

of Vanport which was washed away by a Columbia River flood on Memorial Day 1948. Frank Ivancie was city parks commissioner. We all considered him an evil, ambitious man (perhaps our single consensus), whose deceit had caused bloodshed during the spring student strike. Ivancie made headlines resisting our arguments for a park and condemned our plans of protest as traitorous and communist inspired. He later used media accounts of his stout resistance to hippy disruption (and a photo of me as villain) in his campaign literature for mayor, which he eventually became after three attempts and was not re-elected.

So we bickered with the city for most of that summer while dreaming up a demonstration schedule as logistically complex as a military campaign. We were bequeathed \$10,000 by a local potato chip heiress and we rushed to waste the money as rapidly as we could. Some very sophisticated radio equipment was purchased, ostensibly to monitor police and national guard movements during our days of rage. \$1000 was given to a local hippy lawyer as a retainer for a possibly heavy caseload in the near future. Another grand was used to purchase an offset printing press from a state auction, which printed small poetry books for years afterward. An uncounted and unattributed amount of the \$10,000 disappeared into throats, noses, lungs and bellies: wine, food and drugs.

Probably the worst that can be done with a fringe group is give it money. Fights break out immediately as to where the money will go and to whom. Entire movements have been torn up arguing about money donated by sympathetic sponsors.

That \$10,000 almost disintegrated the People's Army Jamboree and by the time we were able to regroup half the money had been spent with little accounting of where it disappeared.

We worked for most of the rest of the money we received, hats in hand; in my case tongue out of cheek: a TV appearance or a guest shot on talk radio was good for several dollars in donations as were speeches at open or closed gatherings of diverse radical and liberal groups engaged in various agendas. I was even a guest speaker at a luncheon of the inner sanctum of Portland political/economic muscle, the City Club, though I don't believe I received any donations for the PAJ; a ticket for me to get out of town might have been a more popular fundraiser.

By the time the American Legionnaires marched into Portland in late August, everything seemed anti-climax. Tensions and fears had been so relentlessly exploited in the weeks and days before their arrival that the event itself was played through at half-speed with a large sense of *deja vu*.

We conducted our dissent peaceably, to the contempt of the national press which had gathered in Portland and considered our lack of bloodshed the mark of lightweight. A columnist for the Washington Post, Nicholas Von Hoffman, wrote, "The People's Army Jamboree is a lot like the Loch Ness Monster. Everybody's talking about it, but nobody has ever seen it."

I presented an idea at the final hysteria-pitched meeting of the PAJ crowd before Legion Week which I thought was a radical departure from standard radical practice:

A young girl walks through the city's deserted streets. She is about 8 years old. Her hair is long. She wears a dress. She carries a flower in one hand and a sign in her other hand. "End the War" is printed in bright paint on the sign, which is a plank of wood nailed to a stake. She walks down the middle of several streets. On each side of every street, against buildings or grouped in open spaces, are armed policemen and state national guardsmen. They watch the girl menacingly. She sings only one song. "We Shall Overcome."

The girl would have to be 8 or 9, not much older or she risked rape. It would be a feast for television, I argued. Just a lone little girl (virginal; anyone's daughter or little sister) marching past the assembled might of the government. Look at the



contrasts: focus on the little girl in the empty streets; closeups of snarling cops rapping their palms with nightsticks, national guardsmen with bayoneted rifles waiting, various forms of paralyzing gases in handheld canisters. Newscasters' self-important voices edged with contempt at the uniformed brutes clustered in sinister ambush to molest the little girl. Perhaps splitscreen the girl with marching American Legionnaires.

No chance. The crowd wanted to march enmasse, do the usual hippy demonstration schtick. After most of a summer spent in tense anticipation and growing public hysteria for our spectacular, no one wished to stay out of whatever action was ahead. Everybody was impatient for the performance to begin.

Yet, for all that tense impatience, we were obsolete at the very moment of our presence: the real war was for racial and sexual equality as well as for economic justice. Our protest of an unpopular war was a brief recess from more enduring struggles.

Everywhere the People's Army Jamboree appeared the week the Legion was in town it was ringed with concerned citizens who offered themselves as a buffer between us and the armed forces of law & order. They were a well publicized group that called itself "People for Portland," and included nuns and ministers as well as average everyday folk who were worried about violence between police and hippies, and a few political aspirants (among them a gubernatorial candidate defeated in the state Republican primary this past spring).

Encounters with police and national guardsmen were relatively mild, which probably disappointed a few on both sides of the People for Portland rings. My own tactics to keep the

trigger on safe were to roam among demonstrators and quell outbreaks as they occurred, which usually meant pointing out troublemakers as police provocateurs, some of whom actually were. I didn't care. My intent was to isolate belligerent loudmouths before they prompted the police or guardsmen to attack.

