

Waging Peace in Vietnam

Dissent and Resistance Within the Military



Source: Harvey Richards Media Archive (c) Paul Richards

During America's war in Vietnam, the antiwar movement among active-duty soldiers and veterans was central to the success of the larger U.S. protest movement—and had a profound impact on the course of the war.

In the mid-Sixties, as the U.S. escalated troop numbers, tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors and pilots refused to fight, sail and fly bombing missions. As scholar David Cortright notes:

It is arguable that by 1970 U.S. ground troops in Vietnam had ceased to function as an effective fighting force. The disintegration of military morale was a factor in the Nixon administration's decision to accelerate troop withdrawals.

This exhibit recounts the experiences of ten soldiers and veterans who risked so much, from the total alienation of their families to personal harm and imprisonment, as they openly protested the war. May their stories spark discussion and teaching about patriotism and the power of individual and collective dissent to make societal change.

Learn More:

www.WagingPeaceinVietnam.com

www.AMatterofConscience.com

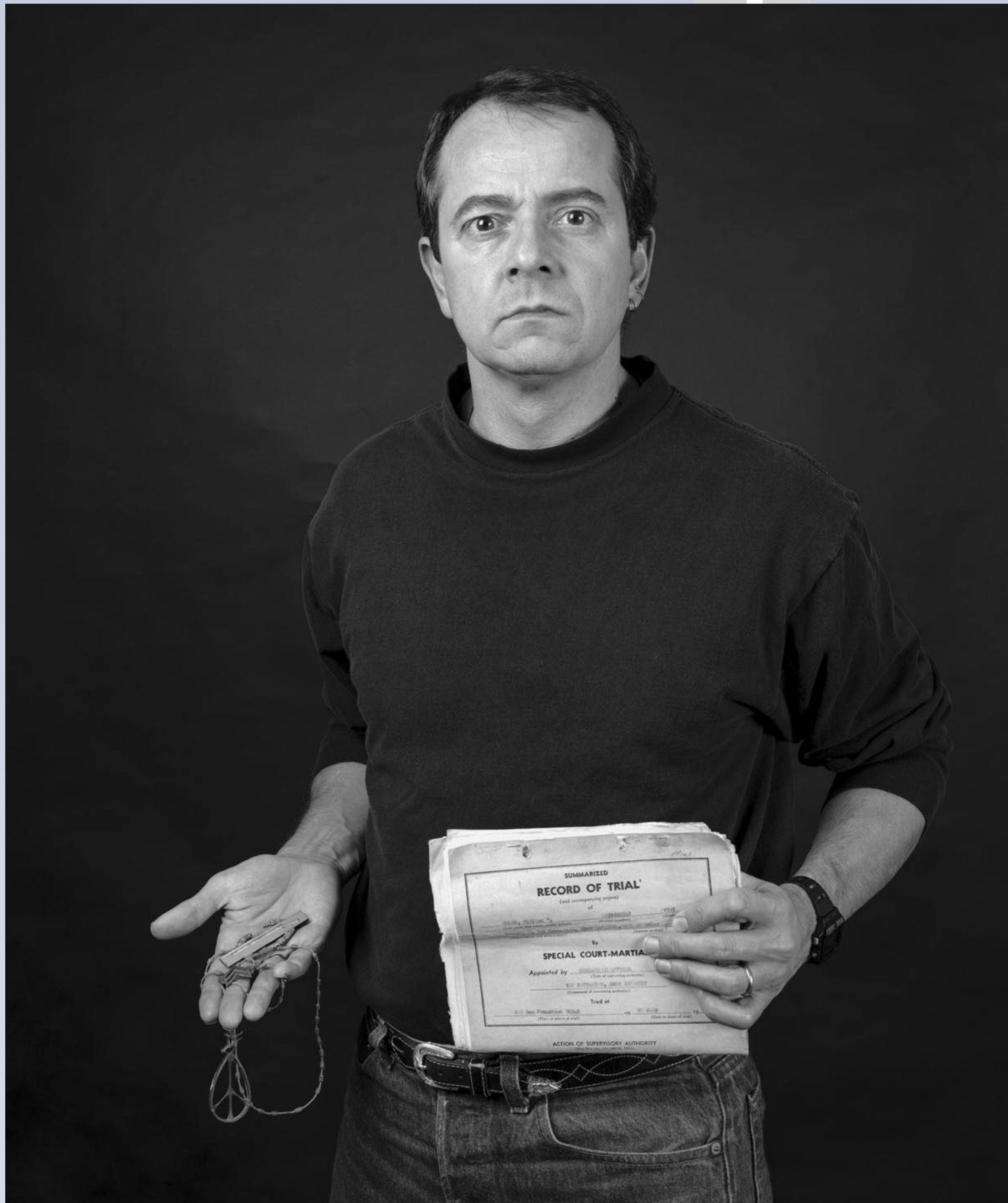


Photo by William Short

Bill Short

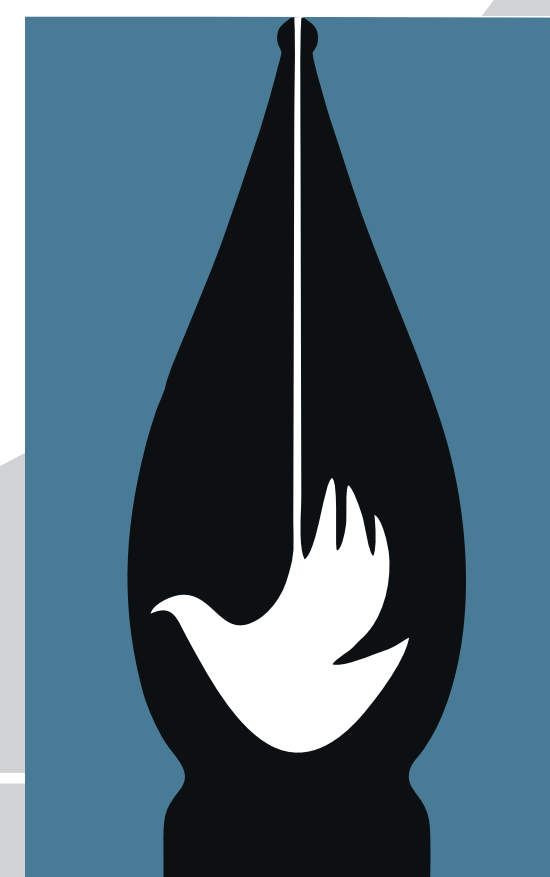
Bill was drafted into the U.S. Army 1968 – 1969. He attended NCOC (non-commissioned officers) school, U.S. Military Infantry War College, at Fort Benning, Georgia. He was a squad leader and platoon sergeant, 1st Infantry Division, in Vietnam in 1969.

