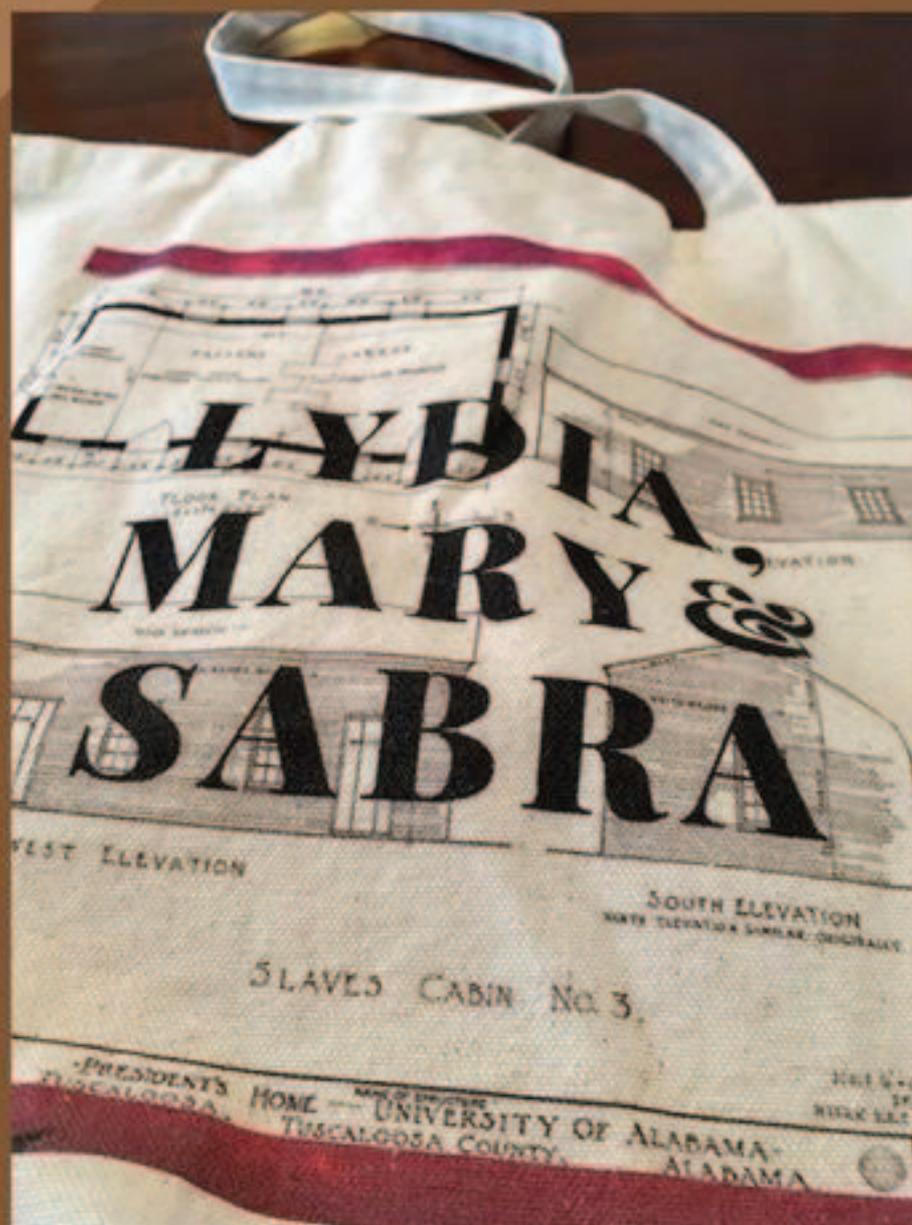


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Waging Peace in Vietnam: U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War, edited by Ron Carver, David Cortright, and Barbara Doherty. New York: New Village Press, 2019. xv + 239 pp.; illustrations, notes, bibliography, index; clothbound, \$89.00; paperbound, \$35.00.

Waging Peace in Vietnam: U.S. Soldiers and Veterans Who Opposed the War is an important book for public historians, especially those who teach oral history or the Vietnam War, or have an interest in archives. The book grew out of an exhibit curated by Ron Carver for the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City.¹ It includes dozens of powerful oral histories and several essays contextualizing the interviews. The overall purpose of the book is to explore an important but still little-known social movement—the rebellion of troops during the Vietnam War. Opposition to the war fell into two broad areas—dissent and resistance. The editors make a persuasive case that the growing unreliability of US troops led President Nixon to accelerate the pace of troop withdrawals. David Cortright argues that the dissent and defiance of troops “played a decisive role in limiting the U.S. ability to continue the war and forced an end to the fighting” (5). Chapters focus on such issues as early resisters; writing for peace and the GI press; GI coffeehouses; petitioning to end the war; marching for peace; exposing war crimes; seeking asylum; uprisings and rebellions; redefining patriotism; and confronting the legacies of war.

