad, but amoral. The men who experienced war know this. Society does not.

**The Good War vs. The Bad War: An Analysis of Combat Veterans' Experience in
World War II and Vietnam by Removing Social Stigma
By Shelley R. Stafford**

Creation of a Good War

The image of a good war, free from immorality and unnecessary destruction, exists in the memories of those who never experienced battle. We are taught to believe that violent action among humans is acceptable when it is for a good cause. Thus, the results of the atrocities that accompany the good cause are viewed as necessary sacrifice. In our collective memory, we see an ideal situation in which happy, well-adjusted young men go to defend an ideologically pure country. The events that occur during combat are simply accepted as part of war, but they are not discussed for fear of robbing the glory of victory. Happy, well-adjusted soldiers return home, ready to jump back into the life that they had left. What the soldiers experienced in combat is of only passing interest to the rest of society, and is easily forgotten. However, the men whose lives were physically and mentally altered in war make it hard for society to forget the undesirable aspects of war. The men who returned home bearing physical or mental wounds are the unwanted reminders of the other side of a good war. Veterans whose physical appearance was altered by war proved to be a visible roadblock in society's effort to expunge itself of any guilt about war, and they slowly coerced a propagandized society to view war differently than from the eyes of a national press. Exuberant boys who returned home as reserved men caused society to realize that the events of war are life changing and permanent even if no physical battle scars exist. Naturally, these injections of reality into small communities that already had an idealistic image of the war and why it was fought and how it affected those involved disturbed notions of the "good" war. Instead of accepting

the veterans' perspective of war, society forced these bearers of reality to conform to the popular image of an idealized war.

The image of the good war was a concept that evolved in the minds of people after the conclusion of the war. In reality, the good war concept had an abundance of fallacies that society did not know how to handle. Men and boys went to war for reasons that were hardly disputed. Ironically, most men had no personal incentive for fighting in the war. The event itself attracted quickly made soldiers, and it held promises of adventure, not of moral elevation. Combat showed young men horrible things that made them question why they had been so enthusiastic about the war. The promise of excitement soon gave way to a longing to return home. The construct of home in the soldiers' minds became an elaborate image of harmony and balance in the midst of a world of disharmony and imbalance. When it finally came time to return home, the soldier's mental image was once again violated when they found themselves amidst a society of uninformed and naïve people. They no longer felt at ease in the comfort of their parent's homes, nor did their own wives and children understand what they had endured. This planted the seed of isolation in the veterans, where it continued to grow as they lived and encountered more aspects of civilian life.¹

For the men whose physical appearance and ability was altered during combat, the return to civilian life was particularly difficult. The American public had a hard time accepting the disabled into all social spheres. They were expected to readjust quickly and forget as much as possible about their physical handicap. They were admired for their "wonderful attitude." This would enable them to be role models for other disabled soldiers. Also, the disabled veterans received significant unwanted public attention,

which made them feel freaky and defective. In fact, wounded men who returned to the United States were treated as though they were diseased. Coming to terms with the challenge of undesired public attention represented a major obstacle for many World War II disabled soldiers. Along with the obvious change in a wounded veteran's life, he was also burdened by the mental obligation of reconciling his personal sacrifice with the cost of supporting a cause. The wounded veteran was forced to come to terms with the moral void of war that called for such costly personal sacrifice. The wounded soldier was forced to confront a dilemma: whether his rationale for fighting in the war justified his sacrifice.²

Because soldiers fought in a good war, it is commonly believed that most veterans of World War II adjusted quickly and easily to civilian life. Since World War II was a good war, veterans committed no acts during war that would later come back to haunt them in the form of a post-traumatic stress disorder. However, combat in World War II was a terrible experience that left physical and mental scars on most soldiers. This does not fit the image of the good war of society's construct, because many thought that somehow, bad combat occurred only in a bad war.³

World War II, like other wars, was conceived as something to look forward to by the young men who were to go to war. It was an event that offered an alternative to a previously dreary segment of American history: the Depression. Young men who had grown up during the Depression were the same men who fought in World War II. It was a chance to break free from the constraints that had held them to a locality or a vocation. Instead of foreseeing the future as a completed portrait, World War II made it possible for young men and women to generate excitement for a new and exciting future. The great

moral imperatives of fighting in World War II had yet to completely surface, but the patriotic imperative to fight for one's country in its time of need was obvious and overwhelming. Men simply felt that it was their duty to fight, and it was a potentially gratifying duty. However, the attitude of patriotism and willingness to fight by American servicemen in all theaters of World War II was challenged, as it had been in all wars by the shock of combat, especially if the soldier was wounded. This abrupt injection of reality into the bravado of going to war for the good of the nation and the civilized world was initially unbearable unless he could formulate his own moral justification for having taken part in it. The ability of a young, wounded soldier to rationalize his participation in combat was especially important. Once wounded, the soldier needed reasons for having participated in combat in order to internalize his personal sacrifice for the war.

Veterans today are beginning to discuss their memories of World War II. Through this testimony, veterans who were wounded, either physically or mentally, can verbalize the reality of not only war, but also of their difficult return to civilian life. The following excerpts from interviews with World War II veterans serve as a microcosm of veteran sentiments.

George Boggs III began his Army career in the ROTC program at Rutgers. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he realized that war was inevitable. He did not feel particularly prepared for war, but he was very charged to "get over there and do something about it." Boggs was sent to the Pacific theater after he completed training.⁴

Boggs stated that he had "no druthers" about whom he was to fight. He was not fearful of the Germans, yet he did not shirk from fighting against the Japanese. He accepted his assignment from the Army to go to the Pacific with little emotion. He knew

that both the Germans and the Japanese had committed atrocities during the war, but he was not inclined to fight the Germans because of the Holocaust, nor was he inclined to fight the Japanese because of Pearl Harbor. His involvement in the war was strictly a response to the call of his country.⁵

Boggs was in very close contact with the Japanese during his service in the Pacific. He attributes his fear of the Japanese during combat to the fact that it was they whom he fought, not the Germans. A significant event that persists in Boggs' memory of combat is of a face-to-face confrontation with a Japanese soldier. During an exchange of fire with a Japanese platoon, Boggs jumped into a land crater for cover. Ironically, he chose a crater that was already occupied by a Japanese soldier. He faced the enemy soldier and shot the man at point blank range. Boggs' comment about this event symbolizes the realization that most American soldiers discovered. He stated that he "could shoot him (the Japanese soldier) because he was the enemy, but when he lay there dying, he was human."⁶

American soldiers went to war with enthusiasm for their mission and patriotism for their country. However, the youthful lure of excitement and honor through duty were challenged by the grim truth of combat. Justinian wrote of the same phenomenon during the Roman wars. Combat experience challenged the initial exuberance that a young man felt about his mission in the war. No longer could Boggs view the enemy as inhuman after he watched the Japanese soldier die by his actions. Boggs was left to reconcile the necessity of killing the enemy soldier with the bloodstains that remained on his fatigues and conscience for days. Had he not acted, Boggs would surely have been killed. That which Boggs experienced when he realized the humanity of the enemy reflects a wider

realization throughout soldiers in combat. A contradiction exists between that which they are taught to do by the government, and that which their morality dictates. This contradiction is often magnified by the onset of old age.