I carried my weapon and fired many rounds through it, but I always felt protected against taking another life because twenty or eighty other guys fired too.

After one ambush where Viet Cong were killed, a sergeant asked for Bill's help in booby trapping the bodies.

Each grenade was placed...beneath the dead men. Later that night...I heard the grenades go off. I knew the comrades of the men we had killed had come to claim the bodies and quite possibly had gotten something extra to go with their grief. I knew I was responsible for taking human life. Two months later I refused to go out on any more combat missions.

Bill was court-martialed twice in Vietnam for refusing to fight. He was initially charged with leading a conspiracy to mutiny and served two months of a seven-month sentence in Long Binh Stockade.



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David Cortright

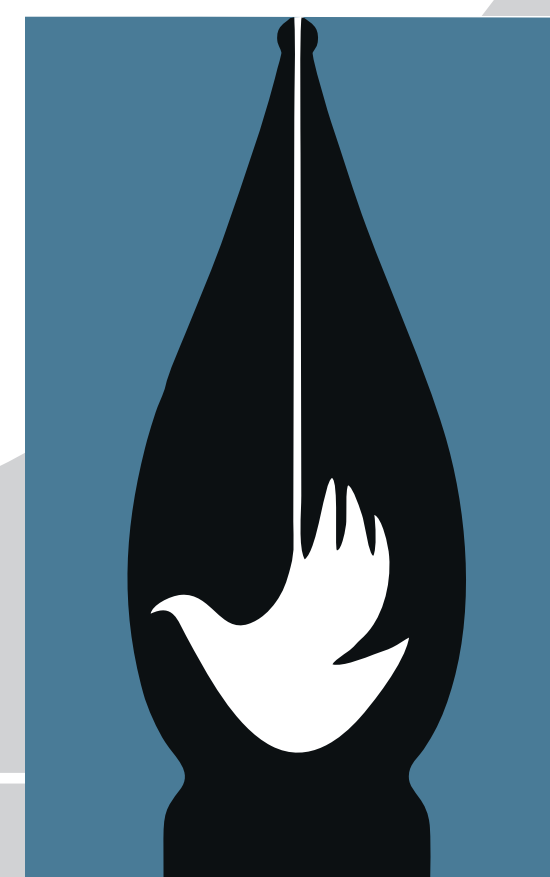
Early in 1969, the Student Mobilization Committee, one of the most prominent national organizations rallying opposition to the war, invited the eminent photographer, Richard Avedon, to make a promotional poster. Avedon agreed and enlisted the help of artist and designer Marvin Israel. Together they transformed a photograph of a soldier holding a white dove into a red-white-and-blue graphic, evoking the aesthetics of photographic solarization and Andy Warhol's silkscreens.

