AMERICAN RECKONING

The Vietnam War and Our National Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Who Are We?

We didn't know who we were till we got here. We thought we were something else.

—Robert Stone,
Dog Soldiers (1974)

"I DIDN'T KNOW there *was* a bad war," George Evans recalled. He grew up in Pittsburgh in the 1950s. Starting at age six, before and after school, he helped his father deliver blocks of ice to poor and working-class people who could not afford the shiny new refrigerators advertised in all the magazines. George understood that the American Dream was beyond the grasp of his parents and most of their friends and neighbors. He was a streetwise kid. He knew life was difficult and the future uncertain.

But there was one thing George trusted completely—his nation's military power and the good that it did. With all his heart he believed the United States was on the side of justice and freedom and all our wars were noble. Despite personal hardships, you could always count on Americans to be the good guys, and always victorious. It was simply unimaginable that the United States might betray that faith.

"I was raised in a family and neighborhood of extreme patriots," George explains. "My father was the commander of his VFW post and I got to go to the club and hang out with the veterans. I was their little mascot." He especially looked forward to Flag Day, when he would help the World War II

vets decorate the graves in a military cemetery. "Imagine how beautiful it looked to a kid to see hundreds of graves in a geometric pattern, all with shining bronze plates and flags waving in the wind. You just can't exaggerate the pull of the military on kids from neighborhoods like mine. Everything you'd seen and heard your whole life made it feel inevitable and right."

But George's faith in America's global goodness was forever destroyed in Vietnam, where he served as an air force medic. "I realized that the country I was from was not the country I thought it was." One day at the hospital in Cam Ranh Bay he was ordered to clean the bodies of two young Vietnamese boys. They were dead. As he was sponging one of them with soapy water, a Vietnamese woman raced into the room. She must have been the mother, but George wasn't sure. "I'll never forget her face. I can see her still. I remember her hitting me on the chest, grabbing me. Then she was running back and forth between the two bodies, from child to child." George later learned that the boys were hit by an American military truck driver who may have been competing with other drivers over "who could hit a kid. They had some disgusting name for it, something like 'gook hockey.'"

With the possible exception of the Civil War, no event in U.S. history has demanded more soul-searching than the war in Vietnam. The false pretexts used to justify our intervention, the indiscriminate brutality of our warfare, the stubborn refusal of elected leaders to withdraw despite public opposition, and the stunning failure to achieve our stated objectives—these harrowing realities provoked a profound national identity crisis, an American reckoning. The war made citizens ask fundamental questions: Who are we? What defines us as a nation and a people? What is our role in the world? Just as the Civil War forced Americans to confront the reality of slavery, an institution that stood in glaring contradiction to the nation's avowed ideals of human freedom and equality, the Vietnam War compelled millions of citizens to question the once widely held faith that their country is the greatest force for good in the world, that it always acts to advance democracy and human rights, that it is superior in both its power and its virtue. And just as the Civil War ended slavery without resolving racism and racial injustice, the Vietnam War ended without resolving the conflicting lessons and legacies of America's first defeat.

The Vietnam War still matters because the crucial questions it raised

remain with us today: Should we continue to seek global military superiority? Can we use our power justly? Can we successfully intervene in distant lands to crush insurgencies (or support them), establish order, and promote democracy? What degree of sacrifice will the public bear and who among us should bear it? Is it possible for American citizens and their elected representatives to change our nation's foreign policy or is it permanently controlled by an imperial presidency and an unaccountable military-industrial complex?

Our answers to those questions are shaped by the experience and memory of the Vietnam War, but in ways that are cloudy and confusing as well as contested. I believe we could make better contributions to our current debates if we had a clearer understanding of that war's impact on our national identity, from its origins after World War II all the way to the present. But this is not a conventional chronological history. There are already many good ones. Nor am I interested in irresolvable speculation about how the war might have turned out differently if only other decisions had been made or alternative strategies pursued. I want instead to explore the ways the war changed our national self-perception. It is such an important and even obvious subject you might assume it has been thoroughly examined and exhausted. After all, there is now a vast literature about various aspects of the Vietnam War—so many books we don't even have a precise count and no one could possibly read them all. Surprisingly, however, only a small number have taken on this topic and none have tracked it over a six-decade span. My ambition, therefore, is not just to enrich our understanding of the Vietnam War, but to show how we have wrestled with the myths and realities of our nation's global role from the early days of the Cold War to the wars of the twenty-first century.

To do so, I have drawn on a great variety of sources—everything from movies, songs, memoirs, novels, and advertisements to official documents, polling data, media coverage, Pentagon studies, government propaganda, presidential speeches, and contemporary commentary. And, of course, I have relied on a long list of superb scholars and journalists whose work made this one possible.

My main argument is that the Vietnam War shattered the central tenet of American national identity—the broad faith that the United States is a

unique force for good in the world, superior not only in its military and economic power, but in the quality of its government and institutions, the character and morality of its people, and its way of life. A common term for this belief is "American exceptionalism." Because that term has been bandied about so much in recent years as a political slogan and a litmus test of patriotism, we need to be reminded that it has deep roots and meaning throughout our history. In many ways the nation was founded on the faith that it was blessed with unrivaled resources, freedoms, and prospects. So deep were those convictions they took on the power of myth—they were beyond debate. Dissenting movements throughout our history did little to challenge the faith.

That's what made the Vietnam War's impact so significant. Never before had such a wide range of Americans come to doubt their nation's superiority; never before had so many questioned its use of military force; never before had so many challenged the assumption that their country had higher moral standards.

Of course, the faith in American exceptionalism has hardly disappeared. Countless times since the Vietnam War our presidents have invoked it in support of wars and interventions around the world. Although the public has been more reluctant to use military force than its leaders, there is still substantial support for the idea that our power is benign and that America remains a singularly admirable nation. That's why virtually everyone who runs for higher office in the United States pledges allegiance to the creed.

Yet even many ardent believers understand that the faith is no longer as broad or assured as it was before the Vietnam War. In 2000, for example, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the war's end, Henry Kissinger wrote: "One of the most important casualties of the Vietnam tragedy was the tradition of American 'exceptionalism.' The once near-universal faith in the uniqueness of our values—and their relevance around the world—gave way to intense divisions over the very validity of those values and the lengths we should go to promote and defend them." Kissinger had been almost as responsible as President Richard Nixon for prolonging the Vietnam War an additional six years. When it finally ended in 1975, 58,000 Americans had died, and three million Vietnamese. Yet in 2000 Kissinger chose to mourn the loss of

American exceptionalism. For him, there was nothing so terrible about the war to justify any doubt about our nation's superiority.

Unlike Kissinger, many others believed the war exposed American exceptionalism as a dangerous myth. They did not regret its passing. National aggrandizement had led the United States into an unjust and unwinnable war. In Robert Stone's 1974 novel *Dog Soldiers*, for example, John Converse is a disillusioned American journalist in Vietnam who persuades an old Marine Corps buddy to smuggle heroin into the United States. As they discuss the deal, with gunfire in the background, Converse says: "We didn't know who we were till we got here. We thought we were something else." The war, he implies, was a kind of awakening. It enabled Americans to recognize their capacity for bloodlust and evil. His friend Ray Hicks offers a witheringly sardonic comment about the price of that awakening: "What a bummer for the gooks," he says. Americans were learning hard truths about themselves and their nation on the backs of a people they dehumanized and killed and whose country they wrecked. It was an expensive education and Vietnam bore by far its greatest cost.

For many people, major reappraisals came slowly, a testament to their deep trust in American institutions and values. In the 1950s and early 1960s, before the major military escalation in Vietnam and the shocking revelations it brought, Americans had remarkable faith in their elected officials. Until the mid-1960s, roughly three-quarters of Americans told pollsters they trusted the government to do the right thing. Therefore, when public leaders announced that the United States was in Vietnam to save the people of South Vietnam from Communist aggression and to defend freedom and democracy, few challenged the accuracy of the claim or the necessity of the commitment. And when Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy said the struggle in Vietnam was required to prevent Communism from taking over one nation after another like tumbling dominoes until our own shores would be directly imperiled, that seemed not just a reasonable theory, but a frightening possibility. And the broad acceptance of Cold War policies was bolstered by the era's equally broad religiosity. The idea that the United States was engaged in a godly crusade against atheistic Communism was not an extreme position in the 1950s, but part of everyday discourse.

It was still unimaginable to most Americans that their own nation would wage aggressive war and justify it with unfounded claims, that it would support antidemocratic governments reviled by their own people, and that American troops would be sent to fight in countries where they were widely regarded not as liberators, but as imperialist invaders. Of course, there were cracks in the Cold War consensus even in the 1950s—the emergence of a mass struggle for civil rights, new forms of dissenting art, literature, and music, early signs of a growing youth culture, and the critical perspectives of older left-wing activists and intellectuals whose challenges to state and corporate power dated back to the intense political struggles of the 1930s. Even so, it is hard today to recover a full sense of how effectively the dominant Cold War culture blanketed the nation with an uncritical acceptance of America's right and responsibility to intervene overseas.

But as the Vietnam War continued, year after year, that faith declined dramatically. Alarming evidence mounted that the United States was doing exactly the opposite of what its leaders claimed. Instead of saving South Vietnam, U.S. warfare was destroying it. South Vietnam was not an independent nation, but wholly dependent on American support. The United States did not make progress by amassing huge body counts of enemy killed, but only convinced more Vietnamese that it was a foreign aggressor. Prolonging the war did not preserve American credibility; it only did further damage to the nation's reputation.

