



Attorney Michael Taylor explains Landlord-Tenant law at workshop held at King Neighborhood Facility by Legal Aid. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Vietnam: The forgotten veterans

by Harris Levon McRae

"Many Vietnam veterans don't realize it takes a beautiful mind to even half-way keep it together after the traumatic experiences that we went through. It puts a chill through your body to see wasted people transported around like trash. Anybody that survived Vietnam can survive in the United States—employed or unemployed."

—Ken King, a Black Vietnam veteran

Ken King and most of the Vietnam veterans I talked to were positive people working full-time jobs and living productive lives. They are quite a contrast to the "drug-crazed killer" image that many people have of them.

"It is a tragic mistake to focus only on those individuals who have failed for whatever reasons, to make an adequate socio-psychologic adjustment following their experience in Vietnam. Disabled American Veterans and Veterans Administration studies suggest that between 40-60 per cent of all Vietnam veterans have failed in some degree ranging from mild to severe, to integrate and successfully assimilate their experience in Vietnam. This implies that 40 to 60 per cent of Vietnam veterans have successfully re-entered American society, and this group of Vietnam veterans is invisible," says Dr. Anthony C. Traweck, clinical psychologist at the Vet Center located at 2450 SE Belmont. "Vietnam veterans are perceived as extraordinarily 'unique,' but they are just like everyone else."

While I do not wish to detract from the positive influence that Vietnam has had for many individuals, I feel that American society in general needs to be more educated about the psychological/emotional effects of the Vietnam war on so many veterans.

Nearly three million men and women served in Vietnam. About 58,000 died, 300,000 were wounded and over 100,000 returned home as disabled veterans. Many others suffer from flashbacks and other disorders that are related to stress. Many Vietnam vets still suffer from

these stress-related disorders today.

Until very recently, the American people have never heard in depth from the soldiers themselves the complicated physical and mental realities of when they went through in Vietnam. For years many veterans refused to talk about their experiences in Vietnam and the ones that did confide in their families and friends often found that they didn't want to hear about Vietnam or they asked questions that the veterans found difficult to deal with.

"I was reluctant to talk about the war until six years later," said David Collier, a Vietnam veteran who is now a counselor at the Vet Center. "Many vets find it hard to talk to anyone who doesn't have that common experience [Vietnam] and many of them don't want to be judged."

Those feelings are well understood. Not since the Civil War had the United States been divided into groups as strongly opposed as those that developed during the Vietnam war.

Throughout the United States, there was a very negative reaction to the military operations this country was involved in. Opposition to the war came from several different directions. Humanitarians were against the continuous attacks and bombing raids on unarmed citizens. Some people were ashamed that the country they lived in—the leading democratic nation—had interfered in what they regarded as a war of liberation. The American presence, too, was economic as well as military and political. Almost 90 per cent of Vietnamese imports were from the United States. The country was flooded with American-made products. The U.S.-backed South Vietnamese government had not reformed the landowning system, it had not eased the burden of taxation, or removed corrupt officials. The U.S. was conducting a war in which their primary concern was gaining territory. The Communists were more concerned with winning people to their cause. Since the Communists or "Viet Cong" as they were generally known had gained the support of a large part of

the South Vietnamese people, it was next to impossible to defeat them.

Ken King sheds some light on the dilemma of the American soldier in Vietnam. "The frustrating thing about being a soldier in Vietnam was you couldn't tell the Viet Cong from other Vietnamese people. We hit anybody that was in the line of fire—we were not taking any prisoners." Ken was 18 years old when he entered the Marine Corps. He served 21 months of active combat duty.

Analysis

"Vietnam was different than World War II in that World War II vets had an identifiable enemy. In Vietnam everybody was potentially Viet Cong," adds David Collier.

Most Vietnam veterans went to Vietnam with an unthinking commitment to democratic principles and the same sincere sense of duty that their fathers and grandfathers had gone to war for. Vietnam vets were thinking of containing Communism and the preservation of American and democratic stability in Vietnam. For many of them, once in combat, their views of "democracy" changed and they were wondering what they had to be patriotic about. They were first-hand witnesses of American fraud and deceit in South Vietnam. They couldn't equate the body count of the people they were killing every day with the incompetence and corruption of the government they were supporting.

Al Jones, another Black Vietnam vet, told me: "I still find it very difficult to deal with the fact that I was risking life and limb for nothing—nothing! The Vietnam war was a big lie."

The straw that proved to break the backs of many veterans came when upon arriving in the U.S. they found that the folks at home too felt that the war was one big sham.

Vietnam veterans didn't get the open-hearted greeting that welcomed home veterans from other wars. They were returned to their communities as individuals—rarely in large groups. There was hardly any recognition of the deeds the veterans carried out in the name of democracy and their country. For many vets this lack of acknowledgement left a feeling of resentment.

One former Vietnam vet explained on last week's Town Hall television show: "It is very hard for many people to realize how it feels to fight for your country and then come home and have people throw bags of urine at you and defecating in bags and throwing them at you. We're supposed to deal with this?"

Many of the veterans understand the criticism of the war, but they can't understand why they are the ones who have to be punished for mistakes that our leaders made. One vet summed it up very well by saying, "Don't confuse the war with the warrior—the war was continued two or three years for purely economic and political reasons."

As I mentioned earlier, the majority of the Vietnam veterans have ad-

Howard, Reed begin exchange

by Kathryn Hall Bogle

Howard University in Washington, D.C., and Oregon's own prestigious Reed College will begin a new exchange program in the fall of 1982.

According to Gary Connor, registrar at Reed, the exchange will allow students from both institutions to "explore another educational setting."

"We have been working on the idea for about a year," said Connor. "Our Black studies program has not been active for some time and because we want to help our Reed students to break through an all-white situation we decided to invite an enrollment of Howard students to the Reed campus. The Howard catalog will be available at Reed for Reedites who wish to study at Howard."

"We realize that when students come to Reed they tend to stay in the same socio-economic group in which they started," Connor said. "We also found that in our new freshman class there are only four minority students and that only one of them is Black."

"Howard University has a strong academic background to offer in medicine, in law and in engineering and business and our students could continue studies among persons in a mixed racial setting. After all, Howard, predominantly Black, has about 10,000 students on campus."

Connor said that Reed had considered the financial difference in tuition at the two campuses and that Reed will offer a 40 per cent discount to Howard students who wish to enter Reed. Applications for the exchange program will soon be available for students on each campus, Connor said.

justed well to life back home. However, things aren't going well for many veterans who still suffer serious problems that are rooted in their experiences in the war and the way they were treated when they returned home.

Next week the *Observer* will take an in-depth look at some of these problems.

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