At the bottom of the poster, the tagline reads: "Who has a better right to oppose the war?" For the next several years Avedon would frequently lend support to antiwar and counter-cultural organizations.

While I was stationed at Fort Hamilton in New York, a representative of the Mobe asked if I would pose for an antiwar poster. The resulting poster (yes, that's a real dove) was widely used in the antiwar movement. It was not intended to be a portrait of me personally, but an image of the antiwar GI as archetype — the thinking soldier who asserts the right and duty to speak out against an illegal and unjust war.



Photograph by Richard Avedon. Designed by Marvin Israel. Copyright Darien House, Inc.



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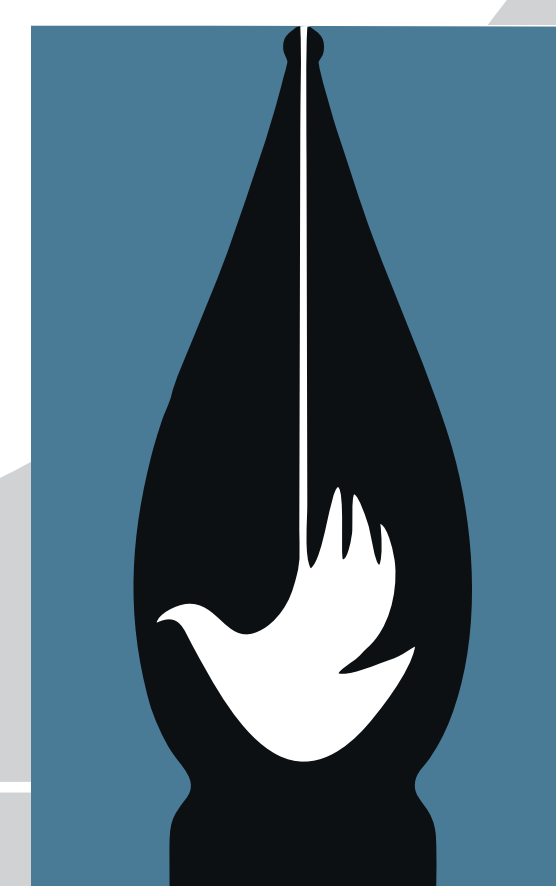


Photo Private Collection

Hugh Thompson

From the air, helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson observed American soldiers slaughtering Vietnamese civilians in My Lai. He landed his craft multiple times in an effort to end the massacre.

Thompson is seen in this photograph speaking to the press immediately after he emerged from a closed-door Army hearing about the massacre. Thompson was strongly condemned by many, including Congressman Mendel Rivers, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, who publicly stated, according to the *New York Times*, that Thompson was the only soldier at My Lai who should be punished (for trying to stop the massacre).