During combat in the St. David Islands, Boggs was shot in his left side and back. Paralysis in his legs for the greater part of a year resulted from these injuries, as well as internal damage. His recovery process was very long and complex. Boggs stated that he had considered making a career of the military before his wounds, but was no longer of any use to the Army. The pension that Boggs received from the Army “has been handy through the years,” but his readjustment to civilian life as a wounded veteran was poorly compensated.⁷

Boggs did not join a veterans’ organization such as the American Legion upon his return. The isolation that he felt upon returning to civilian life penetrated even the bond that he shared with other American servicemen. He stated that he had nothing in common with the men in the veterans’ organizations. Boggs returned to the United States with both physical and mental wounds. While he recovered from his physical wounds, the mental wounds that he sustained in combat have haunted an otherwise happy and successful lifetime.⁸

Bert R. Manhoff also served in the Army during World War II. He is from New Jersey, and grew up in a strong Jewish community. His youth was burdened by the responsibility of being the family provider after the death of his father during the Depression. After he graduated from high school, Manhoff agreed to attend Montclair State due to the lure of a guaranteed job in exchange for playing football. However, the bombing of Pearl Harbor charged him with a desire to serve his nation, and he began

work in the Army in the War Department. He soon joined the tank destroyers, impelled by what he had seen in literature about the branches of the military.⁹

Manhoff provides insight to the mentality of soldiers during training for combat. He relates a story about his time in training that illuminates that which soldiers about to enter combat held as routine. During his training at Fort Hood, in Texas, Manhoff recalls watching two men insult several soldiers. In response, the soldiers retaliated by throwing one man over a post in front of the restaurant where they were eating. Manhoff stated that this incident shows how the soldiers, himself included, were taught to become war machines. He summarized that his training in the Army taught him “life meant nothing under certain situations.”¹⁰

Manhoff’s military service afforded him lots of action in combat. He was part of the build-up and the invasion of Normandy on Omaha Beach. His remarks about the invasion are that “there are no atheists in foxholes.” “Everyone was appealing for help, whether from God or the tree in front of him.” He was part of a unit that also later liberated Nancy, France. Upon arriving into town, he spotted and visited the remnants of a Jewish synagogue. During the Nazi occupation of the town, the synagogue served as a storage area for animals. Animal feces and other damage defiled the synagogue.

Manhoff’s response to this scene was the development of an “ingrained hatred” of the Nazis. Not only did he feel hatred for the Nazis because he was Jewish, but he also stated that the things that he saw in Nancy, as well as in the concentration camps that he helped liberate made him believe that people of “all religions” should feel the same hatred that he felt towards the Nazi’s. He remarked that he had no problem with killing Germans in

combat, neither then or now. He expressed concern that the theory embodied by Nazi Germany could once again surface in society.¹¹

Manhoff was diagnosed at the end of his 100-day tour in Europe as “Psycho-neurotic-moderate-severe.” He refers to this disability as “war nerves.” Because of this condition, Manhoff has blocked much of his memory of the invasion and of the liberation of Buchenwald. However, certain images are burned into his memory and persist to haunt him in nightmares and in daytime memory lapses. Like Boggs, Manhoff cannot hear the roar of an airplane without fear.¹²

Part of Manhoff’s disability that hindered his readjustment to civilian life was a strong feeling of isolation. When he returned to Rutgers after the war on the GI Bill, he was paired with an eighteen-year old roommate who had never been part of the military. One night when both he and his roommate were in bed, Manhoff heard an airplane and dove to the floor in an attempt to dig a foxhole for cover. He recalled the reaction of his roommate, and stated that he then realized that a gap existed between those who had experienced combat and those who had not. He regards the members of veterans’ organizations as “phonies” whose experiences in the military did not compare with his own.¹³

Manhoff’s care by the government after returning home consisted of a pension that was systematically reduced over intervals of time. By the good fortune of being friends with the son of a Veteran’s Administration doctor, Manhoff was written a letter stating that he suffered from a permanent condition. This enabled him to maintain the already reduced pension that he had been receiving. The final diagnosis from a military doctor that Manhoff received instructed him to “keep totally occupied.” Manhoff was

literally told to not think about what had happened during the war, much less talk about his experiences. He was urged to move on with his life as quickly as possible. The GI Bill urged him to return to the youth that he left when he went to war. Whether or not he had come to terms with his experiences in the war, Manhoff, like so many other veterans, was expected to adapt to a civilian world that did not want to hear about the bad experiences of previously good boys in a good war.¹⁴

Manhoff's current views on warfare are identical to the mindset that he had while he was in the Army. The creation of men as "war machines" during training for combat is ingrained in Manhoff's character. He feels that the use of the atomic bomb on Japanese civilians was justified because "nobody is innocent." However, Manhoff expressed horror at the news of the Korean and Vietnam Wars when he first heard of them. Manhoff's contradiction between fully believing in just war and with revulsion following post World War II wars epitomizes his lack of reconciliation with his war experience. He believes that warfare is justified; yet he is plagued by the terror of his memories and by the possibility of another war.¹⁵

In contrast to Manhoff and Boggs, who sustained both physical and mental injuries during war, is Frank Dauster, who served in the Army in both the European and the Pacific. He viewed the war as a means by which he could escape an unsatisfying job at Prudential Insurance in New Jersey. He looked forward to serving his country, and stated, "we had to stop what was going on over there." Dauster's imperative to enter the Army and fight for his country was based on both patriotic duty and an awareness of the moral obligation that our country had to the rest of the world.¹⁶

Once in Europe, Dauster began questioning the necessity of warfare. He describes his first inklings towards pacifism to have resulted from observing the massed units of weapons and tanks before the Allies crossed the Rhine River. He describes his image of the amassing of instruments of death as “a vision of hell.”¹⁷ Dauster’s reaction to the systematic and unremorseful murders in combat indicates that he moralized the war after he arrived. However, Dauster did not justify his role in the war. Rather, he became a pacifist who opposes all forms of violence. Dauster did not sacrifice his physical or mental health during combat. He rejected World War II and warfare in general as a futile waste of life. This is not to say that all veterans who are lucky enough to return unscathed from warfare do not grapple with the savagery of combat. Dauster is a unique case in point that illuminates the common psychology by which disabled veterans might justify their sacrifices.

Dauster stated that he did not understand people who think that war is a viable solution to any problem due to the total disregard for humanity that it includes. He understands that climates exist in which problems must be resolved; however, the willing murder of young people by a government is not the means by which Dauster believes problems can be solved. He protested the Vietnam War, and supported the choices by his two sons to leave the country during Vietnam.¹⁸

Soldiers returning from combat soon realized the niche that society expected them to fill. People who had not been to war expected to witness the return of tough, stoic, yet cheerful soldiers into civilian life. The United States government provided incentives for quick rehabilitation and incorporation into society in the form of the GI Bill. Soldiers were urged to forget about the war, continue with their education, and begin a family.

The baby boom that followed World War II is a reflection of society's move towards forgetting the war by looking to the future.