As citizens came to reject their government's claims, many also shed the once commonplace assumption that Americans place a higher value on life than foreign foes. That faith was eviscerated by the vision of U.S. soldiers burning down the homes of Vietnamese peasants and forcing millions off their ancestral land; the incessant U.S. bombing, year after year, with nothing to show for it but further death and destruction; and the indelible images from My Lai, where an American company of infantrymen slaughtered five hundred unarmed, unresisting Vietnamese civilians.

By 1971, 58 percent of Americans had concluded that the war in Vietnam was not just a mistake, but immoral. More than at any time in our past, broad sections of the public, cutting across lines of class, gender, race, and religion, rejected the claim that American military power was an invincible force for good. Many concluded that the United States was as capable of

wrongdoing as any nation or people, if not more so. And by 1973, when the final U.S. troops were withdrawn from Vietnam, only a third of Americans still trusted the government to do what was right.

Critics of the war were not the only ones whose faith in American exceptionalism was damaged or destroyed. Pro-war hawks were also disillusioned. They agonized over the U.S. failure in Vietnam. Why had the greatest military power in world history been unable or unwilling to prevail against a small, poor, agricultural people? What happened to the America that had rallied so magnificently to defeat Fascism in World War II? Had the protests and divisions of the 1960s forever destroyed our national will and patriotism? And how would the world ever respect us again knowing that we abandoned the Vietnamese government we had so long supported?

For the political right, defeat in Vietnam was an intense motivator. Conservatives were determined to rebuild everything they thought the war had destroyed—American power, pride, prestige, and patriotism. Above all, they wanted to resuscitate a faith in American supremacy. Their restoration project was a key factor in the rightward movement of American culture and politics in the decades after Vietnam. It depended, in part, on efforts to redefine the political and moral meanings of the Vietnam War. Ronald Reagan was elected president in 1980 saying Vietnam had been a "noble cause"—a war that should have been fought and could have been won. Only a core of hard-line conservatives agreed with that, but many more voters agreed with Reagan's claim that the country and its military had been badly weakened and unfairly attacked by the protest movements of the 1960s, liberal politicians, and a biased media.

Right-wing challenges to the patriotism of even mainstream liberal Democratic leaders put many former critics of the Vietnam War on the defensive. Few prominent Americans were eager to continue the passionate debates the war had raised. The most searing evidence of the damage the United States had done in and to Vietnam largely disappeared from public view and consciousness. In its place, a new mainstream consensus emerged around the idea that the Vietnam War had primarily been an *American tragedy* that had badly wounded and divided the nation. The focus was on healing, not history. Attention turned to those Americans who seemed most obviously wounded by the war—Vietnam veterans. The Vietnam Veterans

Memorial in Washington, DC, completed in 1982, encouraged citizens to honor military veterans without debating the merits or meaning of the wars they fought. In one characteristic piece of mid-1980s rhetoric, Chrysler president Lee Iacocca appeared in an advertisement praising Vietnam veterans "who fought in a time and in a place nobody really understood, who knew only one thing: they were called and they went. . . . That in the truest sense is the spirit of America."

The war that had once led so many to anguish over their nation's devastating impact on other lands was increasingly leading citizens to worry about the need to rebuild American pride and power. Fanning that concern was a growing sense of national victimhood, a belief that the country had become the unjustified target of inexplicable foreign threats. Prior to 9/11, this belief was fueled most powerfully by the Iran hostage crisis of 1979–1981, when Americans watched with horror as TV news showed footage of angry Iranian crowds burning American flags and chanting anti-U.S. slogans. A new nationalism arose—defensive, inward-looking, and resentful. Along with it came renewed expressions of American exceptionalism, but it was a far more embittered and fragile faith than it had been in the decades before the Vietnam War.

And for all the pumped-up patriotism of the post-Vietnam decades—all the chanting of "U.S.A., U.S.A., U.S.A." and all the chest-pounding TV ads ("The pride is back!"), there was never broad public support for protracted military interventions. Fear of "another Vietnam" permeated the culture, even the ranks of the military. Reagan and his followers argued against what they called the Vietnam syndrome—a dangerous reluctance to use military force. But even advocates of a more aggressive foreign policy were hesitant to pursue policies that might produce high American casualties. Despite many military interventions in the 1980s and 1990s, fewer than eight hundred American troops lost their lives in warfare during the quarter century after the Vietnam War.

The attacks of 9/11 decisively destroyed the cautionary lessons of the Vietnam War, at least among the tiny group of people who formulated American foreign policy. George W. Bush launched a "Global War on Terror" premised on the idea that the United States was an exemplar of all that was good in the world fighting against all that was evil. He started two wars

that led to protracted occupations and provoked bloody anti-American insurgencies. Both wars continued long after a majority of Americans had come to oppose them and were further prolonged by Barack Obama, a Democratic president who had been one of the first critics of the Iraq War.

Indeed, through drone warfare and the secret deployment of Special Operations Forces to some 120 countries, Obama has extended U.S. military intervention as widely as ever. The size of our domestic and foreign spy network has grown so large no one even knows precisely how to measure it or how much it costs. Nor can anyone say for sure that our global commitment to "homeland security" has made us any safer, or that the animosity our policies engender in faraway places will not further endanger us decades into the future. Nor is there any serious plan at the highest levels of power to change course.

If the legacy of the Vietnam War is to offer any guidance, we need to complete the moral and political reckoning it awakened. And if our nation's future is to be less militarized, our empire of foreign military bases scaled back, and our pattern of endless military interventions ended, a necessary first step is to reject—fully and finally—the stubborn insistence that our nation has been a unique and unrivaled force for good in the world. Only an honest accounting of our history will allow us to chart a new path in the world. The past is always speaking to us, if we only listen.

5

Our Boys

As WORD SPREAD that President Kennedy had been killed, Americans turned to each other in shock and grief. They also turned to their televisions to watch the almost nonstop live news coverage. By Monday, November 25, 1963—a national day of mourning to mark Kennedy's funeral—93 percent of American households were tuned in. Perhaps no other event in U.S. history has been viewed in real time by a greater percentage of the nation's people.

When the casket was carried down the steps of St. Matthew's Cathedral and placed on the horse-drawn caisson for the final journey to Arlington National Cemetery, Jacqueline Kennedy leaned down and whispered something to her young son, John Kennedy Jr., who had, that very day, turned three years old. The little boy stepped forward and saluted his father's flag-draped coffin.

At Arlington, the uniformed pallbearers, representing every branch of the military, carried the casket to the hillside grave. En route, they passed through a cordon of soldiers who formed an honor guard. These men had been flown in from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, at the request of the slain president's brother. Robert Kennedy made the call because he knew how

much these men had impressed the president, how much he identified them with all that was best about the American military and the nation. They were members of the army's Special Forces, the Green Berets. After the president was laid to rest, the leader of the honor guard, Sergeant Major Francis Ruddy, removed his green beret and placed it near the eternal flame that marked the gravesite.

By the time of JFK's death, these elite, counter-guerrilla commandos had become icons of the New Frontier. Magazines and newspapers practically competed to offer the most lavish praise. The Green Berets were not ordinary G.I. Joes, or reluctant draftees; these were the ultimate professionals—the best of the best.

The media relished the punishing thirty-eight-week training ordeal endured by the intrepid volunteers, "a killing tenure of unrelieved work and pressure" with nighttime drops into snake-infested swamps and endless runs in the baking southern sun. The Green Berets were not just the finest physical specimens the military could produce; they were, according to the *Saturday Evening Post*, the "Harvard Ph.D.'s of warfare"—"politico-military experts" who provided the perfect antidote to Communist-led insurgencies in remote areas throughout the world. Steeped in the works of Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara; trained in foreign languages; schooled on indigenous cultural mores; masters of stealth, ambush, demolitions, and emergency medical procedures; and capable of killing their enemy in dozens of ways, the Green Berets could out-guerrilla the guerrilla and defeat the Red insurgent on his own turf with his own techniques. As *Time* effused in 1961: "The [American] guerrillas can remove an appendix, fire a foreign-made or obsolete gun, blow up a bridge, handle a bow and arrow, sweet-talk some bread out of a native in his own language, fashion explosives out of chemical fertilizer, cut an enemy's throat (Peking radio calls the operators 'Killer Commandos'), live off the land." Even the army's own propaganda could not have been more celebratory.

By combining the sophisticated technology and training of the world's most advanced society with the wilderness arts of the "natives," the Green Berets were cast as the latest version in a long line of American warrior heroes who, at least in national mythology, have drawn their power from both "civilization" and "savagery." Laudatory accounts compared the "stealthy

marauders" of Fort Bragg to the Indian fighters like Daniel Boone, the revolutionary patriots who used backwoods skills to defeat the redcoats, the Confederate rangers under John "The Gray Ghost" Mosby, and Merrill's Marauders, who fought behind Japanese lines in the Burmese jungles during World War II.

But the Green Berets were said to rely less on brute force than their predecessors. With antibiotics and folksy charm they would win the hearts and minds of indigenous populations and inspire them to do most of the fighting to defeat Communist rebels. They combined the service of Dr. Tom Dooley and the unflinching toughness of America's best fighting men. It was as if they were a well-armed Peace Corps.

The Green Berets had not always received such gushing tributes. Although founded in 1952, the Special Forces had languished in relative obscurity until the Kennedy administration. Many officers disdained elite units; they would only produce prima donnas—arrogant, undisciplined freelancers who flaunt their special status and undermine the morale of the regular army. In 1956, that viewpoint led to a crowning indignity—the Special Forces were officially denied permission to wear their distinctive green berets.

