Ted Engelmann

Objects for Deployment

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veteransbookproject.com

This is a book about the invisible wounds of war that affect us as individuals, families, communities and as a nation.

From my perspective as an individual with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from my 1968-69 tour in the American War in Viet Nam, and from first-hand experience with the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I believe that our national psyche suffers a type of Post Traumatic Stress Denial.

By sustaining the war in Viet Nam for eleven years, we hurt our families, our nation and so many others. The facts are evident. The reason for war in Viet Nam was a lie. The specious nature of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution is there to see. Yet, collectively and individually, like a dysfunctional family, it is difficult to face this truth, and many are still in denial.

On 9/11 a second national trauma hit America. With the underlying emotions unresolved from the American War in Viet Nam, our nation was vulnerable to emotional manipulation. Our reaction: the invasion of Iraq. The result: a new generation of soldiers and their families is experiencing the emotional effects of war, which are compounded by the multiple and extended deployments they endure. The lasting results: a high number of military suicides, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and PTSD (Soldier's Heart).

THE INVISIBLE WOUNDS OF WAR

CIVIL WAR

"Soldier's Heart"

During the Civil War doctors created the term "Soldier's Heart" to describe physiological symptoms such as the soldiers' racing heart, heart palpitations and fast breathing. In those days the medical system didn't recognize the impact our emotions had on our physical health.

The photograph on page five is my great-great grandfather, Sergeant Henry Wood, Company H, 136th Regiment of the Illinois Volunteers. He fought with Sherman on his march to Atlanta. Although his discharge papers indicate he served 100 days, I wonder about his war experiences and his feelings about the war. Did he suffer from "Soldier's Heart?"

WORLD WAR I

"Shell Shock"

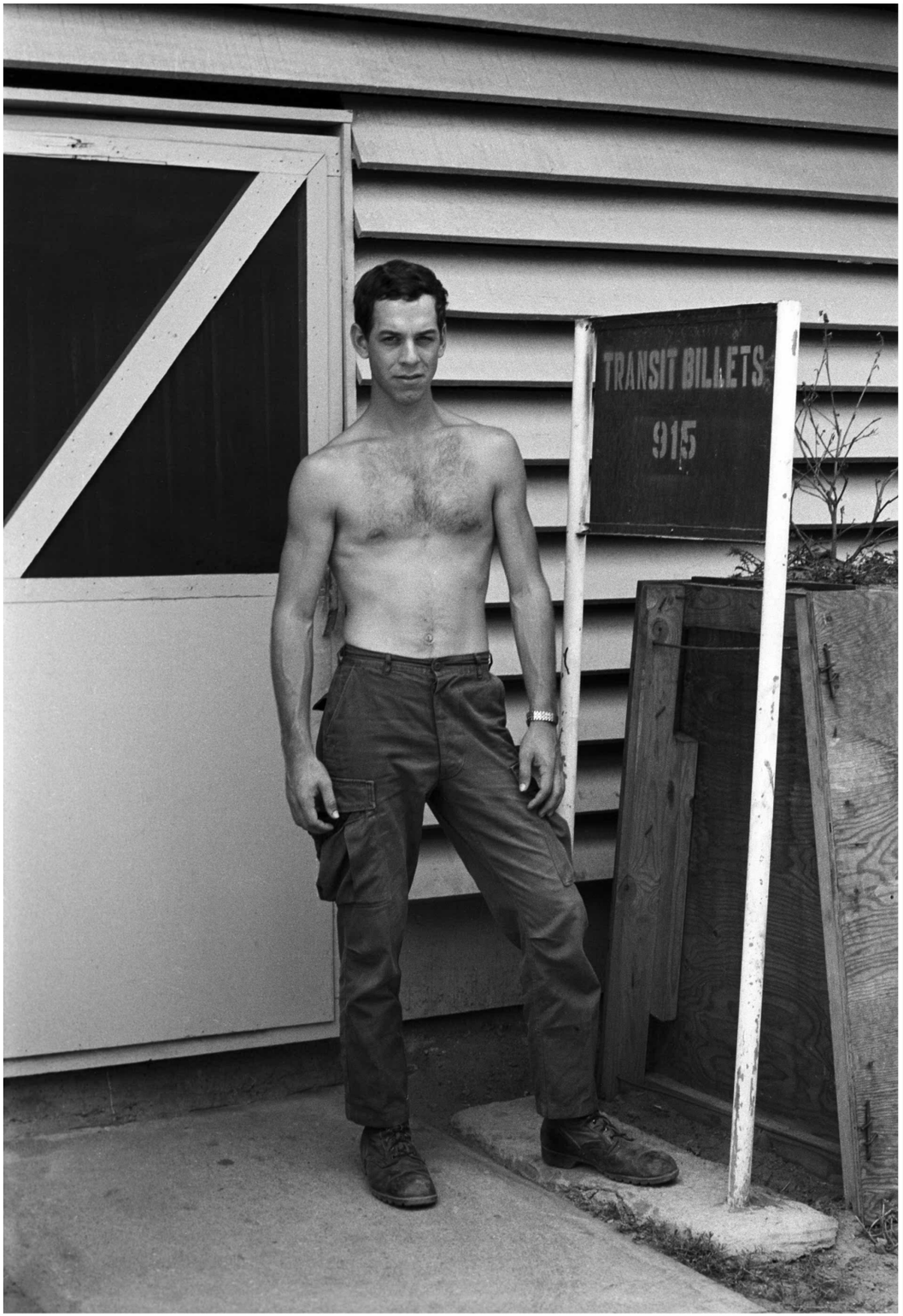
With the development of high explosives by the start of World War I the intense and incessant bombardments caused a high number of casualties. Doctors recognized a dramatic rise of traumatized soldiers – like the renowned British poet, Lt. Wilfred Owen – whom they diagnosed as "shell shocked." As a result of "shell shock," a large number of British soldiers became "deserters." They were tried and "shot-at-dawn." Today it is widely accepted that most of these soldiers were not cowards, but emotionally broken. Their names have recently been reinstated to the rolls of those killed in service to their country.

WORLD WAR II

"Combat Fatigue"

During World War II and the Korean War the symptoms of emotional stress from combat were called “Combat Fatigue.” My father (lower right) was in the September 1944 invasion of the Philippines.

The Army discovered that an effective soldier was emotionally and physically able to withstand 45 days of combat. Many American soldiers spent 80 days on the line before they were relieved. My friend, Edward W. Wood, Jr., notes in his book, 'Worshiping the Myths of World War II,' a quotation from Michael Doubler in 'Closing With the Enemy,' “The Armies in Europe evacuated 151,920 cases of neuropsychiatric disorders to hospitals in 1944 and 1945, and combat units discovered that on average, for every three men killed or wounded, one other soldier became a psychiatric casualty."



WAR IN VIET NAM

"PTSD"

In 1980, five years after the end of the American War in Viet Nam, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became the official medical diagnosis for emotional wounds of war and other life-threatening traumas. Since an official diagnosis didn't exist until 1980, veterans couldn't receive proper treatment from the VA for their emotional wounds. Personally, I like "Soldier's Heart."