However, the mental and physical reminders that veterans carried made it impossible for society to eradicate the painful aspects of World War II. The movie The Best Years of Our Lives illustrates the hardships that men, such as Boggs, Manhoff, and Dauster, experienced upon their return to civilian life. The main character of the movie lost both of his hands during the war. To put people at ease in the presence of his disability, he learned to present himself as genial and unthreatening. However, he developed other emotions when he returned home that created within him personal tension. Since no one expected nor wanted him to show signs of bitterness or anger, he was forced to repress the emotions that kept surfacing.

The veterans of the 1940's returned to a country that emphasized traditional values of self-help and self-reliance. Upon facing reintegration, all veterans received advice literature that showed compassion, but urged men, just as they had been urged while they were in the military, to be tough, uncomplaining, and active in adjusting themselves to the social order, as it was. They also were told to use their families, wives, girlfriends, and mothers to provide sympathy. However, the rest of society only wanted to view the stoic soldier who was once again in control of his life. The main goal of the national veterans organizations included linking individuals and their families with the public benefits they were promised under the G.I. Bill of Rights. These rights were structured so that veterans who had experienced either mental or physical disability could more easily integrate themselves into society and not depend on anyone.

Neither Boggs nor Dauster were driven by humanitarianism or morality to fight in World War II. Not even Manhoff, who is Jewish and who stated that he had heard rumors of what was happening to Jewish citizens in Europe had a driving sense of humanitarian duty to serve in World War II. However, once these men arrived in Europe and the Pacific and began taking part in combat, each one eventually came to a conclusion as to why he was there. Boggs killed a Japanese soldier in close combat. He could do so because he had been trained to kill the enemy, yet his moral foundation dictated that killing, per se, was wrong. Boggs rationalized that his actions were justified because "Japanese were doing horrible things, too." Manhoff feels even today an innate hatred of the German race for the crimes against humanity that they perpetrated and that which he witnessed in Nancy, France and in Dachau. His initial reason to enter the war based on duty to his country dwindled once he reached combat. The reality of war replaced his previously conceived concepts about war, and he rationalized that what the Germans were doing justified his presence in the European theatre as well as his actions in combat. Ironically, Manhoff used the basis of humanitarian morality to fuel his ambition to fight once in combat. Dauster, who was the only veteran mentioned who did not suffer a medically diagnosed wound, is the only one of the three who is violently opposed to war as a means to a solution.

Society remembers World War II as a good war because we, the United States of America, defeated tyranny and fascism around the world. We were the saviors of democracy. We helped other nations in their fight for the good life, and our nation profited. However, the individual men who fought daily in combat were not simply fighting tyranny and fascism. This could have been one of many incentives by people to

serve the United States in war, but the experience of combat made the war very personal.

The soldier was not fighting tyranny, he was shooting at and being shot at by other humans. The soldier who experienced combat had a drastically different view of the good war from that view held by civilians. The good war resulted from the soldier's ability to perform his duty in combat and synthesize his beliefs with his actions.

Once a soldier who had experienced combat returned to America, his personal declaration that he fought in a good war helped his reintegration process. However, society still viewed the war as an absolute good, and caused the soldier to feel isolated from those whose image of the good war was different from his own. The solace that veterans, especially wounded veterans, were urged to seek in their families was a naïve solace. Civilian society urged the wounded veteran to forget about his memory of the war, and focus solely on that which society had created. In a good war, soldiers go off to combat with enthusiasm. Their experiences in war reinforce their patriotism and belief in their duty. The soldiers return as mature men who are to become the pillars of society. They are the models of manhood to which other members of society defer. Their wounds do not hinder veterans who fought in a good war, and the manner by which they deal with their wounds is with bravery and indifference. These mature members of society not only adapt to civilian life with ease, but they lead civilian society with stoic grace. Society is grateful for the veterans' contribution in the righteous fight for democracy. A good war can only result in a good outcome.

In reality, a war is not defined for the soldiers by the political imperative behind the effort. Rather, the only thing a soldier defines is his own role in the war by rationalizing his own actions. If he does something that compromises his beliefs, then he

must create some contrivance of reason by which he can justify having committed the action. If a soldier can justify the reasons for which he compromised his own moral and social inculcation, then he participated in a truly good war. If a soldier cannot justify the reasons for which he compromised his essence, then he is plagued by an overwhelming sense of wrongdoing. He did not participate in a good war.

Creation of a Bad War

The image of a bad war, void of morality and laden with unnecessary destruction, exists in the memories of those who never experienced battle. We are taught to believe that violent action among humans is acceptable when it is for a good cause. Thus, the combat experiences of veterans who participated in a war that society has deemed a bad cause are unacceptable to the civilians who did not participate. The veterans of the stigmatized “bad” war become “bad” veterans, “bad” citizens, and “bad” humans. If a war will not conform to the popularized notion of a good war, society seeks distance. The resulting atrocities that accompany all wars are not viewed as necessary sacrifice; rather, they are viewed as a reflection upon a distinctly separate part of society: the men who fought in the war.

In World War II as in the Vietnam War, exuberant boys who returned home as reserved men caused society to realize that the events of war are life changing and permanent. However, men returning to small communities following the Vietnam War returned not to an idealistic image of the war and why it was fought, but instead to the confusion that Vietnam caused in both its civilians as well as its veterans. Instead of the

equally isolating heroes' welcome of World War II, Vietnam veterans returned to silence at best and condemnation at worst.

A bad war is constructed in our collective memory when we see a shameful situation in which soldiers, not boys, go to fight in a war that is as confusing as it is distant. The events that occur during combat are not simply accepted as part of war, and they are argued about and questioned by civilians for fear of being included in the defeat. Soldiers, not men, return home to an ideologically pure nation, and are pushed to the fringe of a self-proclaimed innocent society. What the soldiers experienced in combat is of extreme interest to the rest of society because it confirms the difference between a soldier and a civilian. The blame of a bad war is volleyed from one arena to the next, and the men who fought in the war are considered the final resting place of that blame. Instead of accepting the veterans' perspective of war, society forces these bearers of reality to conform to the popular image of a shameful war. Glorious wars produce heroic veterans. Inglorious wars produce antiheroes, even villains and deviants.

While many young Americans today recall Vietnam through media coverage of the anti-war movement as a war that divided our nation, the boys who enlisted to serve in the military during Vietnam remember patriotism as a footpath to confusion. Instead of assigning mature men from the American spectrum with a clear sense of purpose to fight the war, the United States sent teenagers from a limited sliver of America to fight. It was a war that they were as much confused by as they were motivated to serve their country. American boys volunteered and were conscripted to serve their country at an average age of nineteen, on average seven years younger than their forbearers who served in World War II.¹⁹ As with their fathers' generation, the American Vietnam generation readied for

a war in a foreign place. Their ensuing confusion at what then happened was understandable.