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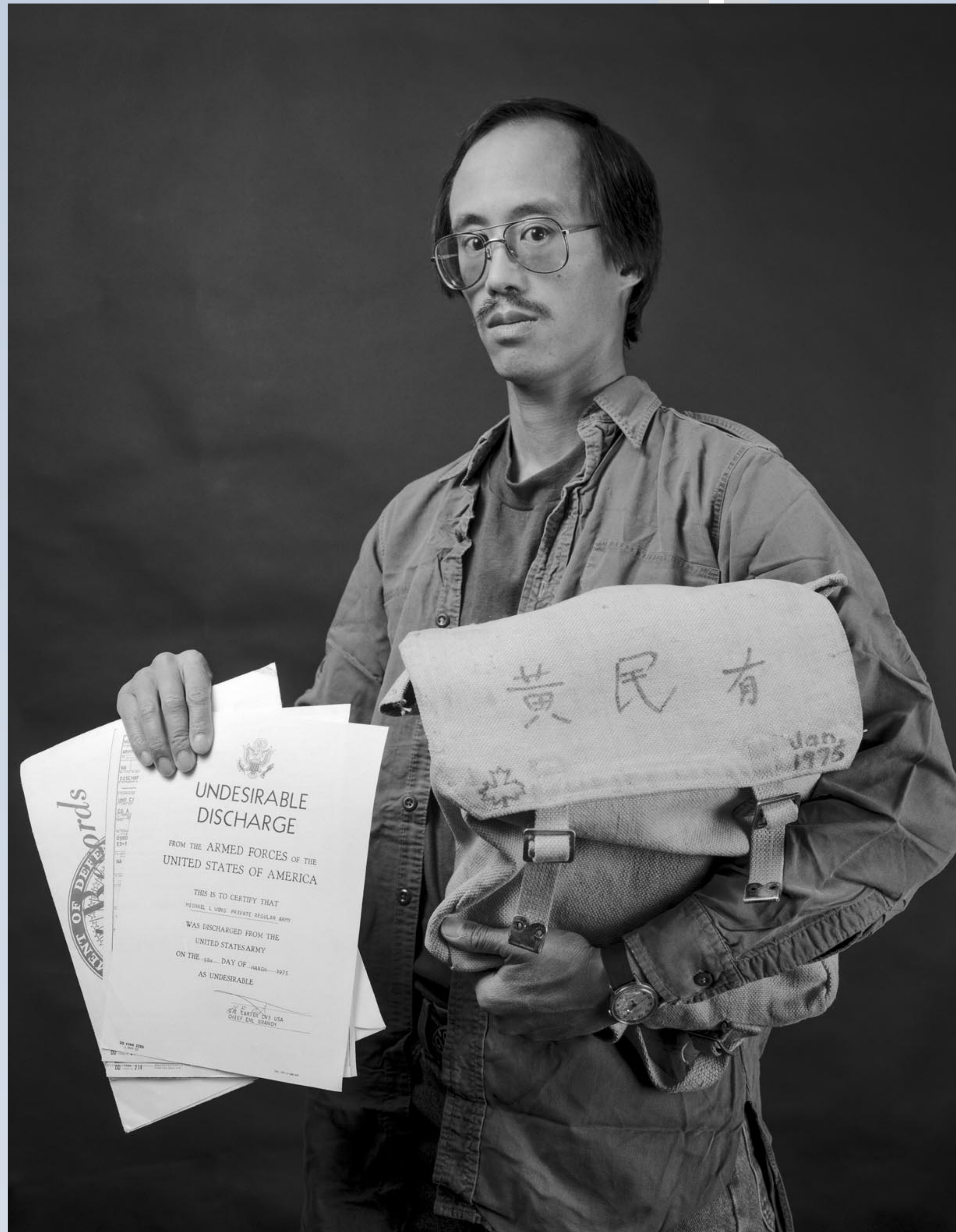


Photo by William Short

Mike Wong

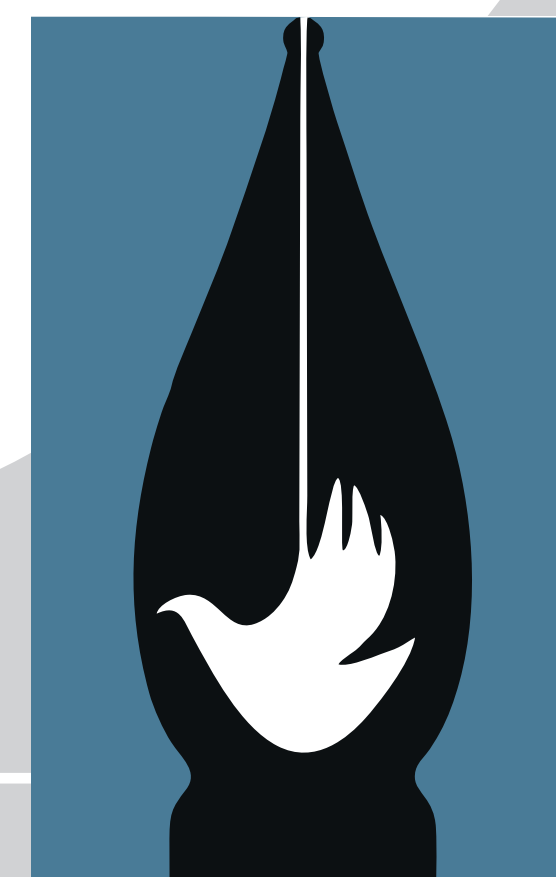
Mike was drafted into the Army in 1969. He deserted to Canada.

The guy in front of me in the mess hall said, 'They're killing women and children in Vietnam.' I said, 'Who's killing women and children? The Viet Cong?' And he said, 'No, we are..'

When we got to the front we saw this newspaper rack with pictures of My Lai on the front pages. I can't describe what that did to us. There could no longer be any doubt as to who's right and who's wrong.

I only had two choices. I could go to Vietnam and do to the Vietnamese what the Japanese did to the Chinese in World War II, or I could go to Canada.

Going to Canada was the hardest decision of my life. It was questions of manhood, giving up your family, your country, your friends, giving up everything you knew. I went to Canada with the assumption I would be there for the rest of my life, that I would be an exile, a criminal, wanted by the FBI...and that I could never come home again.