IRAQ

"PTSD"

For the past few years, as the result of multiple and extended deployments among American Reservists, National Guard and active duty soldiers, there is a very high rate of PTSD and other emotional problems. This is not surprising since soldiers have been trained to consider anyone coming close to their convoy as potential threats. In training they were ordered to run over cardboard cutouts in the shape of humans. In reality this means they were trained to run over children.

AFGHANISTAN

"Military Sexual Trauma"
(MST)

There are a large number of American military women in the combat theater who are subject to the same combat stress as any soldier. Just like their male counterparts, female soldiers operate machine guns in armored vehicles.

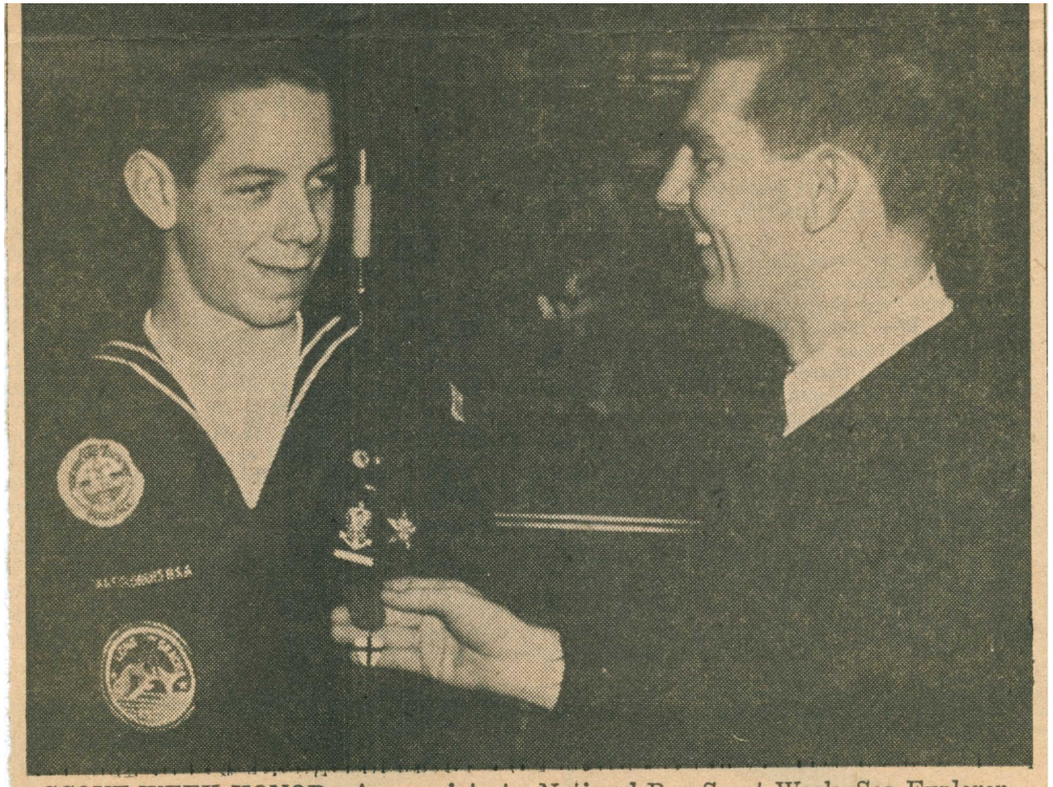
In 2010, the VA indicated that 40% of women and 1% of men reported sexual assault.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

With the advent of television and a prospering society, my generation was entertained with "cowboy and Indian," and shoot 'em-up types of visuals. The proliferation of violent acts and language throughout American culture today accounts for a major portion of the images we see in the "entertainment" industry. In a way, video games train children to be future soldiers. Today you can press a button (trigger) and kill without emotion, face-to-face interaction or concern about human feelings. It's called "fire-and-forget," and it numbs the emotions.

I grew up with guns: toy guns and real guns. In this picture I am holding a real gun. By the time I was a teen Dad taught me the military manual of arms:

Attention…
Right shoulder arms...
Left shoulder arms...
Port arms…
Attention...
Parade rest...



SCOUT WEEK HONOR—Appropriate to National Boy Scout Week, Sea Explorer George T. Engelman 3rd, is shown receiving God and Country Award, highest religious honor in scouting, from the Rev. Fred Brooks, associate pastor, First Methodist Church, Oneonta.

It's afternoon, I'm in my teens and both parents are downstairs working in the basement. Mom's doing laundry and Dad's in his shop. Mom asks me to go upstairs to the kitchen and get some sugar for her coffee. Even though she told me the location twice, I can't find it. On the third trip back downstairs to ask for directions, I am very nervous. I know Dad is getting upset with me for not finding something so simple as a sugar bowl. All of a sudden he flies into a rage. He kicks me and beats me as he pushes me up the stairs. I wet my pants. Mom, usually our protecting angel, stands by, helpless. Upstairs, Dad grabs me by the neck, takes me to the cupboard and shows me the hidden sugar bowl.

Trauma is cumulative.

I believe that being traumatized during childhood makes a person more susceptible and vulnerable to the effects of trauma later in life, as do events in adulthood. Viet Nam veterans often took jobs as emergency first-responders: police, fire and paramedics. We were attracted to the familiar adrenaline rush.

Sadly I often treated my two stepdaughters like my dad treated me. To break the cycle of emotional trauma and a dysfunctional marriage, I left two wonderful little girls in order to heal myself, hoping someday, when they were older, they would understand I wasn't a total ogre, just a messed up guy who didn't want to cause them further pain and suffering.

Because of Dad's behavior I'm pretty sure I had PTSD by the time I was three or four years old. I was hyper-alert, acted out in school and was emotionally bottled up, to name a few symptoms. Outside the house Dad was real nice and a lot of fun to others, but when he got behind closed doors, he could be a real son-of-a-gun. Unlike Tom Brokaw's suggestion that World War II veterans came back hale and hardy ready to start new lives, many stuffed their emotional problems.

When I was born Dad was attending Indiana University on the GI-Bill. We lived in Woodlawn Courts, a football field full of trailers for the GIs and their families. Mom told me she and others could hear the screams and crying of the veteran families. Evidently no one said anything, but everyone knew.

My aunt told me that once when I was crying in my highchair, Dad backhanded me and knocked me out of the chair and across the floor of the trailer. She picked me up and got me out of there before anything else happened to me.

MILITARY SERVICE

My last year in high school my family moved to a new town and I had a rough time adjusting. My name and identity changed, Dad suggested I use Ted, my middle name, instead of George. I left all my friends behind and completed my senior year at a new school. I was miserable and a bit rebellious. Luckily I graduated from high school. Because of the upheaval, I had no plans for the immediate future. To maintain my student deferment and avoid the draft I enrolled in the local community college. Before the end of the first semester I was on academic probation due to too much partying and too little studying. I could see the handwriting on the wall: I knew I wasn't going to make it, even in a community college. To enlist in the Air Force or Navy, you had to have a high school diploma. I enlisted in the Air Force for four years to mature, get an education, travel and avoid the war in Viet Nam. Thousands of young men were picked off by the draft and died simply because they didn't graduate from high school.

Dear Dad

I arrived safely at Lackland AFB, Texas and have been assigned to the 3724 Basic Military Training Squadron. My mailing address is:

AB Engelman, George T.