American servicemen did not volunteer nor were they conscripted to serve their country to fight a fascist Hitler or a nation that brazenly and suddenly attacked America. Instead, Americans who served their nation during Vietnam were responding to a siren that had been sounded during the entirety of their youths: Communism. Yet, the manifestation of this threat was Ho Chi Minh, an aged socialist who had been our ally during World War II but whose culture was as unfamiliar to Americans as his country. Inheriting a situation from the defeated French, the United States in the early 1960's was guided by the Cold War impulse to save the world from the threat of international communism. To ask a GI why he was fighting was an absurd question to most. He answered in the same way that soldiers have nearly always answered: We're here because we're here. Some answered by saying that they were in Vietnam "to stop communism," but this is difficult to interpret because "communism" was an all-purpose term whose meaning often meant "whoever we are supposed to be fighting against."²⁰ Among those who supported the war was the sense that it was a man's duty to fight for his country, right or wrong. This implied a belief in the legitimacy of American presidential administrations and American political institutions in general. If experience in Vietnam led GI's to doubt this reasoning, it consecutively happened that such men lost faith in the political system that sent them over there.

The Vietnam War spanned the time of four American Presidential offices, beginning with Eisenhower and ending on a technicality with Nixon. Believing in its own invincibility through technology, America fought in Vietnam. However, since the

political and military goals of the war were rarely apparent or articulated, the technological strength behind the American military was often counterproductive. Hamlets were destroyed only to increase the number of North Vietnamese Army recruits. Containment policies and confusing restrictions often resulted in GI's taking and retaking the same hill several times a year. While a great majority of men volunteered or served in Vietnam because they felt it was their patriotic duty, the policy that they encountered in combat were contradictions to their initial imperatives to fight. As a machine gun squad leader in the Twenty-sixth Marines in 1967, Danny Cruz commented on the contradiction between the loyalty a serviceman felt to his nation and the confusion of the mission in Vietnam: "Despite my intense loyalty to my country, my strong feelings in favor of support of my country, I can't help but think sometimes that the war was all a big trick." With such meaningless risk and loss of life, it was inevitable that the men who experienced combat in Vietnam also experienced major confusion about their value to the American government even before they returned home.²¹

Men who fought in Vietnam were not the only Americans to experience the confusion of the Vietnam War. While the civilian perspective of the war was markedly different from that of the veteran, it was similar in its mutual disappointment in the war. Veterans had expected their patriotism and faith in the nation's leadership to be confirmed through their experience in combat, as had their fathers' been confirmed in World War II. Civilians who did not initially oppose the war expected the same thing.

American civilians who opposed the war also felt that the World War II generation was able to justify their combat experience while American servicemen in Vietnam were denied that ability. Lawrence Wright, an American author who faced the

prospect of fighting in a war in which he did not believe, stated “I would defend my country if it were attacked. I would have fought in World War II. I was not a pacifist.”²²

At first, the Vietnam War appeared in American living rooms as snappy inserts into nightly television news programs, provoking little more interest than any local headline. Americans began to expect to see the images and were no longer shocked by the blips in the news about the fighting in Vietnam. On the news production end of the spectrum, each day a new shipment of aluminum cans of 16-millimeter film would be shipped to network offices across the nation, where the images would be clipped and cut to two-minute images of the war in Vietnam. Because of the increase in the public's reliance on television for its news, the information that the public received was limited to something that was visually exciting but was accompanied only by cursory scripts that hardly touched on the real issues of Vietnam. The images of huts made of mud and straw, weary young men bearing arms in the jungle, and hollow-eyed civilians were something to look at, and all of it was easily erased with the turn of a channel. Writers and producers saw so much of it that they succumbed to processing the footage, rather than trying to understand it. Civilians saw so much of it that they derived a false sense of security from the repetitiveness of the images.²³

Civilians were not ignorant of America's increasing pledge of young lives in Vietnam, nor were they intentionally flippant about the gravity of warfare. An entire generation of Americans knew of the hardships and horrors of war. However, this generation also knew only victory and its ensuing national ride to world power. It was virtually impossible for the forbearers of the Vietnam generation to imagine war without dominance, without prominent objectives, and without victory. Thus, the images that

Americans watched each night as they ate dinner were somehow familiar. What was unfathomable to the Americans who were not in Vietnam was why the images continued to appear. Why was the war lasting so long, why was America still fighting? Considering the optimism of the American government, the victorious concept of war in an entire generation of Americans' minds, and the technological superiority of America over Vietnam, American civilians could not help but be confused by the war as the government prolonged and progressed the nation's involvement.

As the war became longer and American civilians became more confused once soldiers returned home bringing incomprehensible stories of combat, an anti-war movement began to emerge. Initially only in large cities, on the coasts and in college campuses, the anti-war movement garnered national attention. This movement divided not only a generation from a generation, but also a generation within itself.

The Vietnam generation came of age in a world that had been created by the World War II generation. The World War II generation grew up in an age that was drastically different from the years of the Vietnam generations' collective youth. They spent a good portion of their childhood during the Depression, and the civilian world as well as the American military benefited greatly from the War. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, giving Americans no choice in World War II. In Europe, a madman was overrunning civilization, conquering entire nations in a matter of days. The enemies were formidable and clearly evil. America had heroes, of the magnitude of Patton and Nimitz as well as the hometown heroes who returned home with medals and promotions. If the hometown heroes did not return home, they at least died for a cause that everyone endorsed. Following America's victory, the World War II generation returned home to

build their lives very differently from the manner in which they had spent their childhood. While the return of the World War II veteran to America was no less difficult for him personally than the return of the Vietnam veteran, the two generations of soldiers undoubtedly returned to a different country.

The Vietnam generation grew up in another world, the suburban comfort zone, a new world invented by people like their fathers to give form to their need for order, security, prosperity, and peace.²⁴ It was America's promised land, a grid work of tract homes, two car garages, schools and cultivated lawns. The families of the World War II generation were upwardly mobile, a buzzword that could not apply to the youth of the World War II generation. Their strength came from survival. The darker reflection of World War II shadowed the Vietnam generation in a sense that they grew up with fall-out shelters, civil defense sirens, brinkmanship, and Godless Communists. The very life that their fathers and mothers cultivated for them caused the inherent differences between the two generations.²⁵

Because of the sheer length of the war in Vietnam, the differences within a single generation emerged as an illustration of the public's changing mindset. The older members of the baby boom generation were the first to go to war. They were also the only part of the generation to reflect the mindset of their parents' World War II experiences. With the average age of American servicemen in Vietnam as nineteen, those who went to Vietnam before 1968 were the first-borns, the earliest wave of the baby boomers. They had perceived Communism as an imminent threat during their youth, and had heard their parents' glorified stories of the war years. This made America's call to service in Vietnam an obvious duty for them to fulfill. The patriotism

and full belief that Vietnam was to be a war against the spread of international communism of the early Vietnam generation was a bond that they shared with their parents and the rest of the World War II generation.