But President Kennedy loved the Green Berets, revived their status, and returned their berets. They were, he believed, just the sort of men best suited to fight a smart, largely covert, small-scale counter-guerrilla war in South Vietnam. Early in his presidency he sent four hundred Green Berets to South Vietnam and steadily increased their number. "Wear the beret proudly," Kennedy told the Special Forces when he went to Fort Bragg in October 1962 to see them in action. "It will be a mark of distinction and a badge of courage in the fight for freedom." The president was treated to a demonstration that included everything from rappelling to archery to hand-to-hand combat techniques. They even had a guy flying around with a "rocketbelt" strapped to his back. As more dignitaries flocked to Fort Bragg to see the Green Berets perform, the demonstration was dubbed "Disneyland."

The Green Berets were not the only elite military unit. The navy had its SEALs, the air force its commandos, the marines their reconnaissance teams, and it must have galled them that the Special Forces received so much more hype. But there was, in fact, a deep respect for service of every

kind in the early 1960s, most famously articulated and encouraged by JFK's inaugural address.

Kennedy's famous call to service ("Ask not . . .") has been repeated so often it has lost its original power, but in that moment it tapped a deep well of national feeling. Virtually every line of JFK's inaugural links the efforts of ordinary citizens to the highest imaginable stakes. Indeed, "a new generation of Americans" was responsible for the fate of the entire world. "Man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life." These stark extremes punctuate the entire speech—progress or annihilation, peace or war, freedom or tyranny, cooperation or division, hope or despair. People could transform the world for the better, or destroy it. The daily possibility of human extinction demanded a struggle to eradicate "tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."

Of course, if war was necessary, Americans must be willing to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship . . . to assure the survival and the success of liberty." But JFK made clear that young people might help transform the world in every conceivable arena, not just military service. And he was not alone. The early 1960s, perhaps more than any other time in our history, provided an enormous and diverse set of role models who inspired teenagers to envision themselves as historical actors—civil rights activists, folksingers, astronauts, Peace Corps volunteers, Beat Generation writers, Green Berets. Even the four sensational mop tops from Liverpool, whose first hits were almost entirely about adolescent love and yearning, seemed to have the talent and magnetism to transform an entire culture and its values.

When the Beatles appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in early 1964, seventy-three million Americans were watching, the largest television audience since JFK's funeral just a few months before, and the largest audience for a regular TV show there had ever been. Many commentators dismissed Beatlemania as a transitory teen sensation dominated by young, shrieking, hair-tugging girls. But it soon became clear that the Beatles, and the cultural transformations they signaled, would have a deeper and more enduring impact on America than almost any adult could have imagined. At the very least they reignited the liberating, youthful idealism that had been wounded, but not crushed, by Kennedy's death.

The Ed Sullivan Show (initially called *Toast of the Town*) began in 1948 and ran until 1971, one of the most successful programs in television history. A true variety show, it brought together some of the most surreal combinations of entertainers ever assembled. Sullivan's something-for-everyone approach ("And now for all you youngsters out there . . .") partly explains the show's popularity, but its success also exemplified the degree to which American culture in the two decades after World War II was united by powerful centripetal forces. Despite deep divisions and great diversity, postwar America was bound together by broadly held values and convictions, many of them linked to the faith that the United States acted as a force for good in the world and represented an exceptional set of political ideals open to improvement.

By 1966, the Vietnam War and ongoing racial conflict had greatly strained that faith and cohesion, but not yet to the breaking point. On January 30, 1966, almost two years after the Beatles first appeared, *The Ed Sullivan Show* featured a typically bizarre mix of entertainment: Dinah Shore sang "Chim-Chim-Cher-ee" and a blues medley; Dick Capri cracked jokes; the Four Tops sang "It's the Same Old Song"; an archer named Bob Markworth shot balloons off the head of his wife, Mayana; José Feliciano played an acoustic guitar version of "The Flight of the Bumblebee" and somehow kept the tempo flying even after he dropped his pick; Jackie Vernon did a comedy bit about Gunga Din; Acadian folk dancers performed in wooden clogs; and frequent guest Topo Gigio, the ten-inch Italian mouse operated by four puppeteers, did his usual shtick ("Eddie, keees me goodnight!"). Also appearing was a twenty-five-year-old active-duty Green Beret medic, Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler.

In full-dress uniform, wearing the iconic beret, Sadler sang "The Ballad of the Green Berets":

Fighting soldiers from the sky
Fearless men who jump and die . . .
Silver wings upon their chests
These are men, America's best
One hundred men will test today
But only three win the Green Beret.

A month after this performance, Sadler's ballad reached number one on the pop charts and stayed there for six weeks, selling two million copies. "The Ballad of the Green Berets" was, in fact, *Billboard* magazine's number one pop song for 1966 (eventually selling eight million copies), more popular than anything released that year by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Supremes, Stevie Wonder, the Beach Boys—everybody. The fact that Sadler's unabashed tribute to military service had such massive appeal radically jars with common memories of the 1960s. After all, by the time "The Ballad of the Green Berets" hit the charts, American kids had already embraced "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" (1955–1961), Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" ("You set back and watch / When the death count gets higher," 1963), Phil Ochs's "I Ain't Marching Anymore" (1965), and Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction" ("You're old enough to kill, but not for votin' / You don't believe in war, but what's that gun you're totin'?"—a number one hit in the fall of 1965).

Many peace activists considered Barry Sadler's ballad a dangerous piece of militaristic propaganda. And pro-war students sometimes taunted anti-war protesters by blasting "Ballad of the Green Berets" out of their dorm rooms at full volume during campus rallies. The war divided Americans over just about everything, including music.

Yet the culture of the mid-1960s resisted such clear-cut labels. Millions of young Americans liked "The Ballad of the Green Berets" *and* the folk songs of Peter, Paul and Mary. The emotions they touched had something in common. Like so much else in that era, they encouraged young people to think about their relationship to the world and to history—to have grand aspirations and commitments. Those longings might be unsettled, and even contradictory, but they were nurtured by a wide range of sources. And "The Ballad of the Green Berets" does not even mention Vietnam. It celebrates elite military training and the willingness to "jump and die" for "those oppressed."

The popularity of Sadler's song reminds us that the Vietnam generation was one of the most patriotic ever raised. And millions of young men who would eventually turn against the Vietnam War grew up enchanted by military culture. They had spent endless hours in parks and woods with sticks and toy guns, mowing down "Japs" or "Krauts" or "Injuns," watching World War II movies on TV into the early morning hours, idolizing aggressive

macho stars like John Wayne, and harboring boyhood fantasies of military heroism. Many could imagine silver wings on their own chests, and even in 1966, with the war in Vietnam rapidly escalating, "The Ballad of the Green Berets" had the power to tingle the spines of millions of young Americans. But so, too, did the radical new music screaming out of transistor radios—songs like "My Generation" by the Who ("Things they do look awful c-c-cold / I hope I die before I get old").

Just a year or two later, however, it was far more difficult to reconcile the conflicting impulses in American politics and culture. People felt compelled to take sides on the burning issues of the day—Vietnam, civil rights, campus protest, even music. The crazy-quilt *Ed Sullivan Show*, like the nation itself, was designed to bring together all ages, regions, classes, races, and viewpoints. But as those differences widened, Sullivan's efforts to hold them in harmony seemed ever more strained and comical. One night in 1967 Jim Morrison of the Doors defied Ed Sullivan by refusing to change a provocative word in "Light My Fire"—"Girl we couldn't get much *higher*." By then the other acts looked like throwbacks to some ancient past—Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme singing "Getting to Know You," Yul Brynner doing a medley of Gypsy songs, and the Skating Bredos whipping around a six-foot rink.

By the late 1960s patriotic, pro-military tunes had vanished from the pop charts. The culture was cracking apart, and music deemed conservative was largely relegated to country music charts and TV venues like *The Lawrence Welk Show*. Many of those songs sounded defensive, like defiant claims of pride voiced from a heartland America convinced that its own values were under attack. In 1969, when Merle Haggard wrote the country hit "Okie from Muskogee," he assumed that many (if not most) Americans had come to believe that patriotism, military service, and "livin' right" were hopelessly square.

We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee
We don't take no trips on LSD
We don't burn no draft cards down on Main Street
We like livin' right, and bein' free
I'm proud to be an Okie from Muskogee
A place where even squares can have a ball.

Just a few years earlier most Americans had never even heard of LSD, and now its alarming presence announced itself in a country song played on the most conservative radio stations in the nation.

Within the military, increasingly flooded by reluctant draftees or draft-pressured "volunteers," countercultural music became as popular as it was at home. Country music retained a corps of fans, especially among the "lifers," but most of the young troops favored songs like "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" (the Animals, 1965), "Chain of Fools" (Aretha Franklin, 1967), "Purple Haze" (the Jimi Hendrix Experience, 1967), and "Fortunate Son" (Creedence Clearwater Revival, 1969).

By the late 1960s, the Green Berets would become symbols of the false hype that had sold America on a war it could not win and should not have fought. The reasons for that startling shift can be identified in the very book that did as much as anything to elevate the Special Forces to national prominence, Robin Moore's best-selling novel, *The Green Berets*. It appeared in early 1965 just as the American Green Berets in Vietnam were being vastly outnumbered by conventional troops. It quickly became a best seller in hardcover and exploded in the fall when it was released as a paperback, selling three million copies in a year. In 1966, *The Green Berets* continued to fly off the paperback racks, no doubt given an extra boost by the success of Barry Sadler's "The Ballad of the Green Berets." The two works reinforced each other more closely than most people realized. Moore's paperback cover featured a photograph of Sadler, and Sadler got his recording contract with help from Moore, who made enough changes in the lyrics to share the song's copyright.