AF 12741409

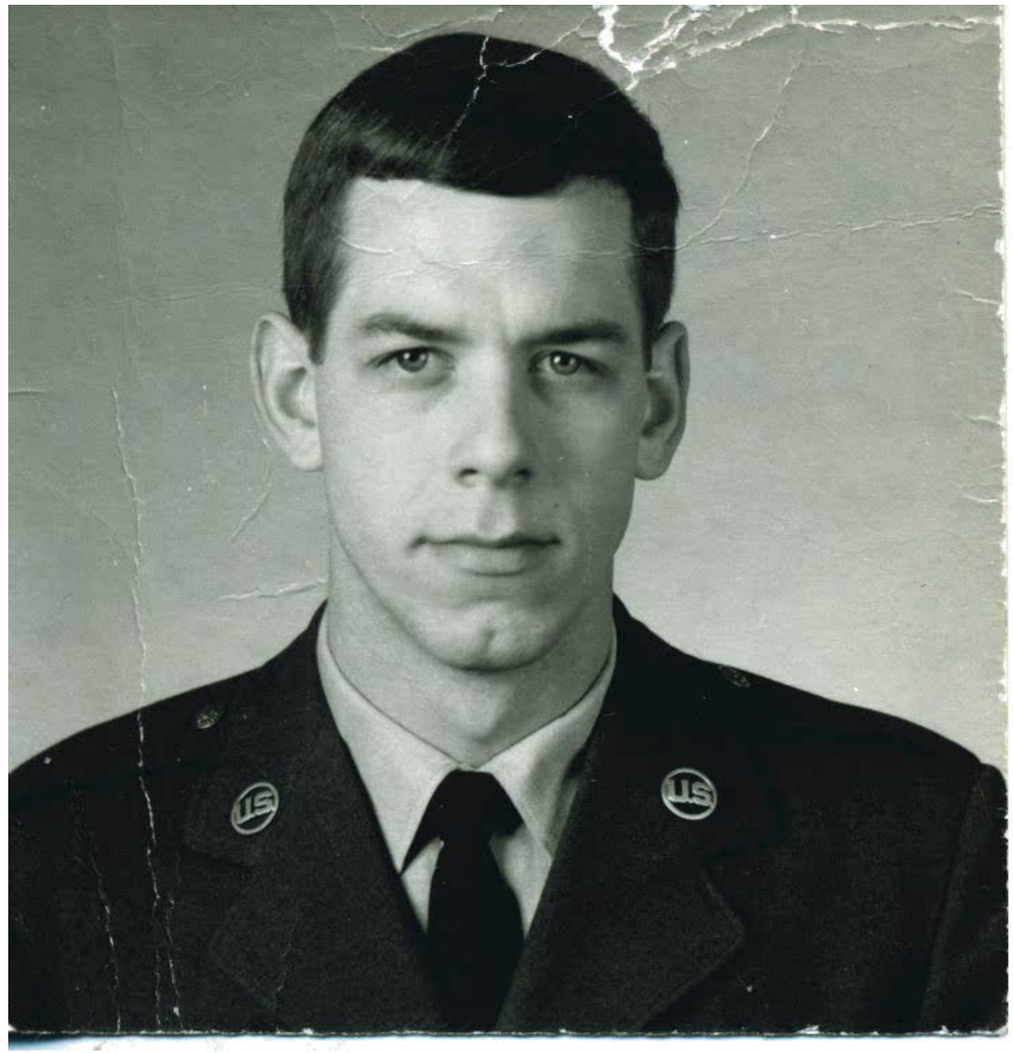
Box 1524 Flight 244

Lackland AFB, Texas 78236

In the event you require information as to my status, contact the Commander of the 3724 Basic Military Training Squadron.

If an emergency arises which requires my presence at home, contact the closest American Red Cross office, explain the emergency and give them my name, rank, service number and military address. The Red Cross will do the rest.

You may receive solicitations from commercial insurance companies, investment firms, encyclopedia salesman and others. The Air Force does not indorse any particular company, and although I do not have what used to be called a $10,000 "free insurance" policy, I do have "free Dependents Indemnity Compensation", and other benefits.



BASIC TRAINING

This photograph, taken in February of 1966, shows I have the military bearing Dad taught me, but no weapon. In tech school I was developing skills in electronics. Viet Nam was not on my radar.

VIET NAM

March 1968 - March 1969

Change of plans: during my third year of service I got orders for "Vietnam." When I arrived in Viet Nam I was issued a weapon, a flack jacket and a helmet.

We forget Viet Nam is a country, not a war.

In Vietnamese, Viet means "people," and Nam means "south." This was to differentiate the Viets, the "people of the south" from the "people of the north," the Chinese. From my understanding,The New York Times was the first newspaper to publish "Vietnam." In the 1950s reporters filed stories by cable, which charged per word. It made economic sense to condense Viet Nam, Ha Noi, Sai Gon, and other names. Because of the lack of cultural awareness, this misspelling stuck over the course of the eleven-year war. I think by using Viet Nam, which is the correct name and spelling of the country, Americans, especially veterans, could develop a new cognitive and emotional reference for the war and gain new perspectives about our country's global

My job in Viet Nam was to help direct air strikes, but not directly engage the enemy. I was a member of a Forward Air Control (FAC) team. I drove a radio jeep, worked radios with the Army in their Tactical Operations Center (TOC) or at times sat in the back of a small spotter plane, an O1-E "Bird Dog." I was a moving target with little or no protection.

When driving my radio jeep I carried several unauthorized guns, but felt I never had enough protection. In my mind I knew I had a certain amount of bullets and grenades, but always had the nagging worry there were more VC than I could manage. I figured I could die at any time. I still don't know why I'm alive. Since 1969 I've felt like I have been living on borrowed time.

At the army base camp, during my only appearance at chapel one Sunday, the chaplain was saying things that had the ring of "kill a commie for Christ." For the first time in my life I realized that in war, God is not on any side.

The last line on my dog tags read: METHODIST. I decided to have new dog tags made in the local village. Now the last line reads: NONE

The ribbon on the chain is my "short-timer's ribbon" which came from a bottle of Seagram's VO. A soldier got one of these when his tour was less than 100 days. As we said at the time, when you became a "short-timer," you got the "double-digit fidgets."

