

PVT. 2147652, USMC

The Commander-in-Chief
The President of the USA
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Sir:

During the Vietnam era
3,000,000 men
served in Southeast Asia.
2,600,000 men
were disabled.
275,000 men
cannot today as veterans find jobs.
153,311 men
were wounded by nonhostile causes.
60,000 to 200,000 men
are Viet vets who became and remain heroin addicts
90,000 to 100,000 men
are today in VA hospitals.
56,097 men
were killed in action.
23,214 men
became 100% totally disabled, physically.
13,167 men
became 100% totally disabled, psychologically.
10,317 men
are dead from nonhostile causes.
1,500 men
were prisoners of war.

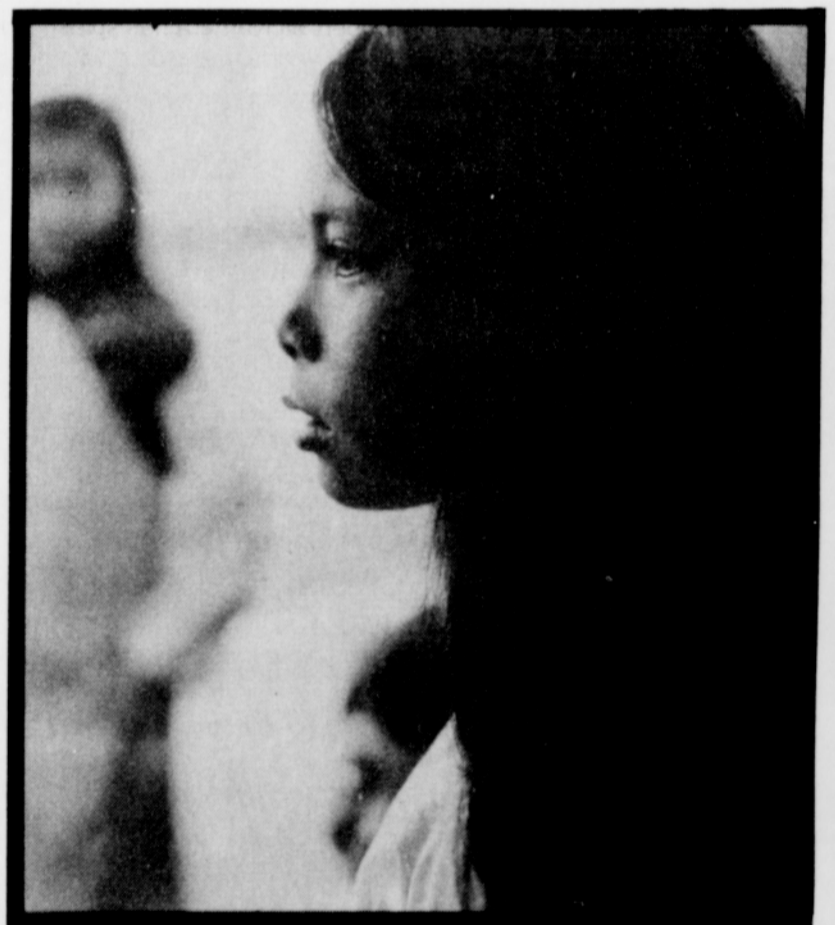
1,100 men
are MIA.
1 man, Pvt. 2147652,
is unofficially in all
but two of the above-listed categories:
that of being killed in action
and that of being killed by nonhostile causes.
Because he lost his hands and feet,
and because he is addicted to heroin,
and because he has malaria,
and because he has had a total physical collapse,
and because he has had a complete mental breakdown,
and because his wife divorced him
because only one part of him finally came home,
and because he has spent the past 3 years
in and out of jails and hospitals
and because he won the Congressional Medal of Honor
which he hocked for a fix,
we, his physicians, are in a dilemma:
we consider him dead
but cannot figure out
which of the two categories to put him in:
killed in action
or dead from nonhostile causes.
Please reply by command.

Signed,
his physicians
Bethesda Naval Hospital
Bethesda, Maryland 20014

SGT. BRANDON JUST, USMC

He was alive with death:
Her name was Sung
and she was 6 years old.
By slightest mistake of degrees
of an artillery azimuth,
he had called for rockets and napalm.
Their wild wizardry of firepower
expired her mistake of a village,
killing everyone except her,
and napalm made her look
like she was dead among the dead,
she alone alive among their upturned corpses
burning toward the sky.
He and the platoon
got to them too late,
removing only her
to a hospital inside his base, Da Nang.
In the months that followed,
when he could make it back from the boonies,
he always went to visit Sung.
Finally he was ordered to a desk job at the base.
He visited her every day,
though he accused himself of being alive
and would stand in a slump,
breathing his despair,
before entering the children's ward.
But he would enter.
Sung, knowing it was him,
would turn toward the sound of his feet,
her own, seared beyond being feet,
crisply trying to stand on shadows,
cool but unseen.

And as he would come in,
Sung would hobble up to him
in her therapeutic cart,
smiling even when she did not smile, lipless,
her chin melted to her chest,
that would never become breasts.
He would stand
and wait for her touch upon his hand
with her burn-splayed fingers
that came to lay a fire upon his flesh.
Sung was alive
and would live on despite life,
but even now her skull
seemed to be working its way through
the thin, fragile solids of wasted, waxen skin.
Her head was as bald as a bomb
whose paint had peeled.
She had no nose
and her ears were gone.
Her eyes had been removed,
and because they were not there,
they were there
invisibly looking him through.
Sung was child-happy
that he came and cared,
and when he would start to leave,
she would agonize her words
out of the hollow that was her mouth.
Her tongue, bitten in two while she had burned,
strafing his ears,
saying without mercy,
I love you.



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