Moore's stories were based on his four-month experience with Green Beret teams in Vietnam during 1964. He was not just an embedded reporter, but a participant observer who carried an automatic rifle, dressed in jungle fatigues, and "was credited with several kills."

"*The Green Berets* is a book of truth," Moore boldly claimed before acknowledging that it was, in fact, a work of fiction. It's easy to see why the military was worried enough to require the publisher to plant a bright yellow label on the dust jacket reading "Fiction Stranger Than Fact!" Although Moore lionized the Green Berets as "true-life heroes," he described them

going on secret missions into Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam, realities no American official would dare to admit.

Moore's characters disdain deskbound army careerists who try to rein in the unconventional commandos. Each of the nine stories serves as a demonstration to military higher-ups, and readers, that the Green Berets should be allowed to "get special jobs done any way [they] can." But, as one character complains, "the orthodox types running this crazy war don't like to admit to themselves that Americans are violating treaties." With the war controlled by "conventional officers sitting in comfortable offices," the Green Berets would have to "outfight and outsmart the Viet Cong with their hands tied behind their backs." Here was an early version of Ronald Reagan's much grander claim that the entire military had been "denied permission to win."

Ironically, if you strip away Moore's action-adventure framework and his unwavering assumption that the Green Berets "are serving the cause of freedom around the world," *The Green Berets* provides the material for a very effective antiwar manifesto. For starters, Moore's portrait of the South Vietnamese government and its military could hardly be more unflattering. They are utterly dependent on the United States and demonstrate no promise of gaining the support necessary to form an independent nation. With a few minor exceptions, Moore describes the South Vietnamese allies as hopelessly corrupt, unpopular, cowardly, and incompetent.

Moore concurs with the prevalent Green Beret view that the allies cannot be trusted to "fight like men." They call the South Vietnamese military forces LLDBs—lousy little dirty bug-outs—for their tendency to desert in the middle of battle. In the absence of reliable, hard-fighting allies, the Green Berets hire their own, including a group of Cambodian mercenaries, led by a "sinister little brown bandit," who are paid by the number of Viet Cong they kill. The kills are "confirmed" by the chopped-off ears or hands they bring back to the Green Berets. In one story, Moore's heroes try to assemble a gung-ho South Vietnamese strike force from Saigon's jails by bailing out "about 100 assorted thieves, rapists, muggers, dope pushers, pimps, homosexuals, and murderers."

The appeal of *The Green Berets* suggests that whatever controversies the

Vietnam War had ignited, there remained a huge market for blood-and-guts shoot-'em-ups with passages like this: "[He] grabbed a bayonet-tipped carbine from a lunging VC, gave it a twirl and plunged it through a Communist's back with such force that it pinned him, squirming, to the mud wall." Moore's Green Berets were not the nation-building Peace Corps types that popped up in many of the fawning magazine articles of the early 1960s. These were combat-loving, hard-drinking cynics: "Funny thing about old Victor Charlie," one of them muses, "he thinks Americans are dickheads for coming over here and trying to drill water wells and build schools and orphanages. The only time he respects us is when we're killing him."

Yet it's not all combat. Moore mixes in enough tawdry, leering, nearly pornographic passages to paint Southeast Asia as a land of unconstrained sexual adventure for America's fighting men. In one of his longest stories, he encourages readers to applaud the decision of a married Green Beret major, Bernie Arklin, to take a Laotian "wife." The officer is in a remote "Meo" village (a derogatory term for Hmong) to recruit and train the people to fight against the Laotian Communists (the Pathet Lao). The village chief brings three girls for Major Arklin to inspect, and invites him to choose one: "The Meo will feel you are part of them if the girl is part of you. She will be your wife."

Major Arklin resists at first, but then decides it is his "duty" to take one of the girls to gain the allegiance of the villagers. So he selects a fifteen-year-old girl who is "much lighter colored than the others," turns out to be half French, and is named Nanette. His next duty is to sleep with her. "It would probably be an insult and a disgrace if they lived together without his enjoying the connubial pleasure she was expecting to give him." Arklin's adultery has magnificent results. The entire village is inspired. Everyone gets busy and the hamlet is transformed into a model of order, hygiene, and anti-Communist fervor.

Not for long. The story ends in defeat. The Pathet Lao Communists pose such a threat, Arklin has the entire village evacuated to Vientiane. Here, way back in 1964, is a foreshadowing of America's entire venture in Southeast Asia. It unwittingly prefigures the defeat of the American-backed regimes in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, all of which were taken over by Communists in April 1975. Though Moore does not acknowledge

it, Arklin's mission in Laos is an utter failure. It merely delayed a Communist victory over the villagers. All Arklin can do is plead for an evacuation: "I want to see these people safely out of here. We owe it to them."

Instead of denouncing the war and its failures, Moore focuses on American heroism. Major Arklin is promoted to lieutenant colonel and ordered home. When asked about his fifteen-year-old Laotian wife, he says this: "That's one of the little tragedies in this kind of war. Nanette and I, we'll just have to say good-bye. She had a lot to do with my success on this job."

Even in the war's early years it proved impossible to find American military heroes whose brave acts were paving the way to inevitable victory—heroes who seized essential territory, who liberated a grateful town, who led an advance toward the enemy's capital. In Vietnam, the Americans had no territorial lines to advance, no grateful villagers crying out for liberation, no decisive battle or final offensive. Only the Vietnamese enemy had those. All the Pentagon could present as "progress" was the high enemy body counts reported by its troops. For the troops themselves, success was measured primarily by survival. The American heroes of Vietnam gave their lives for one another.

The first American in Vietnam to receive the nation's highest military decoration—the Medal of Honor—was Green Beret captain Roger Donlon. In July 1964 he commanded a remote outpost near the Laotian border. His small Special Forces team was assigned to train a force of several hundred South Vietnamese. In the middle of the night their camp was overrun by Viet Cong. Donlon's award citation gives a hint of his enormous courage. He "dashed through a hail of small arms and exploding hand grenades," "completely disregarded" serious shrapnel wounds to his stomach, shoulder, leg, and face, personally "annihilated" an enemy demolition team, dragged wounded men to safety, administered first aid, directed mortar fire, and more. "His dynamic leadership, fortitude, and valiant efforts inspired not only the American personnel but the friendly Vietnamese as well and resulted in the successful defense of the camp."

The citation failed to mention that at least a hundred of the "friendly Vietnamese" fought for the Viet Cong. As Donlon later reported, "The first thing each of the traitors did when the attack started—and they knew it was coming—was to slit the throat or break the neck of the person next to

them . . . the people we thought would be shooting outward were now shooting inward." The Green Beret hero had to defend his camp from American "allies" as well as the "enemy."

The media in the mid-1960s tried its best to identify and praise American military heroism even in the face of mounting evidence that no amount of bravery could overcome the inherent impossibility of defending an unpopular government against a strongly supported indigenous foe. Formulaic tributes to "the American fighting man" and "our boys in uniform" often deflected attention from the war's disturbing details. The war might be "complex" or "frustrating" or "dirty," but much mid-'60s reportage suggested that the world's strongest and best-trained soldiers were more than up to the task. The media's reflexive cheerleading for American troops easily slid into a form of cheerleading for the mission they were ordered to execute.

"Who's Fighting in Viet Nam: A Gallery of American Combatants" was the headline for the April 23, 1965, cover of *Time* magazine featuring an illustration of air force pilot Robert Risner, a craggy-faced forty-year-old lieutenant colonel in his flight suit and helmet. Risner, we learn, is the leader of the Fighting Cocks, a squadron of fighter pilots who fly F-105 Thunderchiefs ("streaking in like vengeful lightning bolts" on "unremitting, round-the-clock attacks"). These superfast jets carry nine thousand pounds of bombs. To fly them requires "the highest degree of human ingenuity and precision." Risner had vast experience. In Korea, many years earlier, he had shot down eight enemy MiGs. He still regarded himself as "the luckiest man in the world to be doing what I'm doing." Five months after appearing on the cover of *Time*, Risner was shot down over North Vietnam on his fifty-fifth bombing mission and spent the next seven years as a prisoner of war.

The Risner issue presented "the fighting American" in Vietnam by profiling a dozen servicemen. Eight of them were pilots (and thus all officers), two others were infantry officers, and another was a Green Beret on his third tour ("Damned if I can think of any place I'd rather be"). Only one of the dozen men was a young enlisted man. This wildly unrepresentative sample drove home the article's main points. First, morale was so great even the wounded wanted to get back in the action ("With a little luck, I'll be flying again in a few days"). Second, this was a *professional* military: "Viet Nam

is no place for the 90-day wonder or the left-footed recruit. It is a place for the career man, the highly trained specialist."

Ironically, just as this April 1965 story appeared, the massive U.S. escalation was beginning to flood Vietnam with quickly trained lieutenants ("ninety-day wonders"), one-term draftees, and "volunteers" who enlisted only because they were sure the draft would soon grab them. Within a year or two the most common media representative of the American fighting man would not be a career officer or pilot but a young enlisted infantryman who slogged through jungles and paddies with a heavy pack searching for the enemy. In the post-Vietnam years, these "grunts" were so stereotypically associated with the Vietnam War—through films and books—you might never know that thousands of Americans flew bombing missions from aircraft carriers in the South China Sea or from air force bases in Thailand and Guam.