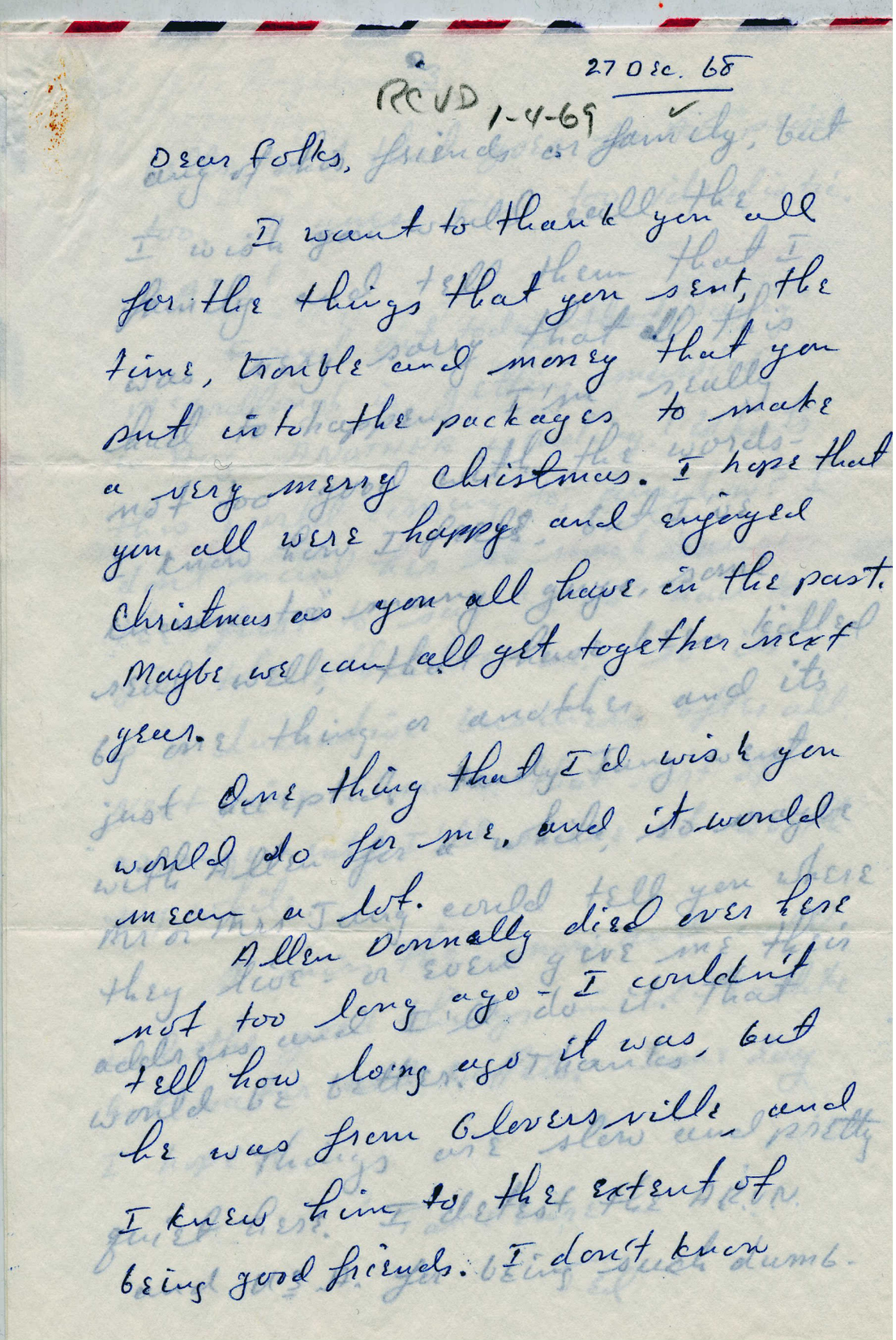
In the context of the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan we hear the words about "god and country." An Army chaplain, a major, explained that about 50% of the military chaplains today have been converted to believe the wars in the Middle East are religious: Christianity vs. Islam.

That was really a high-light of the week, in fact. It me feel off the ground....now I know how Mom felt in tal with you previously. I thought we had a real good hook- except I find I lose some of your words i you don't tal rather slowly and precisely. Normal conversation gets a bit garbled with the small distortions that creep in. B was a swell pleasure to be able to speak with you, Son, we do arpreciate this opportunity. When you rang off to the operator at this end said, "Thank you, Mr. Engelmen. thought that was kind of him-- a nice guy. And I thanke too.

Nice thing about this calling business-- it sort of kno the stuffings out of the miles between us. Being able t talk makes it like you're in Robins or Biloxi....hard to realize that you're hal -way around the world!

Next best thing to having you walk inthe front door! Th the event I'm really waiting for!!

Before I forget-- your call came in here around 1330 Hrs April (Monday)--- what was it there? Gotta get me orien



27 Dec. 68

RCVD 1-4-69

Dear folks,

I want to thank you all for the things that you sent, the time, trouble and money that you put in to the packages to make a very merry Christmas. I hope that you all were happy and enjoyed Christmas as you all have in the past. Maybe we can all get together next year.

One thing that I'd wish you would do for me, and it would mean a lot.

Allen Donnelly died over here not too long ago - I couldn't tell how long ago it was, but he was from Cleversville and I knew him to the extent of being good friends. I don't know

My father kept every letter I sent to him along with a carbon copy of his typed return letters. Fortunately, he gave them to me. These letters take me back to a very emotional time in my life.

Even today I am cautious around these letters. I always looked for a double meaning in whatever my father wrote. That's how I knew him. He would say something nice and then often turn it around against me. There came a point in my life when I didn't trust what he said anymore. Even reading these intimate letters I still feel that. I read them as the major relating to the sergeant and vise versa.

I'm sorry that my negligence in writing has bothered you so
and I don't have any excuse other than I write when I want to an
because I feel I have to. That may seem to be a rather selfish
to take, but more and more I am by myself physically and in my t
and there isn't anybody else. Of course there is my family, and
worry about you also. I think at times it's more dangerous to b
certain places in the States than over here. I imagine that the
ings that happen with you people that you don't tell me, same
don't tell you.

14 January 69
1920 Hours

Ted,

Got your 7 Jan letter today and thought I'd sit down for the next few minutes and get a start on answering it. I have to go over to Dr. Brase's in a short while to work on the new catalog, so I'll have to take a pause soon.

It soulnds like we've one bad habit in common -- that of taking things too darned seriously. Not that it isn't good to be serious about certain things, but not to let it take over and ruin our entire outlook on life and all that goes in it.

For instance -- I bitch and rail about people putting stupid stuff; you do the same. I hate to see injustices; you're the same. I despise inefficiency, you do too. Right on down the line -- we are pretty much alike in this business of griping over the imperfections of others. And you know what?? It won't make a damned bit of difference how much we grouse around -- we won't get those ignorant sob's to change one little bit!! Who loses in the deal? We do. We're the ones who spent all the time, worrying about others. The s-o-b's aren't out anything, because the don't give a second thought about the people and problemsn around them.