We had a few undercover agents and informers within our ranks. One was a young rookie policeman who had been a Marine in Vietnam and intentionally bonded with me from that mutual experience. He fooled me and I defended him against accusations that he was a spy. Yet he was a factor that none of us were arrested. Instead of provoking us to violence, which were probably his original orders, he defended us, reporting to his chief that we did not intend to commit any form of violence or illegal acts and were prepared to prevent violence and crime within our ranks.

Another reason we might not have been put in jail was more obscure and involved a chance meeting with Oregon Governor McCall. My friend Sailor John McGarity (whose political grasp was brilliant) and I were walking downtown one afternoon a few weeks before Legion Week. We discovered McCall at the center of a small crowd cutting a ribbon to something, flanked by stacks of watermelons. Sailor and I instantly agreed I should talk with the governor, which I did as he walked a few blocks to his limousine. McCall was a tall man with a lanky stride; I almost ran keeping apace with him while rapidly filling him in on our intentions, and warned him when he reached the car, his bodyguards politely behind us, that our informal chat could cause him to be subpoenaed if any of us were arrested.

We marched three times through Portland's streets. I made speeches before each march but as a male was dissuaded from the second march which was organized and conducted by feminists.

I lost all copies of my first two speeches, which, if the third is an example, is not a great loss. My rhetoric was full-sailed as I whipped up the crowd for a final effort. "We walked into an armed camp, unarmed, against three times our number," I said of the first two marches. "We walked into the barrels of rifles aimed at every one of us, we brushed against the teeth of the lion, and came back out again. We showed them our courage against their hostile, brutal fear, and we refused to play their game. We refused to give them any reason for their club-swinging orgasms." I felt like I imagined Billy Sunday felt exhorting his flocks to wrestle sin when I said, "We are marching once more into the hostile storm which frantically perpetuates racism and sexism and can only answer our bitter angry demands with guns and clubs."

Fewer of us protested the presence of the American Legion than attended Vortex. The national media were disappointed we did not provide a bloody spectacle as were several members of law enforcement. Proof that the confrontation was overblown from the beginning was apparent when President Nixon, who had planned to make a war speech to the Legion, sent in his place Vice President Spiroccoccus T. Agnats, a Greek-American who referred to everybody else as Dagons, Fat Japs, etc. Some say Nixon was frightened of being attacked, possibly assassinated. I think he realized the political insignificance of appearing in a substantially diminished public melodrama. The pre-Convention display of hysteria had a sobering effect and in the end no one wanted to be responsible for the violence almost everyone feared or claimed to fear. Portland's residents did not wish a reputation for bloody civil war. That determined pressure to avoid violence was powerful enough to prevent it.

is slow enough

Anyone who was involved in the People's Army Jamboree is asked to contact Dory Hylton, who is gathering research for a book about the PAJ. Write her c/o the NCTE, 955 24th St., Astoria 97103; or call her direct 503/287-8525.

POST-VIETNAM SYNDROME

There probably will be no grand 50th anniversaries of Vietnam or any of its battles as for Gettysburg in July 1913 and World War II's Normandy D-Day in June 1994. The end of the Civil War in 1865 and World War II in 1945 are vividly remembered and eulogized. Vietnam's end was vague and indistinct; America's participation and withdrawal were perceived as inconclusive and continue to cause discomfort and argument.

Civil War veterans were honored until the last of them, an ancient Confederate, died in 1959. World War II veterans, though often negligently regarded in the postwar, are experiencing a golden anniversary comeback, resplendent with enthusiasm as well as apologetic respect and genuflection for "saving freedom." (World War I veterans who fought "the war to end all wars" were honored for "saving the world for democracy.")

Vietnam veterans do not claim to have saved anything. As with Korean War veterans, their war was nebulous though deadly and costly. Both wars were eruptions along a faultline of polarity that was otherwise a global "cold war." In themselves, the wars in Korea and Vietnam meant little except to the hard-luck expendable victims who were sacrificed for world power.

Korea and Vietnam were civil wars within artificially subdivided nations and cultures, irrespective of political/ideological conflict. The proclaimed issues and superpower influences and interventions in both wars were muddled and unconvincing.

World War II in retrospect illumines the screen of modern memory with a major illusion of sharply imaged purpose, a war of clearcut right and wrong, freedom assailed by tyranny. In the future both world wars of the 20th century will probably be merged into a single suicidal struggle for European hegemony (though not necessarily colonial supremacy). The combined wars, only 20 years apart (long enough to grow a second generation of combatants), bankrupted Europe's global dominance, victors as well as losers. World power shifted to two diametrically opposed 'superpowers' that had risen from the European periphery and grasped for Alexandrine empire over Europe's political corpse while simultaneously devising desperate strategies to survive and possibly surmount the scorpion's stings of each other.