Following 1968, the mood of the Vietnam generation as well as the general mood of the civilian population in America changed drastically. While the younger wave of baby boomers had heard their parents' glorious wartime stories, they also heard stories from their big brothers, uncles, and neighbors about Vietnam. The stories that the younger part of the Vietnam generation heard had not yet had time to become glorious. They revealed more of the realities of warfare than did the stories from World War II that the older Vietnam generation had heard. Additionally, they watched visual images of the war in Vietnam on television for half a decade by the time they were able to serve. No longer did illusions exist that Vietnam was going to be a short flexing of America's military might. Civilians who did not actively protest the war began questioning in private the heavy involvement of the military in a defensive position only, and the strategy of the war seemed inexplicable to those who had ever served. With the uncertainty that surrounded the post-1968 segment of the Vietnam generation, qualifying for a deferment or drawing a low draft number decreased the pressure they felt to serve in Vietnam. The changing mood of the nation and the method of conscription during the war gave otherwise willing volunteers a way out of the confusion of Vietnam.²⁶

In addition to the confusion that the American veteran felt during his service in Vietnam due to the contradictions between his sense of duty to America and the government's wartime restrictions, the strain of guerilla warfare weighed heavily on the veteran. Marshal Tran Hung Dao, the Vietnamese general who defeated the Mongol

invaders from the north in the thirteenth century, described his strategy in terms that scarcely differed from those of Vietnam:

The enemy must fight his battles far from home for a long time.... We must weaken him by drawing him into protracted campaigns. Once his initial dash is broken, it will be easier to destroy him.... When the enemy is away from home for a long time and produces no victories and families learn of their dead, then the enemy population considers it a Mandate from Heaven that the armies be recalled. Time is always in our favor. Our climate, mountains and jungles discourage the enemy; but for us they offer both sanctuary and a place from which to attack.²⁷

By 1965 in Vietnam, there were two kinds of wars, guerrilla war and limited war. An array of American civil and military presence in Vietnam paired with an executive staff in Washington who had little idea of the enemy they were fighting or the society from which he came resulted in America's inability to fight the enemy, then finally, how to stop him for good. What the United States learned in ten years up to 1965 was how to weaken the guerrillas militarily without being able to defeat them.²⁸

One of the problems that advanced industrial societies have in warring on underdeveloped, pre-industrial societies is that there is very little value in destroying a target in the pre-industrial society. A pre-industrial society does not rely upon social structures, and the loss of them does little damage to the enemy's strength. The American kind of war machine operates best against social and economic structures almost as complex and well integrated as its own. This was not the case in Vietnam.

A problem that the American serviceman faced in fighting a guerilla war in Vietnam was how to identify the enemy. The servicemen had certain territorial sanctuaries that, because of the political limitations of the war, U.S. commanders were forbidden to strike. By 1971, American forces had penetrated all of the enemy's territorial sanctuaries without significantly inhibiting his long-term ability to continue

fighting. The basic military problem in Vietnam for American ground forces was stated by Colonel Robert Rigg, in his handbook for troops, *How to Survive in Vietnam*. “The enemy knows more about your unit and installations than you know about his.”²⁹

American troops fought an enemy who operated by hit-and-run, ambush-and-hide, and nighttime operations. In the field, the way this lack of intelligence affected tactics was simple: if we never knew where or when the enemy would strike, he had to be lured into attacking us when we were ready for him. The search and destroy operation served as the principle tactic to do this. For American servicemen in Vietnam, to bait and then catch the enemy reduced the infantry role to the point of expendability.³⁰

An additional complication to the American role in Vietnam was that American soldiers were fighting to protect some Vietnamese against others. To add to this complexity was the fact that many civic action projects were aimed at villages that harbored communist sympathizers. Essentially, American GI’s would direct civic action towards a village one day in order “to win the hearts and minds of the people,” and the next day engage the enemy in virtually the same place. With the ambiguity of their purpose in Vietnam already questioned, American servicemen faced the problem of not knowing who the enemy was with growing disillusionment towards the American government.

Another strain on the GI was the method by which troops arrived and departed from Vietnam. It would be hard to overstate the soldiers’ constant concern with how much time he had left to serve. The paramount factor affecting combat motivation in Vietnam was the rotation system. The rotation system affected social cohesion and individual motivation. The rapid turnover of personnel hindered the development of

close personal attachments among soldiers and it consequentially rotated out of the unit men with the most combat experience and knowledge. The combination of these two factors was that common knowledge was not shared between the young and old GI's. Overall, the rotation system reinforced an individualistic perspective that was essentially self-concerned. The end of the war was not marked by its eventual outcome, whether victory or defeat. Instead, the end of the war was marked by the individual's rotation date.

The rotation system significantly affected the appearance of the war from a civilian perspective. During the period of the war when it was on an upswing, the rotation system contributed to the morale of the individual combat soldier. However, once the war was on a downswing, the rotation system worked against combat effectiveness. Once Americans at home as well as in Vietnam began to realize that the war could only come to an inconclusive end, the feeling of not wanting to be the last man killed in a closing war characterized the low morale of civilians and servicemen after 1968.³¹

Vietnam veterans today have as varied sentiments about the war in which they fought as they do opinions. Instead of returning home to a society that wanted to quietly omit the memory of battle from its consciousness, as veterans did in World War II, Vietnam veterans returned to a society that had changed deeply in its social structure and that reveled in the combat memories of Vietnam. A situation such as this, where everyone in society had their own opinion about the war, made it difficult for actual veterans to talk about their experiences in combat. Veterans faced a barrage of combat frenzy once they returned to America, from movies that portrayed veterans as victims or

sociopaths to civilians whose image of America had been shaken by the deep social changes of the time and who placed the blame for this upon the men who fought in Vietnam. The following excerpts from interviews with Vietnam veterans serve as a microcosm of veteran sentiments about the war and its effects upon them as well as the nation as a whole.

Ted A. Burton served as an Army medic in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968. He is from Hawkins County, Tennessee. Much like the background of many World War II veterans, Burton dropped out of high school to work in order to help his parents and six siblings. By 1966, Burton realized “that Vietnam was a real war” and he was about to be drafted. Even though he was married, his draft rating was so high that no one wanted to hire him. With his name up for the September draft call in Hawkins County, Burton volunteered for the draft in August.

Burton chose to be a medic during basic training because of his religious background as a Primitive Baptist minister prior to being drafted. According to Burton, “I figured I could help people more that way than shooting at somebody. I didn’t want to kill people; I didn’t think I could do it. ...But after I got in, got over to Vietnam and seen my best friends die, a lot of them in my arms, if I could have, I guess I would have killed all them VC.” Burton became very attached to the men in his platoon. According to him, it was hard not to be attached because they all depended on one another. “Grunts look up to a medic. It was a two-way street, I appreciated them, too.”

Burton’s company was “out in the field most all the time.” He spent 363 days in Vietnam and recalled spending no longer than three weeks in the rear. His interaction with the enemy was symbolic of the ambiguous nature of the American role in Vietnam.

He stated that he usually went on an ambush every third night. “Most of the time Charlie would get us before we’d get him. He would set up a homemade Claymore and blow it on us before we ever knew he was around, even during a cease-fire. Of course, we didn’t pay much attention to cease-fires, either. If we saw a VC, we shot him.” While Burton recalled the inability of American soldiers to refrain from firing at an alleged VC as a result of the danger that it would place on themselves not to, he also experienced medcaps, which were civic action missions that stemmed from the mission to win the hearts and minds of the people. Even on these goodwill missions, Burton felt endangered. “Not long before I left over there, they sent us out to a village near Di An...didn’t sent no infantry or nothing with us. As soon as we rolled into the place, Vietnamese came running from everywhere to show us their little scratches.” He remarked feeling as though one of the men who received medical attention could have been a VC because of the nature of the wound. However, his role for that afternoon was to supply medical treatment to the villagers, even though he felt it was at times contradictory to the American combat mission in Vietnam.