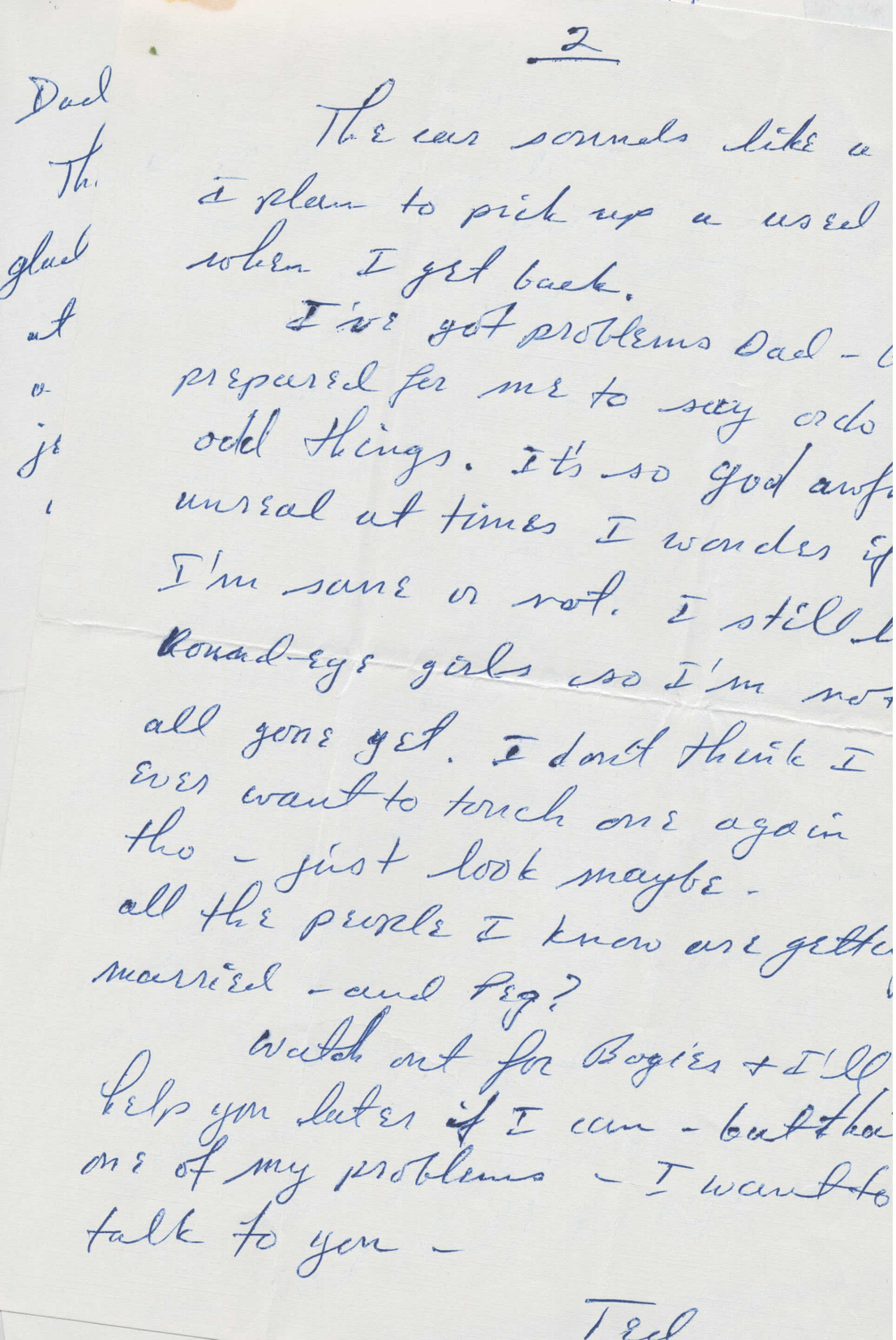
We have to learn the be more careful about the values we put on things. Knowing what to worry about, and what to forget is important. We could drive ourselves to the head shrinker by constantly torturing ourselves with the shortcomings of the day.

Ted, how I wish we could sit down in a good-long talk right now. I feel so darned inadequate, sitting here -- and you'rd out there. Distance, and not knowing what really bugs you the most makes it impossible to be of any immediate help to you. Please figure it this way -- in about two months we'll have the opportunity to get off to one side and try to figure some things out. I would like to take a week off from work and the two of us would bug out for Lewey Lake or some place with the new wagon, the cook stove, the sleeping bags, etc. Sounds to me like a swell chance to get away from everything else for a while. How does that sound to you?

Ted, you're a solid type ofguy. Please just think that it won't be long now -- and you'll be getting an entirely different view of things. Keep a good grasp on yourself. If you can tell me more in a letter, please feel free to do so -- and it's just for the two of us -- you call the shots. But I'm pretty lost right now as to what I can say -- I just don't know what the score is. Ok. Right back at you. Take care for now, Short-timer!

Affectionately,

Dad



2

Dad

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glad

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The cars sounds like a
it plans to pick up a used
when I get back.
I've got problems Dad -
prepared for me to say or do
odd things. It's so god awf
unreal at times I wonder if
I'm sane or not. I still
Round-eye girls so I'm no
all gone yet. I don't think I
ever want to touch one again
tho - just look maybe -
all the people I knew are gett
married - and Peg?
watch out for Bogies + I'll
help you later if I can - but tha
one of my problems - I want to
talk to you -

Ted

"I want to talk to you."

But we never did.

The first time I saw dead bodies after returning from Viet Nam, my immediate reaction came from instincts developed in war.

The four photographs on the following page tell a story that says a lot about my life after Viet Nam. One picture shows my sister, a family friend and my mother having a picnic on the Blue Ridge Parkway in western North Carolina. Even while looking at the photograph I don't remember the picnic. My emotional tunnel vision remembers seeing only the auto accident we encountered that day along the highway. My instinctive reaction was to stop and search for survivors and give first aid. In my memory I can see myself climbing into the car, reaching through the broken windshield and pulling a blanket over the elderly woman's dead body in the front seat. I remember attempting to comfort the elderly man, her husband, knowing he was close to death.

Realizing there was no more that I could do, in anger and frustration because no help came from the onlookers, I finally abandoned the accident. This was 1971, only two years after my tour in Viet Nam. I was wired for crisis and death. In many ways I still have those instinctual reactions. Adrenaline kicks in and I react. I realized years later after finding these photographs in my dad's album that this traumatic event was part of a larger scene with family and my dad taking pictures.

As I write this my frustration bubbles up again. I'm angry that those people couldn't or wouldn't step up and help. I'm frustrated and angry that we (America) keep sending soldiers off to fight wars when other methods of solving our problems would cost less in lives, money and destruction. I know that many of our soldiers return like I did, live fuses of emotion.

I also realize the emotional triggers of my PTSD will continue to surface throughout my life. It's a constant process adjusting, it's hard, but I'm always getting better.

6-11-71 PICNIC - BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY NEAR BLOWING ROCK, NC MART - JULIE CECERE, IRENE

TED - HELPING IN DOUBLE FATALITY 6-10-71 NE N.C.

ICONS OF THE COALITION

I see many parallels between the political and military attempts to validate American foreign policy, both now and then. During the period of the American War in Viet Nam, President Johnson created the “many flags” program that made it look like America wasn’t a bully country since other countries joined in the war. President Bush's “coalition of the willing” is basically the same. The implicit message from President Bush to the world was, “Either you are with us or against us.”

This "7-Flag Chieu Hoi (safe conduct) Pass," is about the size of a U.S. dollar bill. The American military dropped these safe conduct passes out of airplanes throughout South Viet Nam to encourage the Viet Cong to come over to our side.

The seven flags pictured on the front of the pass represent the Republic of Viet Nam (center), United States, Australia, Thailand, Philippines, New Zealand and South Korea.

A decade after the devastating Korean War, the Korean (ROK) government was looking for a war to bolster it's economy. The government of President Park Chung Hee got the United States to pay the Republic of Korea over a billion dollars for 312,000 ROK soldiers to fight in Viet Nam and to provide other support services, which helped Korea become an economic "Asian Tiger."

The My Lai massacre in 1968 by American soldiers is well known. The many massacres of Vietnamese civilians by ROK soldiers are still hidden.