On October 22, 1965, as the young grunts surged into Vietnam, *Time* ran a cover story called "South Vietnam: A New Kind of War." The main point was to celebrate a "remarkable turnabout in the war" caused by "one of the swiftest, biggest military buildups in the history of warfare." With "wave upon wave of combat booted Americans—lean, laconic and looking for a fight," the enemy was now in trouble. "The Viet Cong's once-cocky hunters have become the cowering hunted as the cutting edge of U.S. fire power slashes into the thickets of Communist strength." Buried beneath the purple prose, a few nagging details challenged the "remarkable turnabout" thesis. We learn, for example, that army chief of staff General Harold Johnson estimates it will take ten years to "finish off" the Viet Cong and that "even the most optimistic U.S. officials think five years the outside minimum."

But somehow America's finest and all their firepower would carry the day. "Today's American soldier and marine is as well prepared as any fighting man in the world for waging guerrilla warfare," *Newsweek* reassured readers in 1965. *Time* agreed: "The American serviceman in Viet Nam is probably the most proficient the nation has ever produced."

The U.S. military that fought in 1965 and 1966 did include a substantially higher portion of true volunteers and career professionals than it would a few years later. But *Time* grossly exaggerated their eagerness to

fight. "They are in Viet Nam not because they have to be, but because they want to be . . . almost to a man they believe that the Vietnamese war can be won—if only their efforts are not undercut on the home front." The possibility that American soldiers might hate the war was, at least in *Time* magazine, unthinkable.

Yet when sociologist Charles Moskos went to Vietnam in 1965 to interview army enlisted men and asked them why they were there, the answers were far different from those offered up in *Time*. "I was fool enough to join this man's army," said one. "My own stupidity for listening to the recruiting sergeant," said another. "My tough luck in getting drafted," said a third. He found little ideological commitment to the war. Even early on in the war, soldiers thought of their one-year tours as something like prison sentences to be endured. Most men knew exactly how many days they had left.

Despite the media's initial focus on the "professional" military, it was an overwhelmingly working-class institution throughout the war. A 1964 survey of more than 78,000 active-duty enlisted men (conducted by the National Opinion Research Center) found that almost 70 percent had fathers who did blue-collar work or farm labor and an additional 10 percent had no father at home. Only about 19 percent had fathers with white-collar jobs.

As draft quotas shot up in 1965, the military lowered its admission standards. Prior to massive escalation in Vietnam, the military routinely rejected men who scored in the bottom two quintiles of the Armed Forces Qualifying Test, its mental aptitude test. Beginning in 1965, however, the military admitted hundreds of thousands of draftees and volunteers it once would have deemed unqualified. Most of them were from poor and broken families, 80 percent were high school dropouts, and half had IQs of less than 85.

These lower standards were further dropped with the institution of Project 100,000. Begun in 1966 by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, it was designed to admit 100,000 poorly educated men into the military every year. Project 100,000 was touted as a program of social uplift. One of its advocates was Daniel Patrick Moynihan. As assistant secretary of labor in the early 1960s, Moynihan was disturbed by the high percentage of poor boys rejected by the military. He viewed the military as a vast, untapped agent of upward mobility with the potential to train the unskilled, employ the young and the poor, and bring self-esteem to the psychologically defeated. To reject such men, he argued, was a form of "de facto job discrimination" against "the least mobile, least educated young men."

More than that, he thought the military could help overcome what he believed was a central explanation for black poverty—broken, fatherless families. The military, he argued, might provide a surrogate black family: "Given the strains of disorganized and matrifocal family life in which so many Negro youth come of age, the armed forces are a dramatic and desperately needed change; a world away from women, a world run by strong men and unquestioned authority."

When Moynihan's ideas about race in America were published in a 1965 book called *The Negro Family,* they caused a firestorm of controversy, drawing heated criticism from civil rights activists and scholars. Critics argued that Moynihan's claims were founded on racist stereotypes and assumptions; that he attributed black poverty primarily to pathology and dysfunction rather than systemic economic inequality, discrimination, and racism.

These were not merely academic debates—Moynihan's ideas provided the intellectual underpinning for Project 100,000. Secretary of Defense McNamara agreed that the military could provide remedial help to the "subterranean poor," who "have not had the opportunity to earn their fair share of this nation's abundance." With military training they could "return to civilian life with skills and aptitudes which . . . will reverse the downward spiral of decay." Though Project 100,000 is rarely mentioned in histories of the Great Society, it was conceived and justified as a liberal reform, a part of the war on poverty. Just as policymakers defended the war as an idealistic, even liberal, effort to save the people of South Vietnam, they also claimed the military would improve the life chances of America's most disadvantaged. Both claims proved cruel mockeries of reality.

Project 100,000 was a terrible failure. Only some 6 percent of the men inducted under Project 100,000 received any additional training, and this amounted to little more than an effort to raise reading skills to a fifth-grade level. Instead, it sent some 200,000 very poor, confused, and ill-equipped young men to Vietnam, where their death rate was twice what it was for

American forces as a whole. When Martin Luther King Jr. argued that "the promises of the Great Society have been shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam," he meant that the war had taken money and support away from domestic reform programs. But Project 100,000 was a Great Society program that was quite literally shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam.

Though many poor Americans were sent to Vietnam, the vast majority were from the working class, primarily because the Vietnam-era draft was fundamentally biased in favor of the affluent and well connected. The most obvious class inequity was the student deferment that allowed those who could afford full-time college to avoid, or at least delay, military service. Fewer than 8 percent of all Americans who served in Vietnam (including officers) had completed college. And even by the early 1980s, Vietnam veterans were more than two times less likely to have completed college than their non-veteran peers. The most typical GIs in Vietnam were nineteen- and twenty-year-old high school graduates whose parents were factory workers, waitresses, truck drivers, nurses, firefighters, construction workers, salespeople, mechanics, police officers, miners, custodians, farm workers, and secretaries. The most uncommon GIs were young men of wealth and privilege. They had the best chance of avoiding the draft and few of them volunteered.

About 60 percent of the Vietnam generation's men were able to avoid military service, most of them simply by taking advantage of the rules created by the draft. Three-and-a-half million men received medical exemptions. You might expect those from the poorest homes with the least access to consistent, high-quality medical care would receive the bulk of those exemptions. Yet, in practice, those young men had to rely on military doctors to evaluate their fitness for service. With draft quotas soaring, induction center doctors overlooked all but the most obvious disqualifying physical problems. However, men who arrived with a letter from a private doctor documenting even relatively minor physical ailments (high blood pressure, chronic skin rashes, asthma, a balky knee from a high school football injury, etc.) often gained draft exemptions. One study found that 90 percent of the men who had the means and knowledge to press these claims were successful, even if they were in generally good health.

The Vietnam-era draft began in 1948 as the first permanent peacetime

draft in U.S. history. It evolved into a form of social engineering called "human resource planning." Policy planners believed the advent of nuclear weapons made truly massive armies obsolete. But the Cold War would require tens of thousands of civilian experts to serve the military-industrial complex—engineers, scientists, technicians, even English majors with a gift for writing government propaganda. More than ever before, the "national interest," as the government conceived it, demanded not just grunts in muddy boots, but an enormous range of highly educated civilians in jackets and ties. The goal was to create a *selective* service that produced soldiers *and* civilians who served the interests of U.S. power. To produce that result the Selective Service System devised a scheme that included both force and incentive—the club of the draft and the carrot of deferments and exemptions. Since the baby boom was huge—twenty-seven million men came of draft age during the Vietnam War—the military took 40 percent, of whom only 10 percent went to Vietnam.

The antiwar movement helped expose how the draft system was designed to manipulate the lives of an entire generation. The most damning evidence was a Selective Service memo discovered by a member of Students for a Democratic Society and published in *New Left Notes* in January 1967. The memo, sent to all 4,100 local draft boards in July 1965, made clear that the purpose of the draft system was to "channel" young people into careers that served the "national interest." Channeling, the memo explains, is a "device of pressurized guidance." The "club of induction" was used not just to draft soldiers but to "drive" other young people into higher education. Once in school, students would fear the loss of their draft deferment, a "threat" they would continue to feel "with equal intensity after graduation." A young man would thus be "impelled to pursue his skill rather than embark upon some less important enterprise and . . . apply [it] in an essential activity in the national interest."

Oddly enough, the memo said little about drafting soldiers. That was the easy part—"not much of an administrative or financial challenge." The harder job was "dealing with the other millions of registrants" and finding ways to make them "more effective human beings in the national interest." The Selective Service System regarded college and graduate students as valuable assets worthy of keeping out of combat, but only if they continued

to pursue "essential" professions. Anyone who dared to drop out of school, hitchhike around the country, organize full-time against the war, or any number of other activities the Selective Service deemed inessential to the "national interest" would quickly face the "club of induction." This system was "the American or indirect way of achieving what is done by direction in foreign countries where choice is not permitted."

To many draft-age Americans, it felt like a faceless system was attempting to control their lives. Equally galling was the apparent pride the Selective Service took in its ability to produce "effective human beings" with an "American" form of social control. For a generation raised to believe in the exceptional freedom of American life, encounters with the draft could be a profound awakening.

Many students began to believe that universities, allied with big business, were also designed to channel them into work that served the interests of entrenched power. At the University of California, Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement (1964–1965) criticized the impersonal "knowledge factories" that trained people to become compliant servants of corporate America. The movement began as a protest against the administration's decision to forbid political organizing on campus. Hundreds of Berkeley students had already been arrested in Bay Area protests against racially discriminatory employers, including major hotels and car dealerships. And during the summer of 1964, a few dozen Berkeley students went south to organize on behalf of voting rights for African Americans as part of Mississippi Freedom Summer. Students like these were not about to stand by as the university restricted their own political rights.