The editors draw heavily from the documents in the Wisconsin Historical Society’s GI Press Collection, a digitized collection of hundreds of newspapers produced and distributed by active-duty members of the armed forces opposed to the war. Perhaps the most acerbic title in the GI press was *Fun, Travel, Adventure* or *FTA* which derisively invoked an Army recruitment slogan. “FTA” for many combatants actually referenced “Fuck the Army.”

The book shows that GI coffeehouses were significant sources of support and truthful information. They resulted from collaboration among active duty troops, veterans, and civilian activists. The first opened in Columbia, South Carolina, outside of Fort Jackson in the fall of 1967. Judy Olov, then an 18-year-old sophomore at the University of South Carolina, helped launch the UFO coffeehouse. She recalled that a major accomplishment of this facility, and others that followed, was that it “integrated Columbia in two ways—soldiers and students, and blacks and whites” (41). Every coffeehouse faced attacks from a variety of sources—FBI, local law enforcement, military authorities, and frequently violent attacks by local vigilantes.

Active duty GIs often took the extraordinary risk of participating in public protests. Susan Schnall in 1967 was a Navy nurse at Oak Knoll Hospital, a facility in Oakland, California for Marines wounded in Vietnam. She com-

¹ Carver developed a traveling version of the exhibit which has been displayed in several American universities. For details, please visit wagingpeaceinvietnam.com.



Lt. Susan Schnall speaks at the March for Peace on October 12, 1968, in San Francisco. (Photo credit: Paul Richards, Harvey Richards Media Archive)

mented: “I can still remember the nighttime screams of pain and fear . . . Badly injured young men would dream their nightmares of war, of dead and dying buddies” (59). In advance of a GI and Veterans March for Peace in San Francisco on October 12, 1968, she and a pilot friend rented a plane and dropped thousands of leaflets over area military bases. She led the parade and addressed the rally in her Navy uniform. By 1969, she was court-martialed for her anti-war actions.

Veterans played a critical role in a variety of war crimes inquiries. According to veteran Michael Uhl, they understood that “the U.S. military had been destroying the very fabric of village life throughout South Vietnam and then grimly measuring its *victories* by counting the bodies of the dead, typically unarmed civilians” (69). My Lai, a 1968 massacre of more than five hundred civilians, primarily women and children, was one of many brutal episodes that the book highlights. Uhl was an organizer who recruited veterans to provide their “uniquely credible voices to educate Americans on the true nature of the war” (70).

The most consistently rebellious troops in Vietnam and throughout the military were African Americans. Inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, they confronted racism directed against themselves and Vietnamese. Of the many racial uprisings, the most significant was the prison rebellion in 1968 at Long Binh Jail at Bien Hoa, derisively referenced as LBJ (initials of President Lyndon B. Johnson). Greg Payton, who is African American, was an uprising participant.



Greg Payton, 1988. (Photo credit: William Short)

He reflected that his Vietnam experience drove him to racism and violence. For example, prior to his incarceration, he recalled that his first sergeant was talking about “g**ks” and Payton told him that “the g**k is the same thing as a n****r.” He responded that Payton was a “smart n****r” (102).

Chuck Searcy is one of several veterans featured in the volume providing humanitarian assistance and redressing damage the war caused. He and his fellow Military Intelligence analysts “churned out classified reports on Vietcong and North Vietnamese” but they also read Ho Chi Minh’s speeches, the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, and much more. “Most of us turned against the war,” he recalled. “We felt we were part of an institutional lie” (167). Since 2001, Searcy has

worked with Project Renew in Vietnam. The project's two major goals are to locate and destroy unexploded bombs and assist those injured by accidental explosions and to aid victims of Agent Orange, deadly herbicide employed by the US military. Searcy maintains that his work is not based on guilt but rather on responsibility as an American and as a Vietnam vet.

Waging Peace is a useful corrective to Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's documentary series *The Vietnam War*. The film, which encompasses ten parts and eighteen hours, is problematic in many respects. It is especially egregious in its portrayal of the antiwar movement, embodied by one former protester, weeping and apologetic at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Burns and Novick appear to have been either largely ignorant of the massive resistance within the military, or to have chosen to ignore it. In contrast, *Waging Peace* convincingly demonstrates the many ways veterans and non-veteran activists collaborated to oppose the war.

There are minor issues with the volume. Some of the oral history interviews would be more useful if they were more fully developed. Also, in a few places the book is repetitious. Overall, however, *Waging Peace* is a major contribution that focuses attention on an often-unacknowledged social movement. For public historians, the book will be of special interest because of the oral histories, the GI Press archival material, and the unique examination of the role GIs played in opposing the Vietnam War.

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