

Their Life Matters
An Essay on *Waging Peace in Vietnam: U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War*
by Tiffany Trumble

The government, a most talented organization promoting violence and propaganda, does one thing particularly well: indoctrination. The patriotism of nations is to such an extent that death and destruction against “foreigners” are largely justified without question. A curious proposition, as that *symbol* of land ownership can be altered with the same dedication given to wars. This manufactured divide between nations, regardless of intent, seems to be a most accomplished way to ensure continued violence, making all the more necessary exhibits such as *Waging Peace in Vietnam: U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War*. The stories and the efforts of the anti-war protestors display the importance of deconstructing lines between “us” and “them.”

I spent seven years in the U.S. Army, and I am ashamed to admit I glorified the fight of America against “all enemies, both foreign and domestic.” The ugly truth is that we are *told* these are our enemies, and we take it at face value—we are trained to. But that child who lost their limbs, due to the repercussions of war, is no enemy of ours. The children who died, the women, the grandparents, every individual holding a gun that was persuaded or coerced to fight and kill, was greatly wronged in those long years. Trained, as these soldiers were, to obey orders, it is a wonder to see and hear of their strength, commitment, and bravery as they stand up to their country. This farce our government deems *freedom* was not expected by the soldiers and veterans who defied the fallacious patriotism of their nation. They did not know their fate. Every individual that openly objected to the Vietnam War had no idea of the cost they would pay, nor what it would pay for. But they did it anyway.

As we watch today's wars and those that will undoubtedly follow, it is of the greatest importance to remember our history. Without exhibits like *Waging Peace in Vietnam*, we would forget: We have forgotten! Too many people do not know the horrors of the violence, the strength of the resisters, or the pain of every person affected. In our attempt to protect our children from the egregious acts we commit, we all but ensure the

lessons are forgotten. Desirable as it is to hide from our shame, our desires are not the only ones worth considering. Sharing mistakes is important in order to learn from them.

There is no evil that ends at the end of the act; it grows, it spreads, continuously and without prejudice. The cost of war is heavy, and the people who pay for it are not the ones deciding to wage it. And even if you think it is justified now, I beg that you reconsider, just as all the soldiers and veterans in the exhibit did. As I did. Our belief system is not inherent in us. Release these questionable beliefs taught by our parents, by teachers, by peers, by the government; we are not required to hold onto them when they contradict our values. Look at this exhibit. Read the testimonies. View the cost of war. As history repeats itself throughout the world, we can all do with a reminder that each person matters. Your choice matters. Your voice matters. Your life matters. Their life matters.