The Free Speech Movement's most famous address came in December 1964 from a twenty-two-year-old student named Mario Savio, a former altar boy from Queens (and son of a steelworker) who had participated in Mississippi Freedom Summer. According to an activist friend, Savio's organizing experience transformed him "from being a shy do-gooder with a bad stutter . . . to an articulate activist who quickly became the de facto leader of the Free Speech Movement." In front of four thousand students, Savio shouted:

> We're a bunch of raw materials that don't mean to . . . be made into any product! Don't mean to end up being bought by some clients of the University. . . . We're human beings! [thunderous applause]. There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious—makes you so sick at heart—that you can't take part. You can't even passively take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.

Less than four years earlier, John Kennedy convinced many young Americans that serving the United States would help destroy tyranny throughout the world. By 1964, a growing number had changed their minds—they now viewed their government and their nation as a force for repression, not freedom. Nor did they trust any authorities—including liberals like Berkeley president Clark Kerr—to alter the status quo without pressure from below.

Activist protest against the draft and its inequities eventually led Congress to institute draft reforms culminating in a lottery system by late 1969 and, in 1973, the end of the draft altogether. However, reform came too late to change significantly the primarily working-class composition of the military.

The major media gave little attention to the inequities of the draft. In fact, in the years 1961–1965, the media often celebrated the military as an "elite" and "professional" fighting force. Then, during the years of massive escalation in Vietnam (1965–1967), many articles touted the military as a bastion of democratic opportunity, particularly for African Americans.

President Harry Truman officially desegregated the military in 1948, but the process unfolded slowly. There were still some segregated units during the Korean War, and integrated units typically relegated African Americans to noncombat assignments because of the long-standing racist assumption that blacks lacked the courage and competence to fight well. Vietnam was the first fully integrated war, and many media accounts found it an unambiguously positive change.

"Democracy in the Foxhole," a *Time* article from May 26, 1967, trumpeted the contribution of "Negro fighting men" as "a hopeful and creative development in a dirty, hard-fought war," a chance for blacks to gain respect:

"The American Negro is winning—indeed has won—a black badge of courage that his nation must forever honor." But the greatest praise went not to black soldiers, but to the nation for understanding "a truth that Americans had not yet learned about themselves before Viet Nam: color has no place in war; merit is the only measure of the man." For *Time*, the integrated military vindicated American exceptionalism: "More than anything, the performance of the Negro G.I. under fire reaffirms the success—and diversity—of the American experiment."

Then, directly contradicting its own pretensions of color blindness, *Time* served up a shocking set of racial generalizations: "Often inchoate and inconsistent, instinctively self-serving yet naturally altruistic, the Negro fighting man is both savage in combat and gentle in his regard for the Vietnamese." Then came some wild speculation about "the Negro's" motives: "He may fight to prove his manhood—perhaps as a corrective to the matriarchal dominance of the Negro ghetto back home.... Mostly, though, he fights for the dignity of the Negro, to shatter the stereotypes of racial inferiority." Clearly, very few stereotypes had been shattered at *Time*. It even hinted that racial discrimination in the military had once been justifiable: "Unlike Negroes in previous wars, the Viet Nam breed is well disciplined."

The *Time* piece had an obvious political agenda: to use black soldiers in Vietnam (good) to criticize "Negro dissidents" at home (bad). Black soldiers, *Time* assured readers, had no patience for antiwar critics like Muhammad Ali (the magazine still called him Cassius Clay, three years after the famous boxer had changed his name). "What burns [SSgt. Glide] Brown and most Negro fighting men is the charge—first proclaimed by Stokely Carmichael and now echoed by the likes of Martin Luther King—that Viet Nam is a 'race war' in which the white U.S. Establishment is using colored mercenaries to murder brown-skinned freedom fighters."

In a superficial way, the major African American publications resembled *Time*'s upbeat coverage of blacks in the military. The magazines *Ebony* and *Jet*, and newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Amsterdam News*, initially supported the war editorially and were concerned that antiwar opposition would undermine LBJ's support for civil rights at home. And much praise was lavished on the black paratroopers who served in famous units like the 173rd Airborne Brigade (Sky Soldiers),

the 101st Airborne Division (the Screaming Eagles), and the 82nd Airborne (the All-American division). Indeed, there were so many blacks in the 82nd Airborne, some troops called it the "All Afro" division.

Yet the black press, unlike *Time*, did not believe the contributions of African American troops and nurses proved that the "American experiment" had achieved racial justice. Nor did they use the service of black troops to bash domestic civil rights activists. Nor did the black press ignore or dismiss the contributions of black servicemen from earlier times. Instead, the success of black soldiers in Vietnam was often used to highlight the *lack* of progress at home. For example, in "Negroes in 'The Nam,'" *Ebony* writer Thomas A. Johnson concluded that "the Negro has found in his nation's most totalitarian society—the military—the greatest degree of functional democracy that this nation has granted to black people." The irony was obvious: blacks had to risk their lives in a horrific war under a rigidly authoritarian system to gain basic rights denied them at home. *Ebony* was also more likely than white-owned publications to include a diversity of black opinion and dissenting viewpoints. The Johnson article, for example, cites black troops who were worried that they would return to the United States and be ordered into black communities to suppress urban riots. Some said they would refuse any such orders. Even as early as August 1966, *Ebony* quoted a soldier saying: "I've been fighting 'Charley' (nickname for the Viet Cong) over here so I guess I'll go back and start fighting 'Charlie' back home." *Ebony* did not need to explain to its readers that "Charlie" was slang for white people.

The black press was also more attentive to the racial inequities within the military, such as the fact that despite integration, the percentage of black officers remained small. From 1965 to 1970 the portion of black officers in the army actually *declined* from 3.6 percent to 2.6 percent. African American publications were also more likely to point out that black troops were *over*-represented in the frontline enlisted ranks and thus more likely to be killed, especially in the early years of the war. In 1965 and early 1966, almost a quarter of the Americans killed in Vietnam were African American, more than double their portion of the U.S. population.

As the war continued, the percentage of black casualties declined significantly. Part of the explanation is that the portion of pilots who died

increased and there were relatively few black pilots. There is also anecdotal evidence that the military command, conscious of criticism about the disproportionate black casualties of 1965–1967, ordered a reduction of the number of blacks assigned to combat units. For example, in 1967 a general told *U.S. News and World Report* that his division "deliberately spread out Negroes in component units at a ratio pretty much according to the division total. We don't want to risk having a platoon or company that has more Negroes than whites overrun or wiped out." However, the Defense Department denied that it had given any explicit race-based deployment orders. In any case, for the war as a whole, 12.6 percent of American deaths were African American (blacks made up about 11 percent of the U.S. population).

African American troops were among the first antiwar dissenters within the military, paving the way for a GI protest movement that exploded in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the summer of 1967, for example, two African American marines at Camp Pendleton were court-martialed for speaking out against the war in front of about fifteen marines, most of them black, who gathered under a tree after noon chow "for an impromptu gripe session."

Since the men were in the middle of advanced infantry training, many of them were destined to fight in Vietnam. But they began by talking about Detroit, not Vietnam. Someone had a newspaper with a headline story about the enormous urban uprising in the Motor City. There had been five days of burning, looting, confrontation, and armed suppression. Governor George Romney and President Lyndon Johnson ordered 8,000 National Guardsmen and 4,700 paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division to move in and restore order. By week's end, forty-three people were killed (most of them black), more than seven thousand people were jailed, and two thousand buildings were destroyed.

The most violent urban disorder of the 1960s, the Detroit uprising had its roots in fierce inequalities and a long history of institutional racism, discrimination, and police brutality. But the immediate spark was particularly relevant to the young black marines at Pendleton. The rioting began when Detroit police raided and busted an after-hours social club (a "blind pig") where eighty-two friends and family were celebrating the homecoming of two black Vietnam veterans. They had just risked their lives overseas only to return to a mass arrest and a home front war zone.

At Pendleton, Private George Daniels did most of the talking. Why should black men fight in Vietnam against a nonwhite enemy? Muhammad Ali had it right—no Viet Cong ever called us nigger. They say we're fighting for freedom in Vietnam but we haven't even got freedom for ourselves. And what happens when we get home—are they going to send us to Detroit to put down our own people? This is a white man's war. Let them fight it. Our battle is here at home.

Such arguments were rarely heard on the national airwaves, but they were a concern at the highest levels of American power. In 1965, when LBJ and his advisers debated massive escalation, George Ball and McGeorge Bundy both raised questions about the appearance and consequences of fighting a "white man's war." Bundy, who pushed for a deeper commitment despite his doubts, worried that the United States might be "getting into a white man's war with all the brown men against us or apathetic."

Private Daniels ended the noontime rap session by announcing that he had already put in a formal request to meet with the commanding officer to tell him he would refuse to fight in Vietnam. "Who all is going with me?" William Harvey and a dozen others decided to join Daniels. They were denied a meeting. Instead, the Office of Naval Intelligence interrogated all of the men individually and warned them that they could face charges of mutiny. On August 17, 1967, Daniels and Harvey were arrested and put in the brig to await a November court-martial.

The case had yet to receive any press and the two men had to rely on military lawyers to represent them. Daniels was convicted of conspiring to violate a section of the 1940 Smith Act, which forbids members of the naval forces from attempting to cause insubordination, disloyalty, and refusal of duty. He was sentenced to ten years of prison at hard labor. Harvey was acquitted on the Smith Act charge, but found guilty of violating Article 134 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice forbidding "disloyal statements . . . with design to promote disloyalty among the troops." His sentence was six years of prison at hard labor. The two men were sent to Portsmouth Naval Prison.