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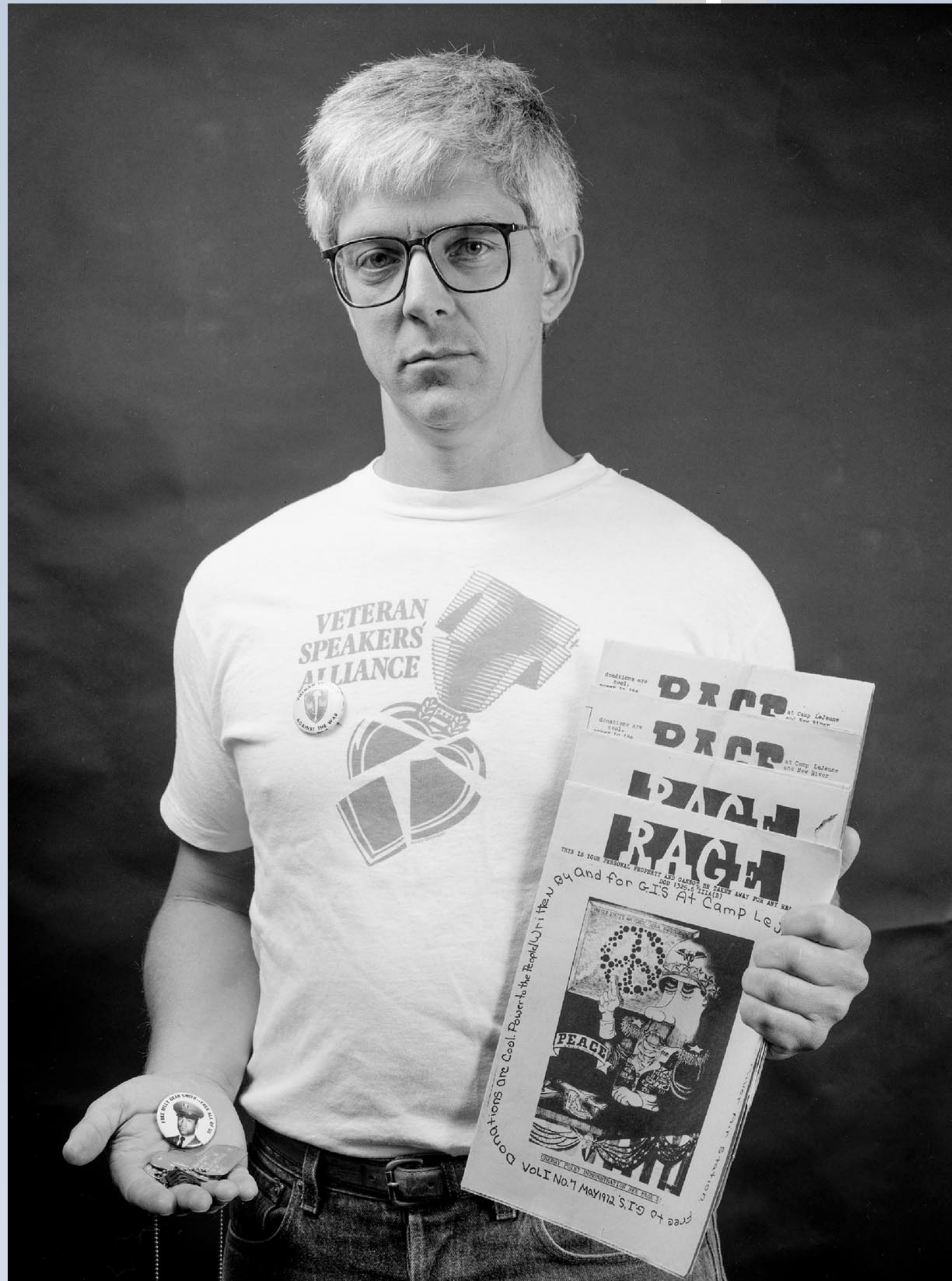


Photo by William Short

Paul Cox

Paul enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1968 – 1972. He served in combat in Vietnam from 1969 – 1970.

