

WHAT WERE THEY LIKE? (Questions & Answers)

- 1) Did the people of Viet Nam use lanterns of stone?
 - 2) Did they hold ceremonies to reverence the opening of buds?
 - 3) Were they inclined to rippling laughter?
 - 4) Did they use bone and ivory, jade and silver, for ornament?
 - 5) Had they an epic poem?
 - 6) Did they distinguish between speech and singing?
- 1) Sir, their light hearts turned to stone. It is not remembered whether in gardens stone lanterns illumined pleasant ways.
 - 2) Perhaps they gathered once to delight in blossom, but after the children were killed there were no more buds.
 - 3) Sir, laughter is bitter to the burned mouth.
 - 4) A dream ago, perhaps. Ornament is for joy. All the bones were charred.
 - 5) It is not remembered. Remember, most were peasants; their life was in rice and bamboo. When peaceful clouds were reflected in the paddies and the water-buffalo stepped surely along terraces, maybe fathers told their sons old tales. When bombs smashed the mirrors there was time only to scream.
 - 6) There is an echo yet, it is said, of their speech which was like a song. It is reported their singing resembled the flight of moths in moonlight. Who can say? It is silent now.

— Denise Levertov

Viet Nam: *for 1000 Years?*



FROM PAGE ONE

women who devote themselves to the League's work say only over their dead bodies will Arlington bury a GI who died mutilated, unseen, unremarked. Americans can do anything. We can name our dead. Not always, not even in 1983, say military forensic specialists in Honolulu. They have at least four sets of remains that defy identification and could properly join those "known but to God," one each from the two world wars and Korea, long ago entombed in a Potomac overlook.

The League women come to us from Homer, Vergil, Bulfinch, from a prehistoric, instinctive tradition of decency and reverence — of vigilance — toward missing warriors. How fiercely they resist their loss (their widowhood, in the typical case). How attractive, how oddly compelling their resistance makes them. Add a box of Viet Nam bones to Arlington, and we will truly seal their men — and themselves — from hope, they seem to have decided.

An inability to accept the death of a husband or son, absent physical evidence, is understandable. It is as if anonymous death under arms, in a remote, triple-canopied Central Highlands jungle or in the chop of the South China Sea — the war had a wild geography — suggests to League survivors the old epistemological saw familiar to undergraduates: If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to see or hear it crash down, did it really crash down?

The burial of the dead and a solicitude for the imprisoned are corporal works of mercy well-fixed in the prescriptions of Judeo-Christian morality. Pursued with a blind vengeance, though, perhaps they are something else. There is not a shred of evidence that there is a single American being held against his will in all of Indochina. The ravings of rightwing Senators and Representatives; the goofy commando raids planned and already staged by paid Asian thugs in search of GIs tied to stakes in pathetically imagined jungle hellholes; the ridiculous and utterly cynical demands of the Reaganites for a complete accounting of our MIAs when one is simply not possible — none of this can change the facts, as even the Pentagon sees them: Of our twenty-five hundred missing servicemen, all but a handful are "presumed dead."

Today the Defense Department lists only nine soldiers, sailors, and fliers as unaccountably missing in action, and one as a prisoner of war; the Pentagon admits it has no evidence that any of these ten Americans is alive. The twenty-five hundred missing represent just over four percent of the fifty-seven thousand-odd U.S. combat deaths in Indochina; the missing rate in World War II and in the Korean War was twenty percent of our fatal casualties.

The repatriation of bodies has become a disgraceful matter of diplomatic to-ing and fro-ing. The Vietnamese have much to answer for in not leveling with successive U.S. Administrations about the coffins they have stockpiled in Hanoi as postwar bargaining chips. No one in a position to know disputes that the Vietnamese and their Laotian clients are withholding a great deal of information on the number and location of dead Americans.

But what can we say about ourselves in all this? We haven't extended a single technical hand to help the Vietnamese and Laotians defuse the many thousands of unexploded bombs that pit the face of Indochina. It has gone virtually unreported that Vietnamese graves registration teams looking for bodies of Americans have suffered seven deaths and twelve serious

injuries from accidents involving land mines and live antipersonnel bombs.