Constraints on dissent within the military were draconian. Though George Daniels and William Harvey had certainly *talked* with other marines about refusing to fight in Vietnam, the only action they had taken was

the perfectly legal step of requesting to speak with their commanding officer. There were no acts of disobedience; certainly no mutiny. Eventually the case received some attention in the hundreds of underground GI newspapers that sprang up in the late 1960s and early 1970s, published and distributed in secret by disaffected and rebellious troops. But by then Daniels and Harvey were doing time. An appeal was finally heard in 1969. The appeal failed, despite a strong case by the defense. The only concession made by the navy board of review was to reduce the prison sentences to four years for Daniels and three for Harvey.

The military did not usually have to rely on such extreme punishment to quell dissent. In the early years of the war, most men were kept in line with the standard tools of military training, indoctrination, and discipline. Given the power of the military to demand conformity, it is astonishing that GI opposition became so widespread. Yet in the last years of U.S. military involvement, 1969–1972, GI dissent was so endemic many officers were as concerned about maintaining discipline among their own troops as they were about fighting the enemy. The kind of antiwar talk that had produced maximum prison sentences for Daniels and Harvey in 1967 became so commonplace by 1970 that the military was unable to stop it and, to a great extent, had stopped trying.

Even the Green Berets lost their luster. In 1966, just a year after the publication of Robin Moore's *The Green Berets*, the Vietnam War was denounced by Green Beret Donald Duncan. After returning from an eighteen-month tour in Vietnam, the highly decorated master sergeant declined a field commission promotion to captain. Instead, he left the army and joined the antiwar movement. In a *Ramparts* article called "I Quit!" he wrote, "I couldn't kid myself any longer that my country was acting rationally, or even morally." A year later, Random House published his memoir, *The New Legions*. It was simply incorrect, he wrote, to view the Green Berets as a force for freedom and democracy either at home or in Vietnam. When Duncan worked in recruitment and procurement, he was told by the captain in charge, "Don't send me any niggers. Be careful, however, not to give the impression that we are prejudiced in the Special Forces. You won't find it hard to find an excuse to reject them." Duncan also offered details about the Green Berets' secret training in torture techniques. "We will deny that any

such thing is taught or intended," warned the instructor. "The Mothers of America wouldn't approve." But the message was clear: "Your job is to teach the various methods of interrogation to your indigenous counterpart. It would be very bad form for you, as an outsider, to do the questioning—especially if it gets nasty." Duncan described one incident that turned nasty indeed, as Vietnamese counterparts tortured, murdered, and then mutilated a Viet Cong suspect as several Green Berets looked on.

By 1968, even film star John Wayne couldn't revive the reputation of the war or the military. But he tried. His film adaptation of *The Green Berets* is a preachy and completely improbable defense of American policy. The U.S. media is presented as so blatantly biased that a reporter asks a military spokesman: "Do you agree . . . that the Green Beret is just a military robot with no personal feelings?"

The film takes one of those dovish journalists and sends him to Vietnam with Green Beret colonel Kirby (John Wayne). Once there, it becomes more than obvious that the Americans are the good guys and the Viet Cong are hideous monsters. By the film's end, the once critical journalist wants to return home and tell the "truth" about the war. In real life, an opposite conversion was far more common—many pro-war journalists went to Vietnam and changed their minds after firsthand exposure.

In John Wayne's film, all the good guys are totally gung-ho, including the South Vietnamese soldiers. They sound like the "good Indians" in old movie westerns. "We build many camps; clobber many VC," says Colonel Cai. "Affirmative?" Colonel Kirby replies: "Affirmative. I like the way you talk."

In Vietnam, when American troops were treated to a screening of *The Green Berets*, they found it hilarious. How could you not laugh at its pro-war piety and all the flagrantly unrealistic scenes—the "Vietnamese" forest with all those pine trees (battle scenes were shot at Fort Benning, Georgia), or the Viet Cong general who rides in a chauffeur-driven limousine to his jungle mansion filled with beautiful, champagne-sipping women in elegant gowns, or the final scene in which the sun sets in the *east* over the South China Sea?

GIs who watched *The Green Berets* were carrying something deeper than the jaded skepticism of war-weary soldiers who know that Hollywood

can't possibly portray their reality accurately. Many of them had come to see John Wayne himself in a completely different light. He had once epitomized what millions of baby boomer boys associated with enviable manly courage and panache. It would be hard to exaggerate just how important John Wayne was as a boyhood fantasy figure among soldiers who fought in Vietnam. No one in U.S. popular culture did more than Wayne to advance military recruitment. Countless veterans have written or talked about the electric impact of watching "Duke" in films like *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, and how the experience of Vietnam made them realize how horribly seduced they had been by their boyhood fantasies of war. Ron Kovic, a marine veteran who was badly wounded in Vietnam and paralyzed from the chest down, put it most graphically and angrily in his postwar memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*: "I gave my dead dick for John Wayne."

Even in Vietnam, many GIs turned on their childhood hero. They saw him as a dangerous and fraudulent model of swaggering bravado. "Don't try to be John Wayne" was perhaps the most common advice given to new soldiers in Vietnam by more experienced men. They worried that the FNGs (fucking new guys) might take stupid risks that would get everyone killed.

Americans, including GIs, were losing their once reflexive faith that the U.S. military, with all its skill and firepower, would prevail in Vietnam as it had so often throughout history. Also shattered was the faith that America's fighting forces were inherently more virtuous than their enemies. The unraveling of that conviction began in earnest in 1969 with the revelation that American soldiers had murdered hundreds of unarmed and unresisting women, children, babies, and old men in the village of My Lai.

For many people, the shocking news came first in the form of several horrifying photographs. One shows almost two dozen dead Vietnamese bodies on a dirt road. Many have fallen in a twisted pile; some are partially naked. Another photograph shows a woman lying in a field with her legs drawn up under her body. Her conical straw hat has flipped off her head. If you look closely you notice that a large portion of her brain lies exposed beneath the hat.

A third photograph shows a group of six Vietnamese women and children huddled together. At the center an old woman stands, stooped over, with a look of unspeakable terror on her face. Behind her a young woman

clutches her around the waist with her head buried in the older woman's shoulder. A young girl stands wide-eyed and openmouthed, with dishevelled bangs. She is pressing into a balding woman, barely visible, who is lifting an arm over the head of the young girl, perhaps to embrace her. On the other side of the photograph, a young woman holding a small boy in one arm uses her free hand to button the bottom of her blouse. In some magazines and newspapers the caption tells readers that American soldiers are about to kill the people in the photograph. We are looking at the final seconds of their lives.

Some of the My Lai photographs were published first in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. A few weeks later a larger selection was published in *Life* (December 5, 1969). Then they appeared in newspapers and magazines all over the world. They were taken by Ronald Haeberle, an army draftee who was sent to Vietnam as a military combat photographer. He had taken the pictures some twenty months earlier on March 16, 1968, while accompanying an infantry company from the Americal Division.

The massacre remained hidden to the public for more than a year and a half because the army had lied to cover it up. Dozens of officers who had information about the killing of civilians participated in the cover-up, including the commander of the Americal Division, Major General Samuel Foster. The army's fabricated cover story claimed that an actual battle had been fought in My Lai. According to the after-action report filed by Lieutenant Colonel Frank Barker Jr., the operation in My Lai "was well planned, well executed and successful. . . . The enemy suffered heavily." Details from the fake report were published the next day in the *New York Times* on page 1: "American troops caught a North Vietnamese force in a pincer movement on the central coastal plain yesterday, killing 128 enemy soldiers in day-long fighting."

The massacre might have remained a secret much longer had it not been for the moral courage and persistence of Vietnam veteran Ron Ridenhour. Though not present at My Lai, Ridenhour heard details of the slaughter from men he knew in Charlie Company. When he came home from Vietnam, he asked his father and other trusted older men what he should do with the information. They told him to "let sleeping dogs lie"; it would only cause trouble. Ridenhour ignored the advice and sent a long, detailed letter

to officials in the Pentagon, State Department, and Congress. The military finally felt compelled to initiate an investigation. On September 5, 1969, Lieutenant William Calley, a platoon leader at My Lai, was charged with the premeditated murder of 109 Vietnamese civilians.

The full story began to emerge later that fall, mostly from investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, writing for a small antiwar news syndicate called Dispatch News Service. It soon became apparent that dozens of men had joined Calley in the slaughter. While most press reports underestimated the number killed, the total death toll of Vietnamese civilians exceeded five hundred.

Once the truth began to emerge, one central fact was undisputed. There was no battle in My Lai. Charlie Company moved into the hamlet unopposed. There were no enemy fighters. There weren't even any military-age men in the hamlet. It was full of women and children. There was no hostile fire, not even a single round of sniper fire. There was no "fog of war" causing panic or confusion. The only noise came from American weapons, the screams of terrified villagers, and the helicopters hovering over the hamlet with higher-ranking officers.

As the Americans approached the village, some of the men murdered people working in the rice fields or walking along the roads. Once the soldiers entered the village, the killing became systematic. They exercised every imaginable form of barbarism. GIs threw hand grenades into homes and underground shelters. They herded large groups of people together and forced them to lie on roads or in drainage ditches, where they were executed en masse with automatic rifles. Other civilians were shot individually. Some Vietnamese were killed only after being clubbed, tortured, stabbed, and raped. Some GIs mutilated their victims after killing them. It was not a spontaneous spasm of violence. The Americans took their time. The massacre was almost leisurely, methodically carried out over a four-hour period. In the midst of the carnage, soldiers took breaks to eat and smoke.

