

# “Catharsis & Closure”

During the Vietnam War I was a 23 year old active duty US Marine Sergeant. My job specialty was "Counterintelligence Assistant" and more specifically, an Investigator in the intelligence and counterintelligence fields. I served with counterintelligence teams in Thua Thien Province, South Vietnam from October 1967 to September 1968. The work was dangerous because you were often in rural areas with one or two other Marines and a Vietnamese interpreter, exposed to assassination at any time. On major operations and small unit patrols, the perils were the same as an ordinary infantry soldier faced, including ambushes, snipers, booby traps, mines and direct combat engagements.

Having viewed the Vietnam war from this level, I can only say that many in the anti-war movement, including activists and war resisters, failed to acknowledge the atrocities and ruthlessness of the communists. They saw them as simply nationalists wanting to "unify" Vietnam, however, they failed to admit that millions of Vietnamese wanted no part of a communist dictatorship. The fact that the communists murdered Catholics, ordinary citizens, and anyone opposed to their ideology were realities the anti-war movement usually omitted discussing. In Vietnam, after the war, we saw thousands perishing in reeducation camps, and a half a million boat people escaping from a harsh communist nightmare. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the same arrogant hypocrites in our free society who enjoy being radicals and activists, and who worship Mao, Ho, Castro, Che Gueverra, and others....could never live under a communist dictatorship themselves.

In closing, I wish we had not sent our troops into South Vietnam, or Iraq, or Afghanistan as well. I have become more of an isolationist in my foreign policy views, yet this position is knowingly unrealistic. Wars go on. All we can do is pray to God and try to keep our own political leadership from drifting us into untenable conflicts. War must always be the last resort, and justified by extreme circumstances only.

UPDATE: As a follow up to a prior contribution under "Catharsis and Closure," I would like to respectfully add some concluding thoughts about the Vietnam experience. I was a Sgt in a Marine Corps field counterintelligence team from 1966-70, and served a combat tour in Thua Thien Province (1967-68).

After watching the recent Ken Burns PBS documentary, I was deeply moved by the breath and scope of the reporting. I felt a renewed and profound sense of betrayal listening to the actual taped words of Lyndon Johnson, Nixon, Kissinger, MacNamara and company...and how our unscrupulous political leaders lied and willfully kept our nation in the quagmire of this war for so long.

However, as an anti-communist, I see no redeemable virtues in the communist system, and the ruthless way in which they have heaped misery, bloodshed, and human suffering in every place they have conquered.

I can respect those who, in conscience, opposed the war and demonstrated against it, but I give no accolades to the violent leftist opposition, to the communist sympathizers, nor to the homegrown anarchists who used the war to create civil disorder, attack our police, and burn down our cities. However, so many Americans and innocent Vietnamese civilians died as a result of this conflict. We Americans must finally begin to learn from our history, and the first lesson is we must be very skeptical of the government leaders we elect. Since the media is also agenda driven and partisan, we must learn the truth from as many reliable sources as possible. Is it possible for this nation to avoid the mistakes of the past? I really wonder.

— *John, Clifton Park*