Korea and Vietnam were low-stakes wars, more bluff than real cards though hundreds of thousands of real persons perished and anonymous millions were handicapped for life, psychologically as well as physically.

Vietnam veterans are pitied more for fools or pathological tendencies than they are honored in the old traditional manner. Raised voices insist Vietnam veterans are either heroes and patriots or butchers and babykillers. Vietnam veterans might respond that almost every day they committed acts deserving medals as well as courts martials.

The Vietnam War was ambiguous and off-center. Combat veterans were discouraged from revealing themselves if they wished to reintegrate into the hostile yet continually oblivious society they attempted to defend in a far off part of the world that was claimed to be of strategic as well as ideological necessity to the United States. Soon enough the propaganda was revealed as sham, yet hardly anyone actively reflected the growing public disaffection with the war. The larger population preferred to distance itself through self-hypnotic (also drug induced) numbness and disavowal of an antiwar movement that would willingly defy authority to protest the continued murder and (as a number of people began to believe) eco/genocide of Vietnamese life and culture.

A small but significant number of Vietnam veterans organized to stop the war, which immediately triggered a pro-war military and political jihad. Neither pro-war or antiwar initially accepted or acknowledged the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. The antiwar accused the veterans of indiscriminate murder and of being pro-fascist personalities. The rightwing, particularly such established veterans groups as the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, assailed the VVAW as traitors and/or veteran impersonators.

Enmity between American veterans of Vietnam and Vietnamese people remains; fortunately it decreases with time, to the particular benefit of the many thousands of Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. (whose first years in this country were met with more than usual hostility toward immigrants and refugees despite the fact most were "our" Vietnamese).

Perhaps while we are still alive American and Vietnamese veterans of the long bitter war might reconcile as did Civil War veterans at Gettysburg 50 years after they fought each other there. The reunion of the old veterans on the bloodiest battlefield of their war was truly a reconciliation despite flares of bitter animosity. (A civil war is after all a family dispute, its antipathy almost eternal, its wounds long to heal and sometimes never; a century later American soldiers in Vietnam carried Confederate flags, and they weren't kidding). Reenactment of Pickett's Charge by its last living survivors was the most poignant moment. The ancient rebels marched toward the old yankees at the stone wall on Cemetery Ridge just as they had half a century before. The charging former rebels broke into a ragged rebel yell as they came up to the wall they were unable to breach 50 years before. "It was then," wrote an observer ("after half a century of silence"), that the yankees, "unable to restrain themselves longer burst from behind the stone wall, and flung themselves upon their former enemies...not in mortal combat but reunited in brotherly love and affection."

(Reconciliation with former enemies was not an active

reason World War II paratroopers staged a 50th anniversary reenactment of their part in the Normandy D-Day operations by jumping into their old drop zones of 1944 this past June 6. Germans were not invited to D-Day celebrations.)

Thirty years ago, in August 1964 (on the 50th anniversary of the beginning of World War I), Vietnam exploded from a backwater war when North Vietnamese gunboats allegedly attacked two American destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf. On August 17, President Lyndon Johnson pushed his *Tonkin Resolution* to bomb the North and expand involvement in the South through the U.S. Senate. Only two Senators dissented, Wayne Morse from Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska. Eleven years later the nation escaped Vietnam aboard evacuation helicopters. "Will the last person to leave turn out the light at the end of the tunnel," a departing soldier wrote on a Saigon wall.

Vietnam remains contradictory, at once troubling and unsettled in the American psyche yet dimming into historical oblivion, overshadowed by the larger afterglow of World War II on the receding horizon.

August 1945 ended World War II and began the nuclear age. The infotainment Goliath will hammer "The Good War" until VJ Day 1995, the golden anniversary of democracy's triumph over Nazi/fascism, though not of capitalism over communism. That came later, after Korea and Vietnam and a nuclear arms race that exhausted the competing superpowers, breaking one and traumatizing the other.

Now Haiti. U.S. Marines are poised to invade Haiti to undo what their invasions of Haiti in the 1920s and '30s banana wars in the Caribbean created. They wait at battlestations aboard a large naval fleet to attack an autocratic army that has never fought anybody but Haitian people. Critics say of Haiti as about Vietnam that it is not worth a drop of American blood nor of any national security interest. Others believe democracy should be restored in Haiti even if it means using the Marines again, who last visited the island of Hispanola on the Dominican Republic side in 1965 to protect an anticommunist dictator from so-called "leftist" critics. That invasion and the invasions of Grenada and Panama in the 1980s are defended as Cold War issues, as of course are the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

Haiti might be regarded as a Monroe Doctrine issue, except that the foreign colonialists we wish to oust are ourselves; a legacy of brutal misrule that we created as our surrogate, one of many military dictatorships the U.S. has installed and heavily armed throughout the world that now in one manner or another threaten its slippery grip on global dominance as the last remaining superpower.

Pox America?

MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER