Liner Notes: 1972

Song of the Year: “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face” by Roberta Flack

Number of U. S. soldiers in Vietnam at year’s end: 24,200

Number of men drafted into service: 49,514

*Billboard* Chart Sweep for 1972

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrxbQO4C6kM>

Being back in the U.S.A. after a year in Vietnam was almost as strange as being overseas for a year in a war zone. There was this bewildered look in everyone’s eyes, especially when I told them I was a Vietnam veteran. Most acted as if the war was over, we’d lost, and it was our (i.e. the Vietnam vets’) fault. No welcome home, no parades and no healing … Made me shake my head and wonder, as I sang along to “American Pie” by Don McLean, recalling “the day the music died” in 1959 when my older brother’s teen idol Buddy Holly was killed. Something had died in America while I was gone, too, and I wasn’t quite sure what.

It struck me that we all needed to heal from the trauma of Vietnam and everything connected to it, but it wasn’t happening. What was happening smacked of more of the same — Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland (and a retaliation by the provisional IRA that following July); the avowed anti-communist Richard Nixon being embraced by the Chinese; the “official” end of the military draft, albeit two years too late for me; Arthur Bremer shooting presidential candidate George Wallace because he wasn’t able to shoot Richard Nixon; a presidential election, or rather an electoral smack-down, as Democrat George McGovern lost 49 of 50 states; the Munich Olympics murders; the debut of the TV show *M\*A\*S\*H* that felt more Vietnam than Korea; more atrocities in Vietnam, including the napalming of a little Vietnamese girl named Kim Phúc captured on film by AP photographer Nick Ut for all the world to see.

And, on June 17, 1973, the beginning of something called Watergate . . .

Desperate times called for desperate measures, so we veteran outcasts joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), which scared the crap out of Nixon and his FBI, prompting the “Gainesville Eight” trial of Vietnam vets indicted on charges of conspiracy to disrupt the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami that August.

The music wasn’t helping one bit, as several of the worst songs I could ever remember were topping the charts — “Candy Man” by Sammy Davis Jr., “Alone Again (Naturally)” by Gilbert O’Sullivan, “Brandy” by Looking Glass and “My Ding-A-Ling” by Chuck Berry. Really? THE Chuck Berry of “Johnny B. Goode” and “Roll Over Beethoven” fame? Just what in the hell had happened to good old rock and roll?

I’d never find the answer to that question as I, like thousands of my fellow Vietnam vets, decided to seek shelter on American college campuses. Sadly, we didn’t find any peace there either. When Nixon and Kissinger dropped thousands upon thousands of bombs in North Vietnam over Christmas, I wrote a highly critical op-ed for the *Evergreen*, the campus newspaper at Washington State University where I was attending graduate school. The editor later told me that as far as she could tell, nobody’d read it.

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