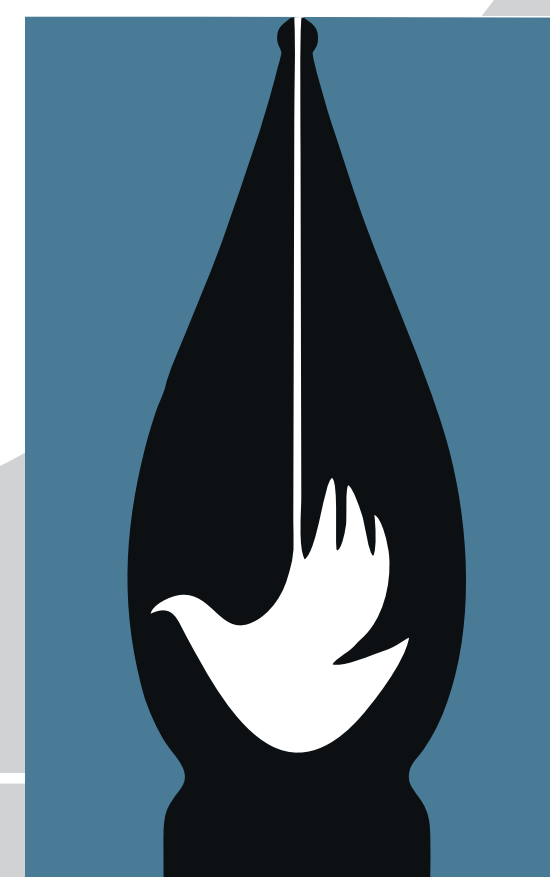
The war for me finally and suddenly became immoral and unacceptable on April 15, 1970, the day my unit, Bravo 1/5, entered the village of Le Bac east of Hoi Anh. The point squad asked our Captain Bailey if there were any 'friendlies' in the area.

The Captain said, 'No, this is a free fire zone.' The point squad then murdered 15 unarmed women, infants and old people.

With no negative response to this slaughter from the captain or any other officers, I could no longer pretend that we were the good guys.

Upon my return to the U.S., I still had two years – two unbearable years – to serve in the Marines, an organization that I no longer respected, while a war that I deeply opposed continued to rage over Southeast Asia.

A few of us got together and decided to print an underground newspaper, named Rage.



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Photo by Ron Carver

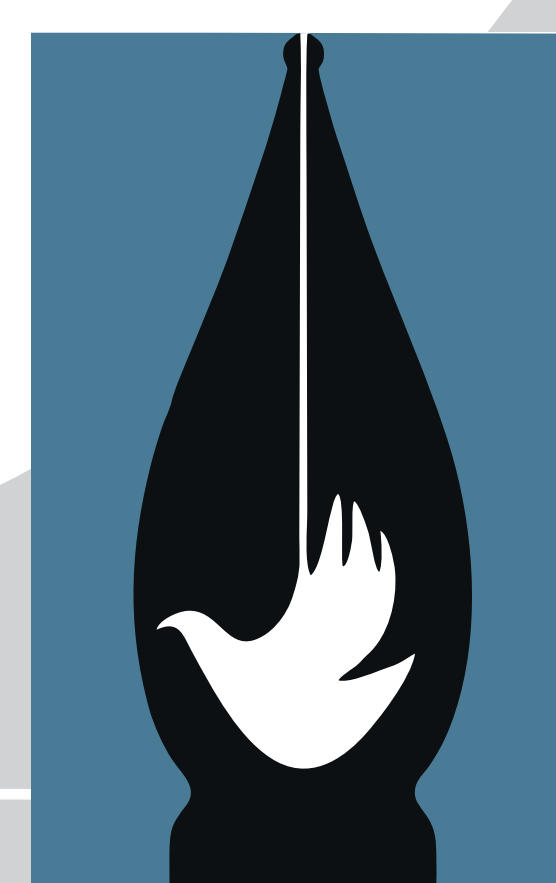
Chuck Searcy

Chuck Searcy enlisted in the U.S. Army from 1966 to 1969. He was assigned to the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion in Saigon from June 1967 to June 1968. After military duty he returned to the University of Georgia as a student and became active in the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

In 2001 Searcy became a representative of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) and with Vietnamese colleagues helped launch Project RENEW in Quang Tri Province, to clean up unexploded ordnance and provide medical assistance, rehabilitation, and income generation for UXO victims.

Project RENEW's mission also includes support for Agent Orange victims' families. Searcy is co-chair of the Agent Orange Working Group, an NGO in Vietnam. He is a co-founder and president of Chapter 160 of Veterans For Peace, based in Vietnam.

