

VICTIMS OF 4 DECADES OF BETRAYAL VIETNAM VETERANS DEMAND REPARATIONS FROM AN UNGRATEFUL NATION

By Gordon Duff STAFF WRITER

The new Obama GI bill just kicked in. New vets can get massive funding for college, enough to live like rich frat boys, yes, that much. They can give their benefits to family members or use them to, not only go to school but live, eat, buy text books, drive a car, all things denied Vietnam veterans.

What did Vietnam vets get? They got \$173 a month. What was that to pay for? Living expenses, books, tuition, supplies, fees, in fact everything. What did it pay for? It paid rent on a shared bedroom in an old house and bus tokens.

Who paid the rest? Vietnam vets worked, most full time, often having to miss classes because of jobs. They borrowed thousands and left college in debt. Books? They were checked out from the library or never bought at all. Food? Whatever you could buy for a buck a day, usually canned hash or Beefaroni.

No counseling, no disability checks, to PTSD or TBI treatment, just poverty, overwork and the struggle to find jobs while being banned from most companies and denied employment preference. The price? Devastation. Banned from mainstream service organizations because of our "undeclared war" we stood alone. Now few of us can stand at all.

40 years ago the big news was Woodstock. A half million Americans were fighting one of the most brutal wars in our history under the worst conditions of any war we had fought and nobody cared. There was still a draft, designed to protect rich kids, the kind whose families could get them into National Guard or Reserve slots that poor kids weren't allowed in. Sometimes it was connections, sometimes cash payments.

Remember the "National Guard wig?" Guard members would push their pony tails up under skinhead wigs to attend drill. How many of these folks are in Congress now? Dozens.

As with other wars, most Vietnam vets didn't make it to college. Medical care from the VA was almost non existent, though not tens but hundreds of thousands of sick and wounded came home. The worst of them died of hospital infections or neglect. I saw amputees stored in hallways and basements in VA hospitals in unbelievable filth. I will remember this all my life.

I still get sick walking into a VA clinic or hospital. They wonder why PTSD vets don't continue treatment? The VA made our PTSD worse - much worse - and for many is as much a part of the nightmares as the war itself.

Most who started college didn't finish. Fighting untreated PTSD, working, many supporting families and paying for an education with insultingly little GI Bill support made it impossible for most. As many vets made it to prison as college. Others lived under bridges and were in and out of jail. Alcohol, drugs and suicide, in numbers well beyond our current national scandal, was the norm, not the exception.

Why should the government have helped? The debt was owed. Wounded troops, and PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injuries are wounds, are supposed to be cared for. Even those with physical wounds were warehoused and as many killed off as possible. For the others, treatment was often barbaric.

Our GI bill for Vietnam was a gutted version of the one WW2 vets had. Those vets controlled the service organizations that denied Vietnam veterans membership and advised the Veterans Administration on policy.

Policy: Ignore Vietnam vets. Pay them nothing. Disrespect their service and sacrifice. Block their funds. Push them aside. This is what happened.

As more and more Vietnam veterans died, tens of thousands of them, even early on, nothing was done. There were no studies, no votes on a new GI bill nor any investigations. All we got were movies like Rambo with vets shown as cartoon morons, criminals or dangerous psychopaths. Vet bashing was an industry in America.

Veterans: real combat veterans, continued to make up the population of prisons, homeless shelters, county jails and to take up the lowest paying jobs. Military retirees, most with NO combat experience in Vietnam as the war was fought on a daily basis by only the lowest ranks, got the post office jobs and other federal employment. We call them "double dippers."

Combat vets from Vietnam suffered malnutrition on a massive scale. Not even aging C-Rations were available and troops often lived on less than 500 calories a day for weeks at a time. There were no hot meals, no fresh foods of any kind, no fruit, no vegetables, no milk, nothing. Vets returned with their teeth falling out and generally deteriorated health.

Agent Orange: Huge numbers of vets came home with a skin condition now called "*chloracne*". This was followed by migraine headaches and neurological symptoms that sometimes resembled Parkinson's Disease. Then came the diabetes and cancers. Vets began dying as though victims of a plague.

