Vietnam War Memorial: a National Center of Healing

Veterans Learn to Cope with Painful Memories of the War

Dan Gisel

Although Dan Gisel would caution anyone to learn the facts before engaging in any sort of armed conflict, at least 20 years after he returned from the Vietnam War, he believes his reasons for fighting remain important and justifiable.

Gisel enlisted in March 1964 as a private and was soon accepted into a class of 250 in the special forces program of the U.S. Army. The following December, he graduated as one of 18 green berets, 15 of whom became an A-Team of advisors for the Vietnamese.

“The career people volunteered to go to Vietnam simply because that’s where the action was,” Gisel stated. “Some of us—I myself included—went to Vietnam because we felt it was very important that in a sense we had an opportunity to, and I know this is something that has been used again and again, but an opportunity to stem the tide of the communist invasion in Asia.”

Believing that if Vietnamese were to come under Communist rule, the whole of Southeast Asia would be threatened, Gisel said he “was in there a long time while I was over there what that we were doing was important and I still feel that the reason I wanted to go to Vietnam were important.”

Committed to these ideals, Gisel said the war’s outcome represented a failure of that purpose and in a sense, made the names of those listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial meaningful.

“You’d say we would have the stigma of being the first United States armed forces personnel to have ever lost a war.”

It was 18 years before Gisel was able to share his experiences and feelings about the war with anyone but his wife, who received only his and pieces herself. His recital began last June after taking Walter Capps’ Religion and Politics class at USC. And only this quarter, in Religious Studies 153, has he told certain stories to fellow students.

He said that “dress rehearsals” are going on now in Latin America for another Vietnam and this “is one of the reasons that I came to the realization that it was time for not just me but all of us really to stand up and say what it is like... To try to get across to people that war is not the glamourized thing that Hollywood has made of it.”

After returning from the pilgrimage to the war memorial, Gisel told the class of an experience which he said was not the worst he encountered during a 23-month tour of duty. Gisel was the sole survivor of an attack. He spoke of the battle and of having to watch as a 14-year-old Viet Cong boy, whom he had shot in defense, first realized his fate and died. Gisel received a Distinguished Service Cross after this action. It was the second time he had ever related the incident.

Although he was frightened about what the class’s response might be and how they would later view him, he felt it must be told because “nobody had talked about the blood and guts. Had the class gone away and not received that, I felt it would have been an injustice to the country which we can teach us to respond to war.”

Gisel said: “I told it to give a bird’s eye view of what war is about — when it comes right down to it, it’s killing more than we can get our of, but being.

Receiving not only intensive combat training, but also instruction on things such as how to build schools and churches, Gisel said he “went over there probably one of the best-trained individuals who any country ever sent to war.”

“I went to Vietnam fully prepared to shoot, but didn’t expect to be shooting at women and”

(See VETERANS, p.18)
VETERANS

(Continued from p. 14)

(Continued from p. 14)

Died in Cuba in 1900 and his remains were returned to the United States for burial. He was cremated in Washington, D.C., and his ashes were brought back to San Antonio for burial in the military cemetery.

Barbara Meisinger

Barbara Meisinger was a nurse in the Army during World War II and later worked as a nurse in the Veterans Administration Hospital in San Antonio. She passed away in 2000.

Visitors to the memorial share in a unique experience of honoring the fallen heroes.


**Veterans**

(Continued from p.13)

Wherever he was stationed with his unit. There were people who were the American flag on their butt and called me baby killer, he said. "How did that help the war out? I wonder how many of my friends did not come back because of the war residue.

Time passed, however, and he began to talk to friends about the war. De La Vega served as an officer for the Los Angeles Police Department for a time, tried to work a failed marriage, and received a master’s degree in counseling. De La Vega moved to Santa Barbara in October and began counseling in 1960. He had a friend who recommended me and I don’t know where it came from, to protect and serve," he said.

A heroes’ welcome has traditionally validated veterans, he said, but the Vietnam veteran were not hailed in this way. This sort of validation is coming out of USC and the veterans taught by Walter Capps, though, he said. "The appliance bail. It is not a real place. But what I can’t help is the fact that I am a human being that can love and care about.