War is an equal opportunity employer.

The flags in this patch that I bought at an Army post exchange in Baghdad represent President Bush's "coalition of the willing." Many of these countries have minimal presence in the war, but that presence nevertheless validated the American invasion. Might makes right.

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This plaque shows the coalition for the war in Afghanistan is a NATO operation, although many of the coalition countries have already recalled their minimal troops. The many flags shown here symbolize the presence of these countries, but in reality, the coalition is based on a few, not many flags.

WELCOME HOME

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA
October 1987

After the war in Viet Nam, Australian veterans came to their first welcome home parade in Sydney with their medals in their pockets. They were waiting to see if the crowd would cheer, or jeer them as they marched. Allied soldiers returning from the war in Viet Nam – Americans, Aussies, Koreans, and others – went through many difficulties coming home.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
JUNE 1986

Coming home from a war is difficult. The world you left is no longer there. You are changed. The world you came back to has changed. All American soldiers in Viet Nam were replacements for other soldiers. A combat replacement soldier is new to his unit, new to the job and usually is a danger to himself and others. American soldiers went to Viet Nam for a one-year tour of duty; they arrived alone, they stayed a year, and they returned to the "world" alone, invisible.

Over the years, there has been considerable debate over whether or not Viet Nam veterans were spit on. I don't engage with that debate. Whether it happened or not is beside the point. Being "spit on" seems to be a metaphor for how many of our veterans felt by the way they were treated when they came home.

Some people want to debate the number of veteran suicides. If even one veteran dies from his (or her) own hand as a result of their service to our country, that is a national tragedy; damn the debate.

ANGEL FIRE, NEW MEXICO
May 1986

For a while after 1975, World War II veterans shunned Viet Nam veterans. They won their war. We "lost" ours. When I made this photograph at Angel Fire, New Mexico, in 1986, these two World War II veterans came from New Orleans just to shake hands with Viet Nam veterans. It was their way of saying, "Welcome home, son." It was the first time I remember seeing that happen.

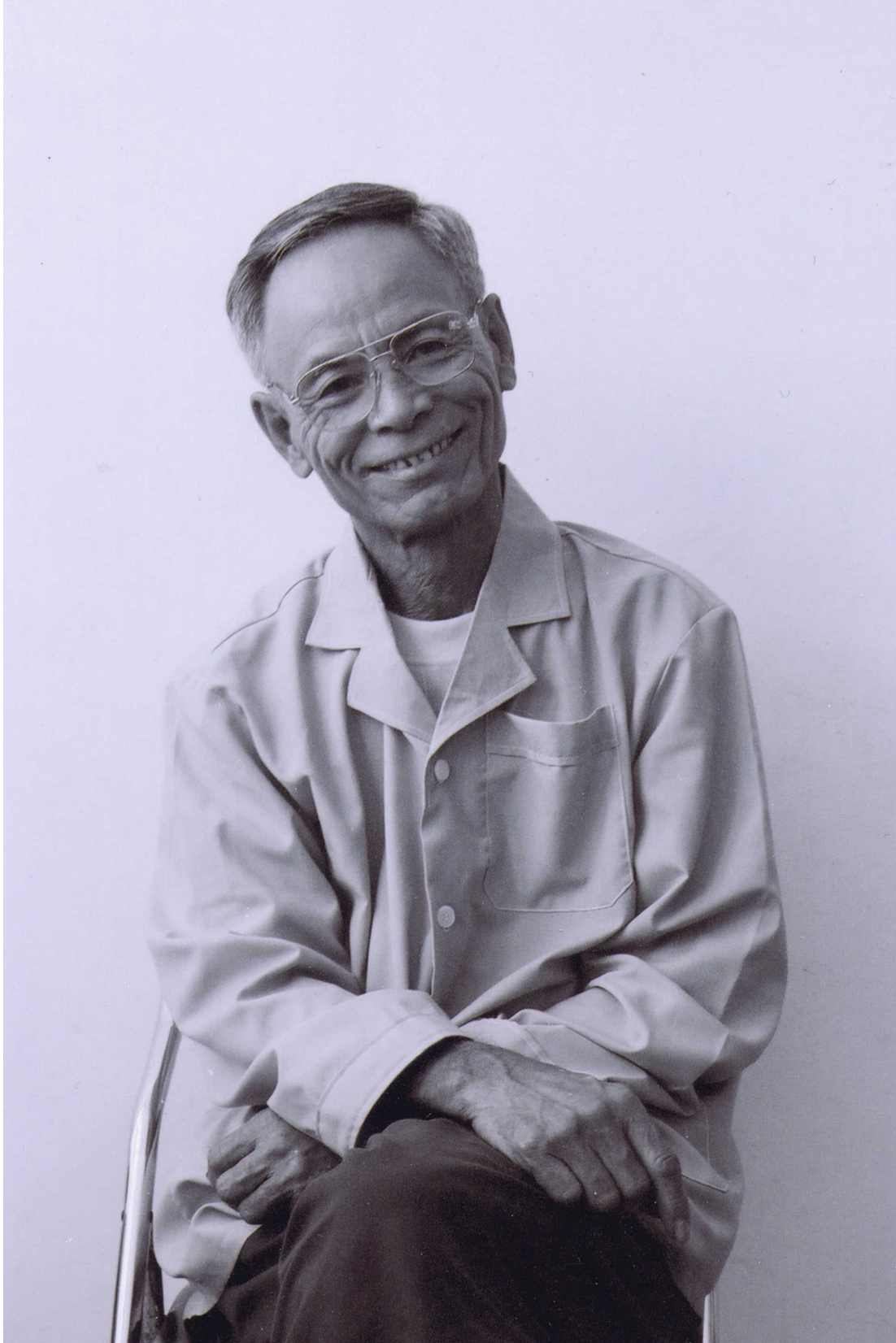
Today soldiers leave and return to war as a unit, unlike the constant stream of replacement soldiers in Viet Nam. The return from Viet Nam could be 18-24 hours from "foxhole to Frisco." Often the soldier was discharged into an unknown and chaotic world, alone. Today's military isolates the departure and return of soldiers from the public. Only at the last moment do the immediate families know details about the arrivals, while the nation is kept in the dark and ignorant of their situation.

RETURNING TO VIET NAM

In 1989 I returned to Viet Nam in order to see what happened to the country where my war took place. From my many trips to Viet Nam since then I learned two important things I think American veterans should know: as an American War veteran I am treated better in Viet Nam than I am in my own country; and, the Vietnamese do not hold American veterans responsible for the damages of the war. They hold our leaders Johnson, Nixon, Kissinger and others responsible.

On the next pages, these Vietnamese veterans from the North were being treated for health problems at Friendship Village, a few kilometers south of Ha Noi. Once we tried to kill each other. Now, as veterans we laugh and cry together.

North Vietnamese Veterans



In February 1989 I arrived in Ha Noi for the first time in my life. The country was still recovering from the war, very poor, but it was at peace. While visiting the Mother and Children's Hospital, I met an expectant mother. Her doctor explained to the young woman that I was an American War veteran and asked her permission if I could be in the delivery room when her baby was born. The mother in labor replied, "Yes." When a healthy baby girl was delivered, cleaned and placed in her arms, the beaming mother told the doctor that her daughter's name would be Hoa Binh (which means peace) because the American War veterans were returning.