To help RENEW clear unexploded bombs and aid victims of U.S. chemical weapons:
www.RenewVN.org



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Photo Credit: Harvey Richards Media Archive © Paul Richards

Susan M. Schnall

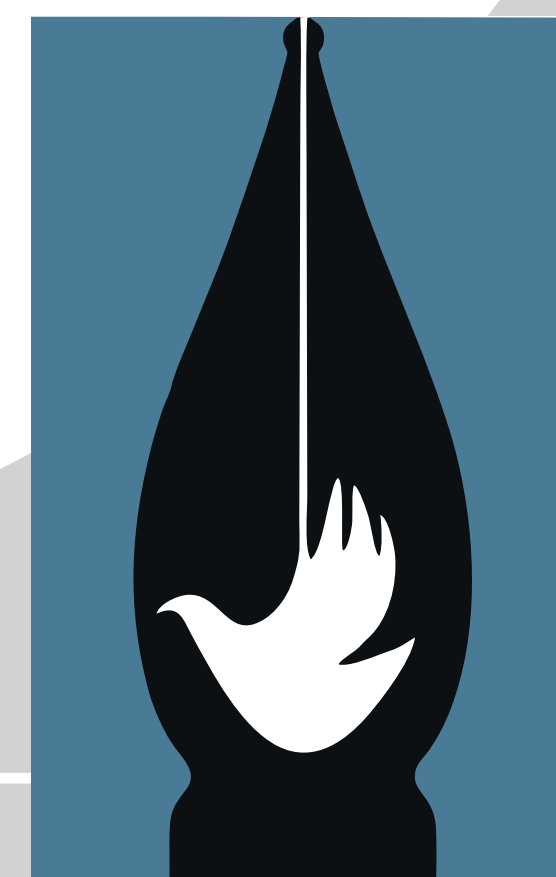
On October 12, 1968, Lt. Susan Schnall led the antiwar march for peace in San Francisco.

I was a Navy nurse at Oak Knoll Hospital, in Oakland, California. For me it was very personal. My father, a Marine, was killed on the beachhead of Guam on July 22, 1944. As I cared for the wounded of yet another war, I wondered when this destruction would end. I knew I could no longer be silent.

A pilot friend and I rented a single engine plane, filled it with thousands of leaflets and dropped them over Bay Area military bases: Treasure Island, Yerba Buena Island, Oak Knoll, the Presidio, and the deck of the USS Ranger at Alameda Naval Air Station.

The next day, along with several thousand people, including 500 active duty military, I marched down Market Street to Civic Center, wearing my uniform.

On February 3, 1969, I was convicted of two charges: conduct unbecoming an officer for promoting disloyalty among the troops and disobeying a Navy regulation for wearing my uniform in a peace demonstration.



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Photo by William Short

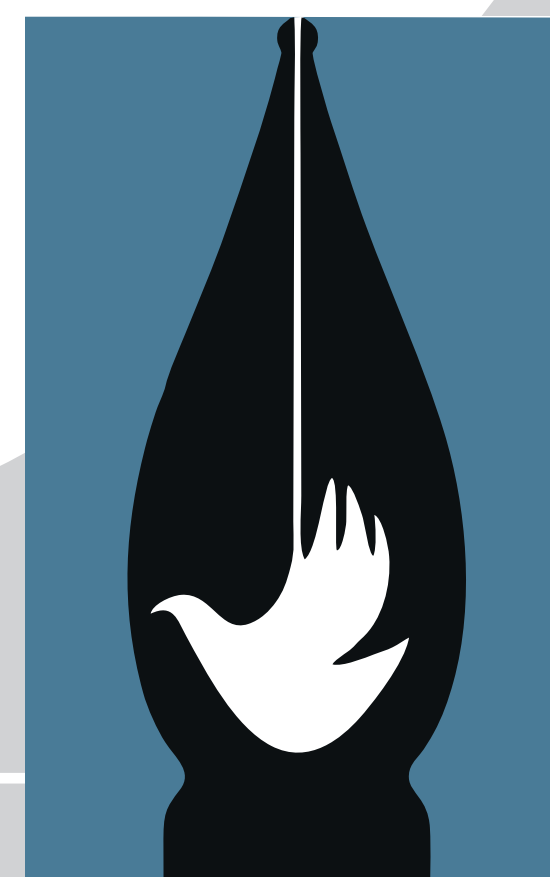
Clarence Fitch

My father was in the military in World War II and even though he was in a segregated army, it was very much part of his life experience. Being a veteran...was one of the few things black men had that they could hold up as being proof that you had just as much right to anything...even though you didn't get it all the time.

For me and other black GIs in Vietnam in 1967, things were changing. Some of the same black consciousness, the whole black power movement, was taking place there, too.

We kind of segregated ourselves, we didn't want to integrate into what we considered the white man's war. For the first time I was looking at the enemy not so much as the enemy, but as another minority, brown people.

You laid down at night and there was just so much tension going through you, with all the racial stuff, the war itself. And we were so young. But it felt like we were so much older. That year in Vietnam was like twenty years, you saw so much and witnessed so much.