Just for the rash hell of it, let us note that Washington has never been eager to take public measure of what their collision with Pax Americana cost the Vietnamese. A January 1974 Senate committee report, heralded hardly at all, placed the 1965-73 death count in South Viet Nam alone at 1,435,000; of these 430,000 were civilians. The Indochina Resource Center in Washington puts the all-Viet Nam fatality figure, soldier and civilian, North and South, at two million, and wounded at three million. The U.S. Agency for International Development has these figures on war-related disablements dealt the South Vietnamese: a total of 181,000, breaking down to 83,000 amputees, 8,000 paraplegics, 30,000 blinded, 10,000 rendered deaf, and 50,000 "others." The number of South Vietnamese who were killed, wounded or made refugees between 1965 and 1973, according to USAID, came to 13,457,822. In contrast, U.S. combat casualties for all branches came to 364,449: 155,419 wounded required hospitalization, 150,375 did not; 58,655 were killed or reported "missing."

It remains to be said that we took a depraved climb up Boot Hill and a descent into baseness in our "disposition" of those we killed. There is no Vietnamese counterpart to the National League of Families. Our GIs, like Millet's sowers, would cast quicklime over stacks of the hated Cong, then see to the digging of common graves with bulldozers or call in helicopter transports to sling-load enemy bodies out over the sea for burial in a watery Potter's Field. Peasant women throughout Viet Nam understood that their husbands and sons were treated, in death, like rodents or weeds. There is no talk in the villages and hamlets of an accounting of those who didn't come home.

Last summer, an older generation of Americans reckoned on an older war. In Houston, veterans of German and American infantry units that faced one another in Italy almost forty years before drank beer together, ate barbecue, and danced with one another's wives.

Gregory (Pappy) Boynton, the marine ace who shot down twenty-eight Japanese war planes over the South Pacific was the featured speaker at the Zero Fighter Pilots Association's annual meeting in Osaka.

In the Bismarck Archipelago, on New Britain, a B-17 pilot found the fuselage of his downed bomber on a heavily forested ridge. The only survivor of his ten-man crew, he wound up in a POW camp at Rabaul, where his Japanese captors starved and abused him for two years. This Air Force career officer said he held no grudges against the old enemy. He's been to Japan several times, and in 1971 went out of his way to reunite there with two of his guards. His oldest daughter is married to a Japanese.

In Beaufort, South Carolina, the aged parents of Joe Hartley finally got to bury their boy, whose remains a German farmer had dug up in the course of spring plowing last year. Private Hartley had been killed charging a German emplacement in the spring of 1945, and had never been found. He came home last summer.

You have to ask when our dealings with the Vietnamese will take a summery turn. The unspeakable Germans, the barbarous Japanese, the Chinese who fought us to a standstill in Korea — all are our great good friends now. We feed the Russians, and man at least a token diplomatic outpost in Havana. The Vietnamese? They have been singled out for a lasting bitterness, and it is little wonder: After we had strewn our national treasure about their country, they went and chased us out. The war came down to a sort of unrequited potlatch. Our feelings were deeply hurt. The Vietnamese had the bad manners to win. We have outdone ourselves in our anti-Communist foolishness in making them a pariah state.

Viet Nam muon nam! Viet Nam for a thousand years. It's a slogan, a casual remark of good cheer spoken at one occasion or another by all Vietnamese. But what for them is a toast, sounds like an exotic curse to us. It won't go away, Viet Nam, not until we explore the redemptive possibilities of peace and forgiveness through reconstruction and reparation, which is what we promised in Paris ten years ago. It really isn't for us to bear a grudge against the Vietnamese.

And we might fill that crypt in Arlington, and get on with the business of making sure we have no more unknown soldiers. If there are, if we fight again, no hole on a Virginia hillside will be up to the job. It will take a crater several thousand yards across. But then the crater will come ready made: We won't need grave diggers.

Lawrence Walsh is an associate editor of The Progressive magazine, from which his article is reprinted. He was a combat cameraman with the Saigon bureau of CBS News in 1968, and worked on the television special, "Hill 943."

**The North Coast
TIMES EAGLE**

A bi-weekly newspaper published on alternate Fridays in Cannon Beach, Oregon, P.O. Box 189, (97110). 25 cents per issue over the counter. Subscriptions pending until application is made for Second Class Mail permit.

Michael Paul McCusker
Editor & Publisher

Michael Hurst, CommExPcd
George Grummett, Typesetter

**The Community Score
INC.**
a natural
foods
grocery

flour
grains
beans, pasta
gourmet coffee
aromatic herbs
assorted cheeses
freshly ground peanut
butter

M-F 10-6
Sat, 10-5
1120 Marine Dr.
Astoria, OR
ask about membership

**HAIR
PRUNING
BY TREE**
a saxon cutter
cannon beach

436-1665