Some men killed with an almost ecstatic enthusiasm; some because others were doing it; some because their officers ordered them to do it. A few refused to participate. A small group of Vietnamese were rescued when a U.S. observation helicopter piloted by Hugh Thompson saw the slaughter from above and landed to inspect. Thompson and his two crewmen ferried

a dozen or so Vietnamese to safety. Three decades later, the military finally recognized the courage and honor of Thompson and his crew. In 1998 they received the Soldier's Medal for "heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy."

The night before the massacre Charlie Company's commander, Captain Ernest Medina, gave his men an impassioned pep talk. Intelligence reports, he said, indicated a large enemy presence in My Lai. This would not be just another fruitless and exhausting patrol, he promised. Finally they would have an opportunity for "payback," a chance to avenge their buddies recently killed by booby traps and sniper fire. "When we go into My Lai, it's open season," one man recalled Medina saying. "When we leave, nothing will be living." Another man recalled these words: "Nothing [will] be walking, growing, or crawling. . . . They're all VCs, now go in and get them."

The My Lai massacre confronted the American public with the war's most troubling questions. How could our boys do such a thing? Were they just following orders? If so, how does that make them any different from those who carried out Hitler's genocide? And what about the responsibility of the men who sent our boys to Vietnam? Don't the military policies they put in place—with an obsessive focus on the body counts—make the killing of unarmed civilians inevitable? And if our troops are capable of a crime like My Lai, how can we continue to regard our country as morally superior to any other nation?

On March 29, 1971, a military court found Lieutenant William "Rusty" Calley guilty of premeditated murder and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Dozens of men were implicated in the massacre, and dozens more in the cover-up, but Calley was the only American convicted. Everyone else who was charged with a crime, including Captain Medina, was acquitted. During and after Calley's trial, many Americans rallied to his defense. Some viewed him as a scapegoat who was bearing the brunt of a much larger crime; others found him admirable, a patriot who was unfairly persecuted for serving his country. "Calley Rallies" and "Free Calley" bumper stickers began to proliferate. In Georgia, where Calley was imprisoned at Fort Benning, Governor Jimmy Carter proclaimed an American Fighting Men's Day, and asked Georgians to drive with their headlights on to "honor the flag as 'Rusty' had done."

As Calley's trial concluded, a newly released song called the "The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley" sold 200,000 copies in three days (two million were eventually sold). It is set to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic":

My name is William Calley
I'm a soldier of this land
I've tried to do my duty
And to gain the upper hand
But they've made me out a villain
They have stamped me with a brand
As we go marching on.

While Calley and his buddies are "forgotten" on distant battlefields where "their youthful bodies are riddled by the bullets of the night," at home people are "marching in the street" and "helping our defeat." Near the end, the singer shifts to spoken word to imagine Calley facing God—the "Great Commander."

> Sir, I followed all my orders and I did the best I could.... We took the jungle village exactly like they said / We responded to their rifle fire with everything we had / And when the smoke had cleared away a hundred souls lay dead.

In the end, a soaring chorus from the original "Battle Hymn": "Glory, glory Hallelujah / Glory, glory Hallelujah / His truth goes marching on."

This "battle hymn" casts Calley and all American soldiers as the victims of a treasonous antiwar movement. As for My Lai, the basic facts are falsified to make it seem as if the victims were accidentally gunned down in a smoke-filled crossfire rather than deliberately murdered.

When Calley was convicted, the White House was inundated with thousands of telegrams calling on the president to offer clemency. Nixon responded by having Calley removed from prison and put under house arrest in his bachelor officers' quarters. After three and a half years, the secretary of the army, with Nixon's tacit approval, reduced Calley's sentence, making him eligible for parole.

At bottom, the efforts to excuse, or explain away, the My Lai massacre reflected a powerful need to evade the most troubling realities of the Vietnam War and maintain pride in the nation and its military. Yet the most common excuse for My Lai—that atrocities happen in all wars—was an unintentional rejection of a core tenet of American exceptionalism. For if all wars, and all armies, produce atrocities, how could the United States continue to regard itself as exceptionally virtuous? It is to concede that all people and all nations are capable of evil. As Jon Sebba from Houghton, Michigan, put it in a letter to *Time* magazine: "In war the average man will commit atrocities whether he be American, Asian, German, British, Israeli or Arab. War—not the morality of an individual man—should be the subject of all this misplaced soul-searching." Or, as Bernice Balfour from Anaheim, California, wrote: "Perhaps the horror-filled memory of My Lai will awaken more of us to the belated knowledge that no nation has a monopoly on goodness, truth, honor and mercy—all virtues habitually ascribed to Americans, and particularly the American soldier."

One of the American soldiers at My Lai was Private Paul Meadlo. While guarding a group of about sixty Vietnamese who had been rounded up and made to squat down, Lieutenant Calley approached and ordered Meadlo to "take care of them." At first, Meadlo did not understand. "Come on," Calley barked, "we'll kill them. Fire when I say 'Fire.'" Meadlo obeyed. The villagers were about ten feet away when the two men began firing their M-16 rifles on automatic. After killing many of the Vietnamese, Meadlo stopped. With tears streaming down his face, he turned to a buddy, shoved the M-16 toward him, and said, "You shoot them."

Two days after the massacre, Calley ordered his platoon to walk through a known minefield that had recently caused American casualties. Most of the men ignored the order, so Calley took only a small squad. Paul Meadlo was ordered to walk point carrying a mine detector. Calley grew impatient with Meadlo's careful movements and ordered him to stop sweeping and pick up the pace. A few seconds later, Meadlo stepped on a mine. His left foot was blown off. When an evacuation helicopter arrived, he seemed to be thinking more about My Lai than his missing foot. He screamed at Calley: "Why did you do it? Why did you do it? This is God's punishment to me, Calley, but you'll get yours! God will punish you, Calley!"

Twenty months later, journalists tracked down Meadlo in his hometown of Goshen, Indiana. They found that most townspeople supported the young veteran and what he had done at My Lai. "He had to do what his officer told him," said the owner of a pool hall. "Things like that happen in war. They always have and they always will," said a veteran of World War II and Korea.

Meadlo's parents, however, did not agree. His father, a retired coal miner, said: "If it had been me out there I would have swung my rifle around and shot Calley instead—right between the God-damned eyes." Meadlo's mother said this: "I raised him up to be a good boy and did everything I could. They come along and took him to the service. He fought for his country and look what they done to him—made him a murderer."

NOTES

To view photographs and images discussed in *American Reckoning*, or relevant to it, please go to the author's website. You will also find a time line of significant dates. Go to: ChristianAppy.com.

Introduction: Who Are We?

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Chapter Five: Our Boys

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143 **screening of *The Green Berets*:** Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers* (New York: Bantam, 1979), p. 38. On the film's reception, see Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *John Wayne: American* (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 547–51.

144 **"I gave my dead dick":** Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 98.

144 **"Don't try to be John Wayne":** Appy, *Working-Class War*, p. 140. But dispensing with an old and beloved model wasn't easy. The very language of the grunts reflected the degree to which their lives had been shaped by the shoot-'em-up pop culture of the 1950s and John Wayne in particular. From their C-rations they ate "John Wayne cookies" and "John Wayne crackers," and called their P-38 can openers "John Waynes." A .45-caliber pistol was a "John Wayne rifle." Jan E. Dizard, Robert M. Muth, Stephen P. Andrews, eds., *Guns in America: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 100.

145 **The massacre remained hidden:** Seymour M. Hersh, *Cover-up* (New York: Random House, 1972); *New York Times*, May 17, 1968; Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (New York: Viking, 1992), pp. 163–213.

145 **"let sleeping dogs lie":** Ron Ridenhour, "My Lai and Why It Matters," lecture given at Tulane University on the thirtieth anniversary of the My Lai massacre. A VHS videotape of the lecture was produced by Fertel Communications, New Orleans, LA. The Fertel Foundation and the Nation Institute award four annual Ridenhour Prizes to "recognize acts of truth-telling that protect the public interest, promote social justice or illuminate a more just vision of society."

147 **Soldier's Medal:** http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/07/national/07thompson.html?_r=0.

147 **"When we leave, nothing will be living":** Seymour Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 39–41.

147 **"honor the flag as 'Rusty' had done":** Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 340.

148 **"The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley":** John Stauffer and Benjamin Soskis, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic: A Biography of the Song That Marches On* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 279–80, 300–301.

148 **put under house arrest:** Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, pp. 341, 355.

149 **"no nation has a monopoly on goodness":** *Time*, December 19, 1969.

149 **"take care of them":** Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 120.

149 **"This is God's punishment":** Ibid., p. 165.

150 **"I raised him up to be a good boy":** James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, *My Lai: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1998), pp. 181–87; Bilton and Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai*, p. 263.

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151 **estimated death toll:** Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets*, pp. 58–59.

152 **impotent (or sexually confused):** Blaire Pingeton, "*Dr. Strangelove*'s Nervous Tics," http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/pingetonthanks07.pdf.

153 **"simple farmers":** Lyndon Johnson, "Peace Without Conquest," April 7, 1965, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650407.asp.

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154 **"When everything was very calm":** Appy, *Patriots*, p. 248.

154 **"the drapes were fluttering":** George W. Allen, *None So Blind: A Personal Account of the Intelligence Failure in Vietnam* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), p. 196.