The nation will heal as well, "we could all understand that we have to talk about this thing which is the norm."

I honestly feel that we weren’t wrong getting into it (the Vietnam war), but we couldn’t have menced it up more if we had tried.

If you don’t want to have a war ... the way to prevent it is to do it beforehand. The people demonstrating against Central America and South Africa are doing that now," he said. We need to make positive choices that will have long-term results.

The current generation of youths has not been tested by depression and war as have the past few generations. De La Vega said, explaining that they have the opportunity to prevent for the future. "It is really important that people educate themselves about the big picture" so they will be prepared to intelligently face a test that the current political climates may be severe, he added.

"It’s not enough to be one of the culture — every generation has had it’s culture," he said. "I hope there’s enough in (this generation) to lead.

Wilson Hubbell

After years of hiding away the fact that he was involved in the Vietnam war, Wilson Hubbell can now talk about his war experiences and find healing in meetings with fellow veterans, Walter Capps’ class and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"It’s too early to talk about all of these things," he said. "I was a Vietnam vet," and not worry about someone getting up and walking across the room and wondering if you’re going to explode," he said.

"It’s finally safe after all of these years to say yeah, I was a Vietnam vet." — Wilson Hubbell

At the age of 26, Hubbell enlisted in the army before his draft notice could take effect in 1963 so he could choose his assignment. Pledging three years for the privilege, he entered the field of balloon repair.

Hubbell went to Vietnam in December 1967. He took pride in work. "We never had one fall out of the sky because of faulty maintenance, at least not while I was there," he said.

Not directly in the line of combat, he nevertheless came under fire. "At night it really was bad news," he said. Every fifth machine gun balloon is hollow, he explained, and filled with a red phosphorus that burns when it is fired so that one can trace the path of the bullet. "If you’re out in front of the balloon, you can see it coming," he said.

When he returned, Hubbell still had to complete his commitment to the army. Stationed in Oakland in 1968, he had to go through a hanger style lottery to get on off of the dirt. He would like to see to get up the hanger if I had to go off. "People just don’t want to associate with you, they left you alone," he said. "You learn to hide it away, you don’t let anyone know (that you are a veteran)."

Hubbell moved back to his home town of San Diego, but nightmares followed him. He suffered from PTSD which resulted during which his heartbeat went as high as 180. "You think you’re going to explode.

It wasn’t until he had moved to Santa Barbara and participated in last year’s veteran’s parade on State Street that he met other veterans and healing began with his experiences.

"I thought I really owed it to myself to get a parade out of this deal," Hubbell said. "I couldn’t believe that there would be a bunch of guys with their hands in the air at a parade and actually admit they were vets."

From that parade, he made contact with people from the Vet Center and found his way to Religious Studies 130. "I learned a lot more about Vietnam from going to the class than from what I learned in my ROTC," he said.

Hubbell made the trip to the wall for the second time this year and looked at the names of those that are dear to him. He looked up the name of his best friend. "He was a good student and a good person in school and they sent him back to Vietnam." Hubbell introduced this friend to a woman who would become his wife. She was pregnant when he returned to the war — he was killed the next day.

Many people were at the memorial "because they wanted to see what it was all about," he said. "That’s a good sign that it has been accepted by the mainstream of society. People who 26 years ago wouldn’t want to get next to you if you were wearing a uniform are going to the wall and dealing with it."

"In 1965, I had the political sensitivity of a gnat, I didn’t know what was happening," he said. "I think the bottom line now is that it’s all right to fight for your country."

He localized situations in which an individual could be threatened and the reasoning behind defense in these situations. "If someone walks into your home and threatens you, you’re going to fight for yourself. If someone walks into your parent’s home that’s love of community."

"But what do you do when somebody says it’s your turn to go and fight and kill and protect the interests of Burger King in Nicaragua? That’s love of community."

Those who served in Vietnam "didn’t understand the consequences," he said. "We got educated on the job and the best thing is not to experience it."

Most students of a UCSB graduate who had served two years in the Peace Corps and then was drafted into the Vietnam War. The student had become a helicopter pilot and was killed in action. He commented on that guy," he said. "I wonder what he would tell you if he was alive."

