Liner Notes: 1970

Song of the Year: “Bridge Over Troubled Water” by Simon & Garfunkel

Number of U. S. soldiers in Vietnam at year’s end: 334,600

Number of men drafted into service: 162,746

*Billboard* Chart Sweep for 1970

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKWmrl8S-Lg>

On March 2, I raised my hand in the Military Entrance Processing Station in downtown Pittsburgh, Pa. and affirmed the following: "*I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."*

Now the war in Vietnam wasn’t just real. It was personal. And so was the soundtrack, one that punctuated my two months of Basic Training at Fort Dix (“Fire and Rain” by James Taylor), five months at the U. S. Army Hometown News Center in Kansas City (“Ohio” by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and “War” by Edwin Starr), a tearful, one-month leave (“Question” by The Moody Blues), and my first two months in Vietnam (“Tears of a Clown” by Smokey & the Miracles). I survived, thank God, in large part because of the music. “Let It Be,” indeed.

Of course, the world didn’t stand still while I was dancing my Vietnam two-step. Earth Day was born; Hendrix and Joplin died. Casey Kasem launched *American Top 40*; Lt. William Calley went on trial for the My Lai Massacre. *Doonesbury* debuted; the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin was bombed by anti-war activists and an innocent researcher was killed … and Richard Nixon decided to invade Cambodia.

And while I was in the Army when the Kent State shootings occurred on May 4, I was very much a member of my generation. I could’ve been William Schraeder, Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, or Sandy Scheuer. Or one of the Ohio National Guardsmen. How had it come to this? How had *we* come to this? Just who in the hell were we at war with?

I listened to “Ohio” and “War” in Vietnam, but they seemed different over there. Distant. Muted. I knew war was good for “absolutely nothin’” and didn’t need Edwin Starr to remind me of that. What I remember from those early weeks in country were the irrepressible heat, the ubiquitous sound of helicopters and the stench of diesel fuel and *nuoc mam* (a Vietnamese fish sauce). Luckily, I landed a “safe” job as an Army journalist in the “air-conditioned jungle” at Long Binh, where I was reunited with my good friend George from the Army Hometown News Center. One of my first assignments was to cover the Bob Hope Christmas show. What you’ll never see on TV is the old comedian being booed early on because of some of the things he said about the war. But he recovered and for one afternoon, 30,000 soldiers forgot they were in Vietnam.

Later that night, the base adjacent to ours, Bien Hoa, had sent off some flares, brightening the night sky with reds and blues and purples. And then we heard voices singing “Silent Night.” The singing was picked up by the other positions around us, and pretty soon by everyone. It echoed through the post for a long time and died out slowly. “All was calm” in Southeast Asia, if only for one silent night.

* [*Doug Bradley*](http://origin.kcts9.org/vietnam-war-timeline/about.html)