In 2009 I tried to find Hoa Binh by showing this photograph on TV and newspapers. She didn't turn up. Feeling I had failed, my Vietnamese friend, who was also a new mother, told me not to worry. She said, "Everywhere you go in Viet Nam you will find Hoa Binh in the hearts of all Vietnamese."

On that first trip in Ha Noi in 1989, I photographed an eight year-old boy and his six year-old sister. Every ten years (1999, 2009) I have photographed the children, including their mother. I give them photographs and find out how they are doing. We have a special bond as friends – even though we live in very different worlds.

Since my initial return trip to Viet Nam in 1989 I have photographed the old US Embassy over ten years: 1995, 1997, and 1999, from the same location atop the Palace Hotel in Sai Gon. The first time I made a photograph of this building I thought I was done. As the years went by I instinctively made more photographs from the hotel roof. Then I noticed the physical changes in the growth of the trees and the skyline. In my 1999 photograph the embassy is completely gone, replaced by a one-story, state-of-the-art consulate. It was then I realized these four photographs might help American veterans recognize the physical and political changes in Viet Nam. President Clinton normalized relations with Viet Nam and the US Embassy is now in Ha Noi. These photographs show, "that was then, this is now, and life goes on."

As former director of the Veterans Administration counseling centers, Dr. Arthur S. Blank Jr. explained that after World War II and the Korean War there were many photographs documenting the rebuilding of Europe and Asia. It was at least a decade after the war before new photographs came out of Viet Nam. In the meantime, the history of the war was frozen. Veterans could only replay their individual mental tapes of their experiences again and again. I hope some of these photographs will help veterans and their families come to understand, Viet Nam is a country, not a war.

1989

1997

1995

1999

In May 2006 I arranged to return to the site of my base camp at Lai Khe, located about sixty kilometers north of Bien Hoa airbase. The building that my unit occupied was originally the laboratory for a French rubber plantation. The buildings are still intact and again serve as the Rubber Research Institute of Viet Nam.

I brought several photographs made in 1968 of these buildings and the hooch where I lived. A research staff member guided me while I re-photographed the buildings shown in my original photographs. When I made a new image, I gave the old print to my guide saying, "This one's done, now let's do the next." I gave away all the photographs of these buildings made during the war.

When I was finished and ready to leave for Saigon, I got in the car but felt something was missing. For a few moments I thought I had lost or misplaced something important, like my notes or camera. Then I realized it wasn't something physical, it was something deep inside. All of a sudden, after 38 years of living with the pain and anger from the war, those emotions somehow evaporated. My only explanation: I gave away the old photos made under the emotions of fear and anger from the war and replaced them with the new ones made in peace. Somehow the process cleared my spirit.

EMBED PHOTOGRAPHER

IRAQ

November - December 2008

Forward Oberating Base (FOB) Falcon
Combat Observation Post (COP) 803
Alpha Company, 1/22nd Infantry
1st Brigade Combat Team
4th Infantry Division
Baghdad

AFGHANISTAN

December 2009 - January 2010

Bagram Airbase
Provincial Reconstruction Team
FOB Lion, Panjshir Valley
COP Pirtle - King
Charlie (C) Troop, 3-61 Cavalry
4th Brigade Combat Team
4th Infantry Division

To complete my photographic story about the emotional effects on soldiers and others, I wanted to know what life was like for today's soldier in comparison to my year in Viet Nam.

I knew about the American war in Iraq,"Operation Iraqi Freedom." I saw the "news" coverage on television and read about it in the papers. It felt like information was being controlled. Americans weren't getting the whole story, let alone the "truth." I wanted to know, what was going on and what was happening? There have been no public forums to discuss or debate these issues. If I photographed this war as it were happening, maybe my images could encourage a discussion.

I applied to the Army Public Affairs Office in New York City to embed. Along with the Media Operations Centers, they provided a schedule for both my embeds in Iraq and Afghanistan. All embeds are required to have their own Individual Body Armor (IBA) and Kevlar helmet, plus be able to carry all their own equipment. The military provides transportation, food, and shelter during the embed.

COP 803
BAGHDAD, IRAQ

During night operations my squad patrolled neighborhood 803 (east of the Baghdad International Airport) looking for IED and Explosive Formed Projectile (EFP) material. This experience was both exciting and scary. It was a new place, but the experience was similar to Viet Nam where we had also looked for locals and their weapons in their own backyard. Often the odds were against us.

While on patrol, I came to realize that I could trust these young soldiers with my life. I hadn't felt that kind of trust in forty years, not since I left my unit in Viet Nam.

Thanksgiving dinner at COP 803. For me, this is a special photograph. At the table sit young men whose lives are forever altered by war. One man died alone a few weeks later in his vehicle from a single gunshot wound. One soldier is now medically retired for PTSD. Another was discharged and took off for the West Coast and hasn't been seen or heard from since. Some of these guys are doing OK. One soldier from COP 803 was redeployed to Afghanistan. This February I received a call that he had died.

The list goes on.

While I was at COP 803, the US Army was doling out three million dollars to the local neighborhood, mainly to keep the peace and improve the local economy. This mother, along with her daughter, was on a list to receive US money for personal projects. One of the soldiers handing out cash made a comment about how ironic it was that a close relative of his had just lost his job in Michigan; it felt really strange to pass out so much American cash while his relative's home was going into foreclosure.

The woman pictured here standing with her hand on her daughter's shoulder told me she was using the money to repair her house that had been destroyed by American bombs. She showed me photos of smeared bloody handprints on the broken house walls; her handprints. Then the mother gently lifted her 8 year-old daughter's shirt to show me the jagged scar that ran from the little girl's naval to her neck. American shrapnel hit the little girl and an Afghan doctor sewed her up the best he could. The experience was so powerful I forgot to ask if I could make a photograph of her scar.

Wes was the turret gunner in my Humvee. His father was a Nam vet. Wes's father never told him about the war in Viet Nam, but he gave him this Zippo lighter. Wes knew what war was about, but he, like some others in the COP, were wondering what their future would be like after the war. Because I was a Viet Nam veteran like many of their fathers, they wanted to know what it was like for me to return to Viet Nam and how I was treated there by the Vietnamese.

Some of the men and women deployed in Iraq and Afghnistan would like to return after the war, when it is safe, to help with the rebuilding.

I feel the war in Afghanistan is very similar to the war in Viet Nam. For example, soldiers wearing nearly fifty pounds of armor, magazines of ammunition and other equipment run operations and walk through villages surrounded by the local civilian population. This population is divided by religion and tribal affiliations, making it very difficult to tell who is friend and who is foe.

In Viet Nam, we wrote letters home. It often took a week for a letter to reach family in the "world," and week for return. Soldiers today communicate in real time with their family and friends through Skype and email.

In this cyber café, every once and a while I could hear tension in the voice of some soldier. In the few minutes available to talk, they seemed to be frustrated trying to find common ground with the person they were talking to. Looking back on my own experience, I think a letter might have been better. Technology doesn't always make life easier when you're in different worlds.