Our answer? America looked away. We ignored it as we did with Gulf War Illness. Half the Agent Orange diseases may still be unrecognized for treatment today and the ones on the list weren't admitted to until so many died it no longer mattered.

How were AO vets with cancer treated? Most weren't diagnosed and when they were, the VA used the cheapest and worst treatments available. Friends of mine that survived sold their homes to pay for cancer treatment or had advanced treatments because of jobs with health insurance. How many had cancer? We will never be told. My first "fatal" cancer diagnosis was 1995.

Money: The average E2-3 combat soldier in Vietnam made between \$7 and \$8 a day, less than 10% of the pay of current troops. Out of this money, they had to buy uniforms, toiletries and often food. Troops returned from war totally broke.

Today's veterans are sometimes having disability claims held up a year. Vets are now on PTSD disability at 20 years old. Many Vietnam veterans are only being diagnosed now. My best guess is that the average PTSD disability finding for a Vietnam veteran happens at 58 years old, not 20. If anyone can prove me wrong, please do. The average time from onset to treatment has been over 20 years and from treatment to disability compensation, over 10 years and for some 20 or more.

Families: PTSD vets seldom have families or can seldom keep them. PTSD vets are unemployable with some holding dozens of jobs over the years with long periods of unemployment. This tears families apart and crushes children.

What was the government supposed to do? These vets needed treatment and the disability compensation current vets are now fighting, successfully, to get, for life, the day they leave service. This would have given the families a living income, health insurance, excellent college assistance for children and much more.

Instead, it caused a generation of suffering, not only from undiagnosed PTSD, but from tens of thousands with undiagnosed Agent Orange illnesses and the related birth defects, only some of which are even admitted to decades later. Who would die first, the vet or his child?

How do we find and help the combat vets of Vietnam who were screwed over? Biggest place to look is easy. Buy a shovel.

Next best tool, a lie detector. Chances are most of the Rambo types you have been running into all your lives are total liars or were in the Alabama National Guard or, even if in Vietnam, working in an office. All veterans that served "in country" have issues, with Agent Orange and other problems crossing lines through every MOS. (military occupational specialty).

Combat vets: These were the "stepchildren" of the military. They were brought in to be used up and discarded. Enlistees who opted for 4 years or more were able to negotiate non-combat options and most did. Thus, a 4 year enlistee with a 5th grade education could work in "intelligence" and a college grad, engineer, teacher or pre-law, with a 2 year enlistment would be a "grunt."

If this doesn't explain exactly how the military got the way it is and how it works, I don't know what does. Getting food to combat units was never a priority. Getting uniforms, weapons and ammunition wasn't either.

Boots and body armor were picked up off the ground, discarded by rotating, wounded or the dead. "Here's a good pair of pants, only a few holes. See if you can get the blood out of them."

This was good training for going to college on GI bill.

Is there responsibility for fixing the lives of grown children, raised in poverty, denied insurance, educational benefits or a stable family? Is it a problem. Yes, of course. Should it be done? Yes, today is decades late, but not too late.

Veterans Service Organizations: It was all about hair. Vets came back from Vietnam and grew hair, beards and did anything to be accepted by their peers. Acceptance by the older generation was hopeless. Old always resented young. Add hundreds of movies, TV shows and the endless stories of "baby killer vets" and the old lived in terror of Vietnam veterans. African Americans must have felt some relief about this.

VSO's were all about old people. To Vietnam veterans, guys in their 50s were old. These were the people who ran the VSO's and they were jealous, resentful and afraid. Being young in 1969 meant you were having sex, the "kegger orgies" seen in every movie. Veteran and outlaw biker meant the same to them. Funny thing, veterans now have taken on the garb of the outlaw bikers as their own.

Veterans also competed for funding. With hundreds of thousands of undiagnosed WW2 and Korean War PTSD victims suffering from years of cigarettes and booze, and all the related illnesses, the VA was built around serving a clientele that was half rural uninsured and half "skid row bum."

VSO's worked hard to see that NO effort was made to make room for tens of thousands of seriously wounded veterans who had been subjected to years of brutal combat. A third, much lower priority of veteran was established behind the "skid row bum." This was the wounded vet, many multiple amputees or nearly unrecognizable from burns.