While returning to America, Burton was spit on in the Newark Airport by “a young hippie-looking thing, a college-age girl” that had seen them as they walked into the terminal in their khakis. Burton had heard about “what was going on in the States” from replacements to his company. According to Burton, “if I could have got by with it, I’d have done a few things. If I could get by with it, I’d still do some things. These draft-dodgers, Jane Fonda, line ‘em up against a wall. I had a lot better people than they are die over there, and I ain’t forgot them. Way I feel, they’re just walking on their graves, what they done.” Burton had not returned to America undaunted by his combat

experiences. He was hospitalized for several days for “nerves” after he watched a young soldier die in an ambush. However unjustified he believed the deaths of friends in combat was, Burton felt that the behavior of some American civilians towards Vietnam veterans at home was even more unjustified.

Today, Burton returns to the war every day. According to him, “the way the war ended, that was just all those boys’ lives down the drain. It would have been worth it if they had let us fight, let us win. I believe that was a politicians’ war.” He also stated, “but you know, I’m awfully proud of what I did in Vietnam. If I had it to do over, I’d go again.” Burton’s conflicting remarks, and the fact that he moralized his role in the war as completely separate from the government’s role in the war, illustrates the confusion that Vietnam brought to an entire society.³²

Richard C. Ensminger served as a Marine forward observer during two tours of duty in Vietnam in 1966-1967 and in 1969. He grew up in a military family and had a stepfather who worked in naval intelligence. He quit high school in 1963 after he moved from a big high school in Nashville to a school of only about 900 kids. To Ensminger, the move was not a good one, there was nothing to be involved in, and he was tired of moving, so he joined the Marines. After serving with the Second Marines at Camp Lejeune for nearly two years, he received orders to Vietnam in 1965. According to Ensminger, many of his friends were going to Vietnam at about the same time, but none of them knew what type of situation Vietnam was. “Most of us only knew war from movies and books and talking with higher-ranking sergeants (who had not served in Vietnam).”

Upon arrival in Vietnam, Ensminger recalled, “the old-timers who had been in Vietnam wouldn’t have anything to do with me. I had to prove to them that I wouldn’t get them killed during their last months, even days, in Vietnam.” Also, he stated, “most marine grunts were good for only six to eight months of combat. For the last couple of months before a guy’s DEROS, we just left him alone because he had the short-timer’s attitude. They didn’t want to go out in the field; they were afraid some guy would screw up their chances of going home.”

When Ensminger returned home after his first tour of duty, he felt isolated from the rest of America enough to request a second tour. “When I went to Vietnam, I believed it was my duty to go over there and fight for my country. I knew I had done something worthwhile, but I wasn’t prepared for the demonstrations against the war here, for the people who downgraded me for being in the military. As I saw it, there were three groups of people in the United States: the older people who didn’t care about the war, the kids who didn’t understand it, and those who were totally against Vietnam.” A little more than a year after he returned to the United States, Ensminger volunteered to go back to Vietnam because he “didn’t feel comfortable going outside a military base. I felt I wasn’t wanted in American society, and I was getting tired of the petty, spit-shined mentality of the stateside marines.”

Ensminger immediately noticed changes in Vietnam as well as the Marines when he returned to Vietnam. His second tour in 1969 was with draftees as opposed to all volunteers. He also noticed the drug use of servicemen and commented that it caused him to not completely trust everyone in his company. He also stated that “now the war seemed like one endless search-and-destroy mission.” In June of 1969, Ensminger was

severely wounded and had his left leg amputated. He returned home, where his reliance on prescription pain medicine turned into a dependency that he eventually had to confront. He felt isolated from his parents and had a difficult time making friends. According to Ensminger, “probably the only people I can really relate to are the members of the Disabled American Veterans chapter in Boone.” In retrospect, Ensminger believes that “the war started out as a just cause that ended up being a very political affair. A lot of people made a lot of money off it; some still are. In one way, I’m proud that I served my country. But I’m not proud of what I did over there.” Unlike Burton, Ensminger justified the actions of his country during Vietnam as well as his call to duty; however, he has yet to justify his own actions.

The wound suffered by Ensminger illuminates yet another aspect of the Vietnam War that made it difficult for the veteran to return home. In a study of alienation and estrangement among wounded Vietnam veterans, Loch Johnson examines the attitudes of wounded veterans toward the government that sent them into an unpopular war. In Vietnam, the veteran was not given a hero’s welcome or widespread respect. The severely wounded veteran received fewer benefits than their counterparts who served in World War II and the Korean War.³³ Additionally, the nature of the wound affected the veterans’ alienation. Heroic wounds from a fierce battle might be more easily justified, and might encourage a justification of the war itself by the wounded veteran. However, the majority of wounds inflicted in Vietnam came from “booby trap” devices which were seen as accidental. Finally, Johnson’s study found that men who were drafted, who were not committed to the rationale behind the war, and who were not officers were eventually the most likely to be estranged from the rest of society.³⁴

Ed Shore served as an officer in the infantry of the Marine Corps from 1968 to 1969. He grew up in Depression era poverty as one of ten children in his family in Maryville, Tennessee. At the age of thirteen, Shore left home to earn a living. While living alone and managing the farm of a local family, Shore attended high school and became resolute in his plans to attend college. He felt that an education “was the ticket out of that impoverished situation.”

As a child, Shore had been enthusiastic about the military, and based much of his knowledge on the heroic stories depicted in the movies and by an uncle who served in World War II. He recalls feeling drawn to the toughness, bravery, and excitement of combat. As an agriculture student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, nearly all of Shore’s professors were World War II or Korean War veterans. His collegiate experience from 1961 to 1966 was not impacted by the anti-war movement that was spreading across many college campuses at that time. In fact, Shore recalls using his future military career as a way to finesse certain professors to increase his grade. He told them that he would be unable to become an officer in the Marine Corps with poor grades, and noted the occasional assistance of professors. This is an ironic contrast to the story of many college students at the time who persuaded professors to help their grade in order to avoid fighting in the war.

Shore graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1966 and enlisted in the Marine Corps in March of 1967. In the interim, he shoed horses on a military base for work. In fact, because his employers did not want him to be drafted, he was placed in the coveted Air National Guard during his last year in college and during the year following graduation. However, instead of remaining in the relative safe haven of the Air National

Guard, Shore joined the Marine Corps. He felt that he had a duty to his country, and against the advice of many family members and friends, he prepared to attend Officer Candidate School for the Marines.

Shore was commissioned as an officer in the Marine Corps and was immediately sent to Vietnam as a 2nd Lieutenant in charge of an infantry division during the Tet Offensive. He saw heavy combat action during his thirteen months in Vietnam, and during his thirteen months in Vietnam received the Silver Star, a Navy Commendation, two Purple Hearts, and the Cross of Gallantry.

In June, Shore led a battalion of Marines into combat on Go Noi Island as part of Operation Allenbrook. For two weeks, he and his men fought day and night. Wounded on June 15, Shore was taken to a hospital in Vietnam where the officer of the NVA with an equivalent rank to Shore was also wounded. He recalled being in beds facing each other, both having barely survived the same battle. According to Shore, he felt little desire to seek revenge on his enemy, now roommate, because “he was doing the same thing I was by fighting. If I condemned him for what he was doing, then I would be condemning myself.”

