



Photo by Ross Martin

No Tickertape Parades

The Vietnam War was in many ways a different kind of war for America.

BY CURTIS CONDON

It has been 17 years since Lily Hill Stubbs last saw her son, Bill. In 1969, she was told only that he was missing in action. Four years later she was given a map of Southeast Asia showing where Bill, a staff sergeant with a unit of the Green Berets, was last seen and she was told the story of how his patrol was ambushed on Oct. 19, 1969, in Laos.

The men had stopped on the trail. Bill Stubbs was the point man, an exposed position 15 yards ahead of the rest of the patrol. He cautiously stood up to survey the terrain when, suddenly, automatic weapons opened up not more than seven or eight feet away from him. He fell to the ground severely wounded.

During the ensuing firefight the small group, made up of two Americans and a handful of South Vietnamese 'Kit Carson scouts', suffered more casualties and the decision to withdraw was made. An evacuation helicopter was called and everyone was extracted, except Bill Stubbs. During the skirmish he was seen being dragged into the bush by the enemy. He was never seen again.

"At that time there was a \$50 reward

Curtis Condon is the editor of Spectrum magazine. His previous experience includes two years as the editor of a small 'city' magazine, and as a freelance writer for various Northwest magazines and newspapers.

to those guys for any Green Beret they brought back," Lily Hill Stubbs says. "He didn't have his beret on because he was wearing a helmet at the time, but they knew."

She sat back in her favorite chair, a slight woman who has endured much. She seems frustrated with her weakening legs and the need for a cane, after serving such an active life as a nurse.

At her feet was a stack of photo albums filled with pictures and mementos of her lost son. One album is filled with pictures of the White House reception given during the dedication ceremonies of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The invitation from the White House occupies its own separate page. There are pictures of 'the Wall', and snapshots of President Reagan addressing the gathering on the White House lawn.

Another album has clippings pertaining to the war, photographs of her son overseas and a polaroid of him posing with his father, who is a retired Army major — both men are in their uniforms.

"He was out on a hush-hush deal," she confides. "That's why they couldn't tell us anything at the time."

"A young man, very confused, came to the door," she remembers. "I think it was the first time he ever had to meet a family and tell them, 'your son is missing.' He wasn't in proper uniform. I mean, he didn't have his hat on and he was shaky. We almost felt more sorry for him than we did for ourselves."

After so much and so many years,

Lily Hill Stubbs is no less "proud of my Bill" and the other veterans who fought in Vietnam.

There is nothing new about men being killed or wounded in war. Officers appearing on the doorstep of the family of a serviceman killed or missing in action is a scene that has been repeated many thousands of times in America. And there's certainly nothing new about Americans having pride in the men and women who go off to war.

However, few people would deny there was something different, something tragically wrong with the Vietnam War. What made it 'wrong' is the subject of an intense debate which goes on even today. The question of how it was different from previous American wars is more easily answered, but no less complex.

"A big difference was on the home front," says Gerry Kamp, a Vietnam veteran. "Participation in the war effort was greater in World War II because of the cause and because of the magnitude of the war, and that didn't happen during Vietnam. There wasn't the social involvement that brought Americans together in World War II."

Kamp enlisted in the Navy in 1968 "to avoid the draft so I wouldn't have to go to Vietnam," he remembers with a laugh. He was at the teletype when his orders to go to Vietnam came over the wire, and he was assigned to a river assault group in the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam.

"It was a time during the war when we rarely fired back. We had aircraft

coverage — the Seawolves and Black Ponies — but for the most part they were calling a lot of zones 'passified zones' and we had to have permission to fire back. Sometimes by the time we got permission to fire back it was all over anyway," Kamp recalls.

He now spends most of his time running the Book Station, a combination gas station and bookstore he owns in Eugene. Kamp also teaches courses on America's involvement in Southeast Asia at the University, and he is currently teaching a course in the literature of Vietnam.

"Another difference is there wasn't a well-defined time period of when the war started and when it ended," he continues. "In Vietnam we kind of slid in and the fighting slowly escalated."

America got involved in Vietnam and Southeast Asia shortly after World War II, but the presence of a significant number of American troops didn't exist until 1965 when a brigade of U.S. Marines landed near DaNang in South Vietnam. By the end of that year there were 181,000 American troops in the country.

The number of Americans in Vietnam progressed from 23,000 advisers in January, 1965 to a peak troop strength of over 549,500 in 1969. A gradual withdrawal of troops began the same year.

A third difference between Vietnam and other American wars, Kamp points out, is that there were no well-defined, major battles. "What you had was everyone involved in circular