Don't see many of these folks around anymore? Surprise, surprise. How long could someone in this condition survive in a hospital that belonged in Albania or Somalia? Were they this bad? Yes, they were. Those who know them well will never forget.

What is unique about the abuse of the Vietnam veteran is that it has gone on so long. Rather than things getting better, the current war is making them worse. Our "volunteer army," less and less volunteer and more and more "economic refugee," eats up funds.

Throwing money at war, done for profit, not support of the troops, is America's biggest racket. Troops are fed, overfed and have military marvels helping them that many, even now, can't imagine. We also find our new troops, unemployed, dead of suicide, homeless or serving in combat, afraid of losing the only job available, while wounded or driven to mental instability.

Is this a reason to crush the remaining Vietnam vets who have suffered so long? Is buying an army for our crazy adventures in the land of oil and opium an excuse for more murder and betrayal? Yes, it seems so, because that is exactly what is being done.

Are current troops responsible? Of course not. If I had been offered food, I would have eaten. If we could have had helicopters or moderately good body armor, I might have worn it, maybe not. Play station and internet? Yes, in a damned minute along with any air conditioning I could find.

Blame? Not the troops. Blame. Not even the government. Blame Americans willing to live as though nothing can touch them while others suffer in their name. Christ wasn't the only one. Blasphemy, maybe, but more than Christ has been crucified to cover the sins of the many.

Do we owe just the Vietnam vets? We owe them, mostly, but will never be able to pay enough or undo the horrors wrought. We pay \$4500 for a junk car and hundreds of billions to crooked banks and health insurance companies whose management live like Arab sheiks, on taxpayer welfare.

What would I do if the government sent me a million bucks reparation, part of what they owe? Could I buy back one day of suffering, my own illnesses, watching my friends die or seeing families do without?

There are things we can do. We can pass on real GI bill benefits to our children, even those over 30 who now still have to go back to school to survive in the economic nightmare America has come. All we ever cared about was them anyway.

Should grandchildren be helped? Of course. Vietnam has caused generations of poverty and suffering, all directly due to the criminal misconduct of our government, the disdain of our people and the greed of our military/industrial complex.

Is this a debt really owed? No debt is owed more and no group more deserving, not current troops, not people wanting new pickup trucks, not wealthy bankers worried about keeping the pool at their summer home in top condition with bailout money.

We took a generation and murdered them. It was a holocaust. Vets fought for education, jobs and to have a decent life for themselves and their families.

How did we help them? Doing nothing at all would have been an improvement. No medical care is better than systematic euthanasia thinly veiled as criminal neglect.

Decades of insults, lies, deceit and every cheap administrative ploy and dodge possible has not gone unnoticed. We all know it, we all see it and we are not forgetting any of it. None of us are robbing banks or running around the woods playing militia. The scandal sheets love talking about it, but it simply isn't true.

We are going to continue trying to look after each other, our families and even the current troops and new vets. It is all we know and we are too old to become anything different. We were brave and loyal then and aren't likely to change.

Many of us are broken, sick, wracked with pain and many dying, not just us but our brothers from the gulf war and the newer generation who are kids to us, not just kids but our kids.

Anger and neglect have not made us less American and more "Wall Street" or "Country Club." Check your history, this is how we spent 40 years. Ghandi could use some of us as examples.

Some of us joined the VSO's, some to change them, some because posts chose to stick by them and some because there was no where else to go. Thus far, the VSO's are still dumb, sometimes harmful and blind. That may change, but most of us won't live long enough to see it.

Government? We have lost hope here. The heroes of the past have been replaced by the most deceitful and spineless Congress in our history. There are lions there. Decent people serve, but the real power lies outside the halls and in the back rooms where packets of money move in, and honor is placed aside.

Reparations? Why pay debts easily forgotten to people who are dying anyway?

Is honor worth it? Is the lesson worth paying for? Is the real reason to save families, not only families but the most deserving families in America?

Victims: These are victims of, not a natural disaster or attack but of hate, fear, neglect and dishonor, not by a few but by all, every one of us.

Nobody is innocent. Everyone should pay.

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