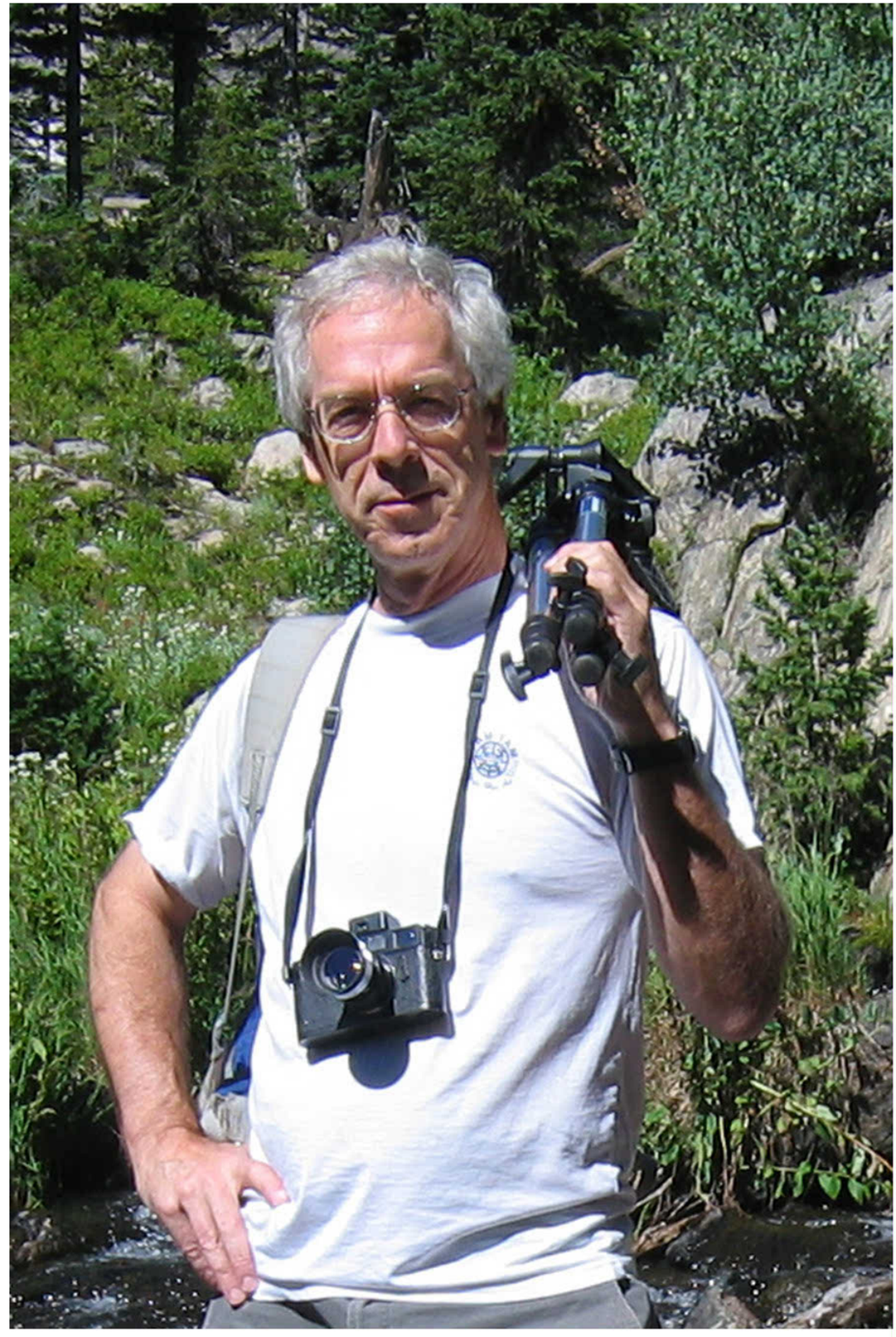
Often American FOBs and COPS are named for soldiers who were killed at that location. FOB Bostick near the village of Naray, in the northeastern province of Kunar, was named for an Army major who was killed in action. Looking at the commemorative plaque I found it ironic that Major Tom Bostick was born in December 1968; at that time I was 21 years old and in Viet Nam. He was young enough to be my son.

People may be poor, but that has nothing to do with their intelligence. The Afghans, like the Vietnamese, say what they think Americans want to hear and then do what they must. As I looked around me in Afghanistan, I felt that American soldiers sometimes displayed a lack of cultural awareness, and were insensitive to the stress put on locals by the war. One American Army captain, for example, kept spitting his dip in a plastic water bottle while talking with local dignitaries. I don't know what the elders thought, but to me, the Captain's behavior was rude, at the very least.

During my first two embeds I was feeling and thinking more like a veteran than a photographer. I found myself feeling like a soldier without a gun; vulnerable and emotionally unable to concentrate on making photographs. On my final embed this upcoming May, I believe I'm ready to focus on being a photographer, albeit, one with the sensitivity of a veteran.

When today's soldiers return from war, their feelings and words of frustration, anger and fear sound like those spoken by soldiers of World War II and Viet Nam. It is a different time and there are different military technologies that make killing easier, but the emotional effect of war on soldiers remains the same.

From my perspective as a veteran I hope to document the conditions in the field that produce these effects.



Had I not gone to Viet Nam, obviously I would be doing something different than living a nomadic existance, without a family, spending my life trying to understand my war and photograph those who are also affected by war.

As individuals, families, as a community and as a nation, we need to become more aware of what we do in war and the effect wars have on ourselves and others. This belief brings me back to Iraq and Afghanistan as an embed once more. The next question is, if we weren't fighting and trying to recover from wars, what could we do instead?

It is an optimistic question. Still, I don't think it's stretching our individual and collective imaginations too much to believe that we can determine the quality of our own lives. Observing President Eisenhower's admonition in his 1961 farewell speech, it will take a conscious effort and time to regain our self-worth from the Military-Industrial-(Political) Complex, but I believe we have the capacity to be resilient and learn a new way.

COLOPHON

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Ted Engelmann is the son of a World War II and Korean War veteran. He enlisted in the US Air Force in February 1966, and was discharged in December 1969. He served a tour in Viet Nam, from March 1968 to March 1969 where he was part of a Forward Air Control (FAC) team directing air strikes north of Saigon and in the Mekong Delta.

Since the 1980s, Ted has lived and traveled throughout Viet Nam, South Korea, Australia, and the US, documenting the parades and memorials to the veterans of the war in Viet Nam. His photographs have been exhibited in venues throughout the United States, Canada, South Korea and Viet Nam.

In November 2008 Ted embedded in Baghdad, Iraq, at Forward Operating Base Falcon, and Combat Observation Post 803, with Alpha Co., 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division. In December 2009, he embedded in Afghanistan at Forward Operating Base Lion in the Panjshir Valley, north of Kabul, and Charlie Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division at Combat Observation Post Pirtle-King in Kunar Province. In May 2011, Ted will embed a final time in the Kandahar region of Afghanistan.

Ted is a Distinguished Lecturer with the Organization of American Historians, and gives presentations to civic groups, schools and colleges on topics about the American Wars in Viet Nam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Ted currently lives in Denver, Colorado where he is completing his photographic memoir, One Soldiers' Heart: from Viet Nam to Iraq and Beyond.

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