Following his release from the hospital, Shore was given the job of Agricultural Advisor to the Vietnamese. In retrospect, Shore believes that the measure of success that was used during Vietnam, the body count, was not only inaccurate but also the wrong measuring device. Instead, he believes that the measure of success in Vietnam should have focused more on the success that the military had in helping the people through the hearts and minds campaign. However, Shore feels that “the greatest experience, the most challenging, the most rewarding experience of my life was defined during combat.

Combat was the most important part of my life. I am proud, confident, but humbled by war.” He feels that his role in the destructive part of the war in combat prepared him for his role in the constructive part of the war. By maintaining his moral code during combat, Shore is proud of his actions in combat. By surviving the constant threat of enemy attack, Shore is confident in his ability to rely on himself and overcome challenges. By bearing witness to the destruction of war through his combat experiences, Shore is humbled by the bravery, loss, and sacrifice of all people during war.

Upon returning home, Shore experienced no hostility from civilians for his part in the War. His only experience with civilians who opposed the war was during a job interview in which the interviewer was “obviously not favorable to the military.” However, this was not a common experience for Shore and he had no trouble finding a job. He did not remain in the Marine Corps, stating “I would have made a terrible stateside Marine officer.” After being discharged, Shore served in the National Guard for fifteen years. The only veterans’ association to which Shore has belonged is the Marine Corps Association. When asked if he felt that the government could have made his return home any easier, Shore replied “the government doesn’t owe me anything. I served because it was what I owed the nation. I didn’t need any hand-out.” Shore has remained in contact with several men with whom he served. In 1976 he formed his own construction and development business and today continues to work.³⁵

Following any mass scale military operation, the government must devise a plan to return servicemen to the civilian society. This plan must be thorough enough to include any assistance that the veteran needs along the way, including health care, education, transportation, and social integration. The GI Bill has served as the umbrella

under which most of these interests fall. However, it is a malleable service that reflects the attitude of the government towards the military and its role in general during the era in which it is used. School enrollment for the period 1966-1971 included 31.2 percent of the eligible population of veterans. However, this level of participation is significantly lower than the 39.8 percent participation rate in the first five years of the World War II program. Equally poor in comparison is the rate of participation in post-service training. From 1966 to 1970 only 26 percent became trainees under the GI Bill, whereas between 1944 and 1948, 35 percent of World War II veterans entered training programs. The situation of the Vietnam veteran was exactly the same as confronted them before the service: they wanted to go to college but they could not afford it, even on the GI Bill.

Additionally, the differences in medical procedures between World War II and the Vietnam War resulted in fewer fatalities to injuries that would have been fatal during World War II. As a result, Vietnam produced totally disabled servicemen at three times the rate of World War II.³⁶ This, compounded with the government's policy of denial of Agent Orange damages or malaria cases resulted in a much-decreased health care policy for veterans.³⁷

Society remembers Vietnam as a bad war because the government of the United States of America flexed its military might against a pre-industrial society while prolonging the loss of both American and Vietnamese lives. We were not the saviors of democracy. We involved ourselves in a culture that we did not fully understand, committed our servicemen to a war that they were not fully allowed to fight, and our society reflected the confusion of the process. However, the individual men who fought daily in combat were there, regardless of their many different reasons, in an individual

attempt to fulfill their individual duty to America. The men who served could have been influenced by any number of the changes in society at the time; however, the experience of combat made the war very personal. A personal war is not a war that is easily written off in the minds of the men who experienced it. The soldier might not have been fighting tyranny, but he was shooting and being shot at by other humans. The soldier who experienced combat had a drastically different view of the bad war from that view held by civilians.

In World War II as in the Vietnam War, American society placed labels on war that reflected their own civilian involvement. World War II was a good war to civilians because it brought victory, honor, and economic benefits to their lives. It returned to them their sons, husbands, and fathers in a manner fitting of the good fight. They began their collective quest for security and order in a world in which all was well. Conversely, the Vietnam War was a bad war to civilians because it brought an undefined ending, little honor to the civilian society, and virtually no economic benefit to their lives. It returned to them their sons, husbands, and fathers in a manner unfitting of the good fight, and it vilified an entire generation of men. Because of the length of the war, nothing seemed to completely be as it was before the war, and security and order were scarce. The good war and the bad war reflected the experiences of the civilians who did not endure combat.

In the reality of the men who experienced combat, and who are the most qualified to label a particular war, neither good wars nor bad wars exist. While veterans of World War II and veterans of Vietnam were treated drastically different by the societies to which they returned, their shared feelings of isolation and unrest evolved from returning to societies whose constructs of the wars in which they fought reflected the civilians'

shared involvement in the war, not the involvement of the veterans. The combat experiences of veterans in the good war and in the bad war are strikingly similar, and in their eyes, there is but one type of war that exists. War is neither good nor bad, but amoral. The men who experienced war know this. Society does not.

¹ Information regarding the feeling of isolation by many men once they returned home from combat came from Elaine Tyler May in her Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (United States of America: Basic Books, 1988): 87-88

² Information regarding the difficulties of wounded and handicapped veterans re-entering civilian life came from David Gerber in his "Anger and Affability: The Rise and Representation of a Repertory of Self-Presentation Skills in a World War II Disabled Veteran", found in the Journal of Social History (fall 1993): 5-22

³ The concept that the public perception of bad combat existing only in a bad war, and the implications of a soldier who participated in either a good or a bad war, came from Michael C.C. Adams in his The Best War Ever: America and World War II (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994): xiv

⁴ Information about the initial reaction to the war and motivation for fighting of George Boggs III came from a transcript of the interview by G. Kurt Peihler and Edward Colvito on 19 October 1994 on page 8 of 31. The transcript is from the Rutgers World War II Oral History Archives, Rutgers, New Jersey.

⁵ Information pertaining to the involvement of George Boggs III in World War II came from *ibid*, page 15 out of 31.

⁶ The story of George Boggs' confrontation with the Japanese soldier came from *ibid*, page 17 out of 31.

⁷ Information regarding Boggs' intentions to make a career out of the military after combat, as well as information regarding his government pension, came from *ibid*, page 25 out of 31.

⁸ Information regarding the feeling of isolation by George Boggs III came from *ibid*, page 26 out of 31.

⁹ Background information about Bert R. Manhoff came from a transcript of the interview by G. Kurt Peihler and Jeff Schneider on 11 April 1995 on pages 1-10 out of 58. The transcript is from the Rutgers World War II Oral History Archives, Rutgers, New Jersey.

¹⁰ The story illustrating the mentality of soldiers during training for combat came from *ibid*, page 23 out of 58.

¹¹ Information regarding the military action seen by Bert Manhoff, as well as his response to Nazi Germans, came from *ibid*, pages 26-27 out of 58.

¹² Information concerning Bert Manhoff's mental wound came from *ibid*, pages 45-46 out of 58.

¹³ Information regarding the feeling of isolation by Bert Manhoff after returning from combat came from *ibid*, pages 46-47 out of 58.

¹⁴ Information about Mr. Manhoff's re-entry to civilian life came from *ibid*, page 49.

