

# Vietnam vets speak on battles in Asia and postwar adjustment

By William Homans  
Of the Emerald

Veterans of all four combat services told of their Vietnam War experiences and the adjustments they made after their return from Vietnam in a panel discussion Thursday night at South Eugene High School.

After a showing of the Academy Award-winning film "Witness to War," a panel of local veterans explained the changes brought about in them by participating in the war.

Ed Rieman, a Eugene lumber salesman, was a crew chief and door gunner on Huey helicopters in 1967 and 1968. Door gunners were reputed to have the shortest life expectancy of any combat soldiers in Vietnam.

Like many young men at that time, Rieman thought that after high school, he had three alternatives: marriage, college or military service.

"I thought my parents were well-informed about Vietnam; I thought my eyes were open," he said. "They weren't."

"I learned about the rage and hatred within myself while I was in Nam," Rieman said. Killing Vietnamese civilians became easier as the time he spent in the combat zone increased, he said.

He has been adjusting to life ever since, but the experience has revealed some hidden strengths, he said.

"I learned that the only danger in life is when someone is shooting at me," he said. "Everything else is merely uncomfortable or inconvenient."

He said he understands now that the government would lie to him about war if he were not constantly on his guard. "Now no one will teach my children about war, or about peace, but me," Rieman said.

Rieman urged the audience not to accept the "vanilla pudding" that passes for Vietnam War history in high school textbooks today.

"Peace starts with the individual," just as war depends on the individual soldier, he said.

Ron Phillips, a Marine infantryman in 1968 and 1969 and a member of the Draft and Pre-enlistment Counseling Project, said his involvement in draft counseling is his way of giving meaning to his Vietnam experience. He described a gradual evolution from the anger, guilt and sorrow of post-Vietnam delayed stress syndrome to meaningful political activism.

Phillips regularly offers presentations about Vietnam in Eugene schools. He has said his mission is to help students understand the pain, blood and heartbreak of war, because young people today are bombarded with so much war-

glorifying material.

"They know Rambo's not real, but they don't know what is," he said.

Peter Craycroft, a Eugene graphics designer, grew up in a distinguished military and clergy family.

Halfway through Navy Officer's Candidate School, Craycroft said his conscience drove him to resign rather than accept orders for Vietnam. He spent 18 months in the Navy brig and was given a bad conduct discharge, which he later successfully appealed.

Because of his resistance in the military, resistance to war in civilian life came naturally to him, he said.

Steve Tice was a radioman with the 101st Airborne Division in 1968 and 1969. A veteran of Hamburger Hill, one of the bloodiest battles of the war, Tice enlisted because he did not want to lose his family and because he had been encouraged "to either go in, or go to jail."

Tice said he did not expect what happened to him in the war.

He did not expect to be assigned to the infantry. He had not expected the survivors of Hamburger Hill to be evacuated only three days after the division suffered hundreds of casualties fighting its way to the top. And he had not expected to be hit by the rocket-propelled grenade that left him with one arm.

Alienated and disillusioned, Tice said he started to work the pain out in the mid-1970s when he met a therapist "who wasn't scared of a long-haired vet who hated the VA."

Tice is now a counselor at the Vietnam Veterans' Outreach Center in Eugene, and is involved in many community organizations and projects.

He said the tragic death of a close veteran friend drove him to help veterans and their families "make a separate peace, a personal peace with the war. My road to peace has been a very violent one, but since I got out of the war, it has gradually become peaceful."

The challenge veterans face is "to come to terms with the violence in their own hearts," Tice said.

During the question-and-answer period that followed the panel, a high school-age girl asked the panel what she should tell her boyfriend, who was considering enlistment.

A Vietnam veteran in the audience told her to "remember what George Santayana said in 1923 — that those who forgot the lessons of history were condemned to repeat them."

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## Local youth fights for peace

If the United States goes to war again, don't blame Jesse Palmer.

Palmer, 18, is a member of the South Eugene High School Peace Club, which has more than 70 student members. The club co-sponsored last Thursday's Vietnam panel at the high school.

Palmer also is co-editor of the Nuclear News Bureau, which has published news about the nuclear fuel cycle and other news every six weeks since 1983. The publication now has a circulation of more than 8,000, Palmer said.

"The Peace Club is my way of getting my peers to think about war and to do the right thing," said Palmer. He believes the club's ef-

forts are paying off and noted that Churchill and North Eugene high schools now have active Peace Club chapters.

The students of South Eugene were among the first in the country to declare their school a nuclear free zone, he said.

Although Palmer said the club could be more effective, he is encouraged by the way the anti-war message is spreading in the schools.

Palmer considers himself a community activist and has been involved in the Draft and Pre-enlistment Counseling Project, Clergy and Laity Concerned, Citizens' Action for Lasting Security and other community anti-war and anti-nuclear organizations and activities.

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