**Welcome Home.**

Gay and Lesbian Student Union at UC Santa Barbara

**Facing the Threat: Gay Rights and the New Right Bigots**

It never ceases to amaze me how many of those in our community seem quite oblivious of the crisis facing gay people in this country. This is as true at UCSB as anywhere else. Comments like “Well, you know I’ve never really been discriminated against,” “I’m not really into politics,” or “Yeah, I guess I did vote for Reagan, but he looks after our wallets and won’t support those welfare bums,” are all too typical of people who enjoy their little private paradise.

The AIDS crisis is not the tip of the iceberg. Did you know how much hate mail pours into the offices of congressmen supportive of a gay rights bill, especially of late? I write these letters in response to this avalanche of bigotry as “pervs,” “scum,” “disease-carriers” and “child molesters,” amongst other things.

What is really frightening is that we can call it “treatment,” or “quarantining; there are some who seek our death, advocating the death penalty for homosexuals. Of course, we are all too often so-called Christians who assuredly would have made the Jesus of the gospels weep; some are neo-Nazis and KKK members. Whatever the case, groups like the Moral Majority know they are onto a good thing. As a recent article in Christopher Street pointed out, here is the one minority that is still acceptable to make ugly jokes — and we should not look to the liberals for support, not only because the Democrats have supported President Carter far out of proportion to his views, but because, quite frankly, we are a political embarrassment, especially to those who fear the rightist ideologues, traditional smearing of progressive politicians with “anti-family” tags.

Gay people need to understand the nature of the problem. They need to act on it in an intelligent way, a way that understands both what we are up against and in what kind of system we are operating. We cannot afford to be the new scapegoats for all the sins of all the Jews were in the thirties. Again and again we have to remind our fellow-citizens that Hitler used perhaps half-a-million gay men for his practice run for the Holocaust. Those who act against us will act against others later. The mentality is just right — how often are not these very anti-gay bigots who are the least concerned about other minorities, about poverty, about peace, and who are most concerned to build more prisons, hang more criminals, tolerate vicious dictatorships around the world in the name of anti-Communism, and mouth platitudes about the South African government? We need to get the message out to the millions of basically decent folk of all political persuasions that because freedom is indivisible, so is prejudice. Nor can they get off the hook by saying “We don’t mind them as long as they keep it out of sight.” Bigotry cannot merely be tolerated, minorities cannot merely be ignored. Prejudice has to be acted against and the oppressed have to be actively supported, in the dark, in the dark, and pleasure is rooted in the sin of not being you.

Anywhere but here

Silhouettes in our window are allowed
And cloudy rooms, smoke-filled
And gloomy alleys, empty
Of all but footsteps. Shadows, we find our way
To a crowded place where passions are dark
And pleasure is rooted in the sin
Of not being you.

GLSU Calendar

**April 12**

Annual Spring Retreat. Call office for more info.

Confidentiality is respected at all groups, meetings and functions.

Funds for this newsletter are from A.S. and GLSU.

The GLSU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, veteran status, or the basis of sexual orientation.

This newsletter was prepared by Dale. U.C. Policy

In accordance with applicable federal laws and university policy, the University of California does not discriminate in any of its policies, programs, or practices on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age or handicap.

Anywhere but Here

Silhouettes, we are allowed
And cloudy rooms, smoke-filled
And gloomy alleys, empty
Of all but footsteps. Shadows, we find our way
To a crowded place where passions are dark
And pleasure is rooted in the sin
Of not being you.

Anywhere, but here

GLSU Calendar

**Tuesdays**

7 p.m., Cafe Interim, General business meeting
8 p.m., Social night.

**Thursdays**

7 p.m., Women’s Center, Gay & Lesbian Support group.

**Mondays**

7 p.m., Women’s Center, Lesbian Support group.

**April 12**

Annual Spring Retreat. Call office for more info.

Confidentiality is respected at all groups, meetings and functions.

Funds for this newsletter are from A.S. and GLSU.

The GLSU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, veteran status, or the basis of sexual orientation.

This newsletter was prepared by Dale.