¹⁵ Information about Mr. Manhoff's current views on warfare came from *ibid*, page 47.

¹⁶ Information about the background of and motivation for war of Frank Dauster came from a transcript of the interview by G. Kurt Peihler and Susan Tong on 31 October 1995 on pages 9 and 11. The transcript is from the Rutgers World War II Oral History Archives, Rutgers, New Jersey.

¹⁷ Information about Frank Dauster's initial impression of combat came from *ibid*, page 19.

¹⁸ Information about Frank Dauster's subsequent response to warfare came from *ibid*, page 26.

-
- ¹⁹ Moskos, Charles C., Jr. *The American Enlisted Man*. (New York: Russel Sage 1970): 134-56.
- ²⁰ Helmer, John. Bringing the War Home. (New York: Macmillan 1974): 22-25.
- ²¹ Quoted interview and information regarding veterans' sentiments are from: Wikler, Norma. *Hidden Injuries of War*. (New York: Brunner/Mazel 1980): 102.
- ²² Wright, Lawrence. In the New World: Growing Up With America from the Sixties to the Eighties. (New York: Vintage Books 1983): 122.
- ²³ Severo, Richard and Lewis Milford. The Wages of War. (New York: Simon and Schuster 1989): 347-349.
- ²⁴ May, Elaine Tyler. Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era (United States of America: Basic Books, 1988): 87-88
- ²⁵ Wright, Lawrence. In the New World: Growing Up With America from the Sixties to the Eighties. (New York: Vintage Books 1983): 221-228.
- ²⁶ Figley, Charles R. and Seymour Leventman, eds. Strangers at Home: Vietnam Veterans Since the War. (New York: Brunner/Mazel 1990): 56-57.
- ²⁷ Helmer, John. Bringing the War Home. (New York: Macmillan 1974): 18.
- ²⁸ Ibid: 23-29.
- ²⁹ Rigg, Col. Robert. *How to Survive in Vietnam*. (Harrisburg: Stackpole 1966): 17.
- ³⁰ Helmer, John. Bringing the War Home. (New York: Macmillan 1974): 23, 155-156.
- ³¹ Information about the rotation system and its impact on both the veteran and the civilian come from Charles Moskos' *Surviving the War in Vietnam*, found in *ibid*: 76-80.
- ³² Interview with Ted A. Burton came from James R. Wilson's book Landing Zones: Southern Veterans Remember Vietnam. (Durham: Duke 1990): 69-79.
- ³³ *New York Times*. 1974. Page 1.
- ³⁴ Information from Lock Johnson's study came from his article *Scars of War*, found in: Figley, Charles R. and Seymour Leventman, eds. Strangers at Home: Vietnam Veterans Since the War. (New York: Brunner/Mazel 1990): 223-224.
- ³⁵ Information about Ed Shore's experiences in combat came from an interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Shelley Stafford on April 17, 2001. Interview to be transcribed.
- ³⁶ Statistical information about the GI Bill and its usage comes from: Helmer, John. Bringing the War Home. (New York: Macmillan 1974): 225-227.
- ³⁷ Severo, Richard and Lewis Milford. The Wages of War. (New York: Simon and Schuster 1989): 348-356.

III Unemployment Rates for Veterans of Wars During Periods of Reduction in Armed Forces Strength

	WORLD WAR II	KOREAN CONFLICT	VIETNAM ERA
<i>Period</i>	<i>Veterans aged 20-44 years</i>	<i>Veterans aged 16-44 years</i>	<i>Veterans aged 20-29 years</i>
December 1945	14.9		
January 1946	13.0		
November 1953		7.0	
October-December 1969			4.7
One year later:			
December 1946	6.7		
January 1947	6.9		
November 1954		7.9	
October-December 1970			7.9
Two years later:			
December 1947	4.0		
January 1948	4.5		
November 1955		4.2	

SOURCE: *Data on Vietnam Era Veterans*, Veterans Administration, June 1971, 16.

V Distribution of Diagnoses of Psychiatric Patients Under 26 Years of Age, For Three Wars, Minneapolis VA Hospital

<i>Diagnosis</i>	PERCENT		
	<i>World War II</i> (<i>N</i> = 76)	<i>Korean Era</i> (<i>N</i> = 234)	<i>Vietnam Era</i> (<i>N</i> = 458)
Schizophrenia	39.5	29.1	33.4
Affective disorders	0	0.9	0.7
Personality disorders	6.6	18.7	36.2
Psychoneurotic disorders	43.4	40.2	24.0
Other diagnoses	10.5	11.1	5.7

SOURCE: Gayle K. Lumry and Gordon A. Braatz, *The Vietnam Era Veteran and Psychiatric Implications*, unpub. paper, Minneapolis, Minn.: Veterans Administration Hospital, Psychology Service, 1970. Used by permission of the authors.

I Method of Raising Army Troops for World War II, the Korean War,
and the Vietnam War

	PERCENT OF TOTAL PROCUREMENT		
	<i>World War II (1941-46)</i>	<i>Korea</i>	<i>Vietnam</i>
<i>Method of procurement</i>			
Induction (Draft)	75	62	48
Enlistment (first term)	20	13	33
Reenlistment	—	11	16
Reserves to active duty	5	12	1
Total	100	98*	98*

* Does not sum to 100 percent owing to rounding of numbers.

SOURCE: Computed from data supplied by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense,
Comptroller, Directorate of Information Operations, February 12, 1971.

II Educational Attainment at Time of Separation from the Armed Forces of Vietnam Theater Veterans and Vietnam Era Veterans, Fiscal Years 1965–1971

PERCENT

<i>Fiscal year</i>	<i>Less than 12 years of school</i>		<i>12 years of school</i>		<i>1–3 years of college</i>		<i>4 or more years of college</i>	
	<i>VNT</i>	<i>VNE</i>	<i>VNT</i>	<i>VNE</i>	<i>VNT</i>	<i>VNE</i>	<i>VNT</i>	<i>VNE</i>
1965	12.5	28.4	87.5	55.2	—	10.2	—	6.4
1966	22.9	22.3	62.5	59.5	8.3	10.9	6.3	7.3
1967	23.6	23.3	61.8	59.5	9.0	10.4	5.6	6.4
1968	19.6	20.3	65.5	61.7	8.7	12.3	6.2	5.7
1969	18.3	18.2	60.0	60.4	15.9	14.7	5.8	6.7
1970	17.5	20.0	56.9	56.6	17.0	15.1	8.6	8.3
1971	14.7	19.2	55.4	54.9	19.4	16.0	10.5	9.9
Total	17.9	20.8	59.2	58.2	15.2	13.5	7.7	7.5

SOURCE: Reports and Statistics Service, Office of Controller, Veterans Administration, April 11, 1972.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisors, Dr. G. Kurt Piehler and Dr. Janis Appier, for their time, knowledge, and suggestions. Without them I would have been lost.

I would like to thank my father, Thomas J. Stafford III, for his candid and objective analysis of Vietnam during countless discussions about my project.

I would like to thank the many veterans who were willing to be interviewed about a very personal subject. They gave me the foundation for this project.

I would like to thank the Normandy Scholars Program for presenting complexities about the past in a way that addresses the present and the future. It is a brilliant program that should be preserved.