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Source: Courtesy of John Kent

John Kent

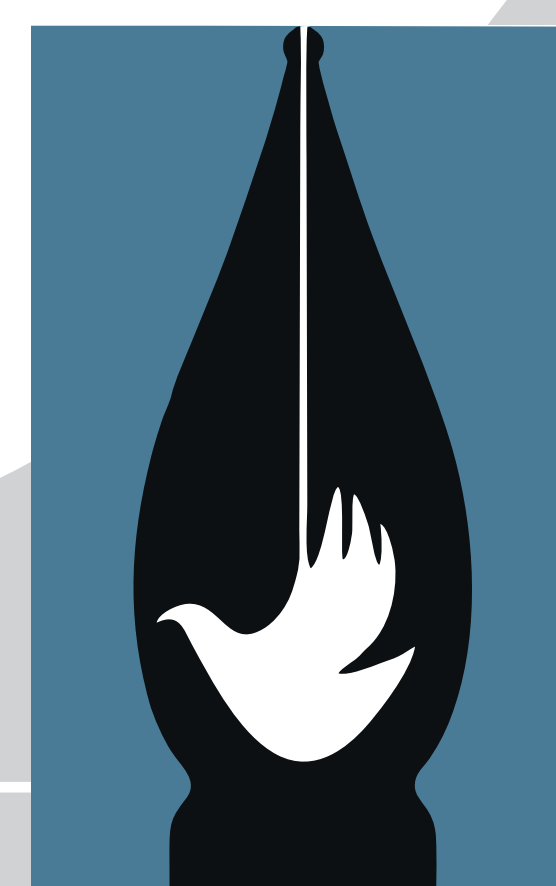
John is a 1968 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, where he was a company commander. He experienced combat in Vietnam during search and rescue missions in the Gulf of Tonkin.

While training to become a jet fighter pilot, John remembers:

A Marine major with a chest full of ribbons, fresh from combat in Vietnam, was telling us war stories to psych us up. On the way back from destroying a bridge, the major bragged to us, 'I circled back and found an old man riding a bike on an open path, a perfect target. With the heat-seeking missile I barely had to aim. I fired and blew him to smithereens. Made my day. I reported it as a confirmed kill of a munitions transport vehicle.'

I thought, Holy shit, is this what I've been training for? Is this what the war is about? I concluded that, yes, it was a bully's war, an imperial war of domination.

John turned in his wings and refused to return to Vietnam. He founded the San Diego Concerned Officers Movement, organizing sailors to refuse orders to Vietnam.



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Source: Photo courtesy Bob Chenoweth

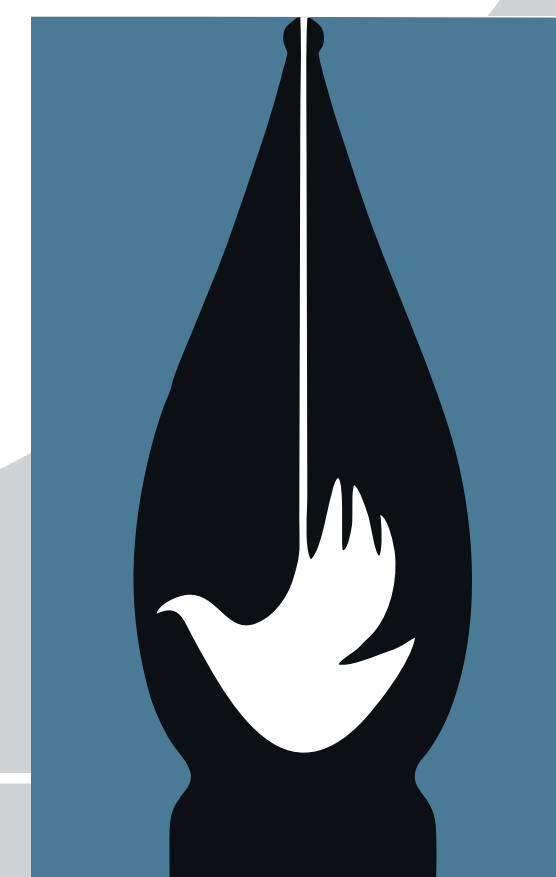
Bob Chenoweth

Every year I commemorate the day my UH-1 helicopter was shot down in Quang Tri Province, Vietnam. I mark February 8, when I was captured by people we called the Viet Cong, because it was the beginning of a process that led to my own opposition to the war.

I had already served on tour in Vietnam at the time of my capture.

I learned about Vietnam's history, culture, and people. I learned about the growing antiwar movement at home, and what antiwar leaders were saying about the war. My own experience confirmed what they were saying and convinced me to raise my own voice against the war.

The Right and war apologists would have us believe that peace activists could only spit on veterans and GIs. In fact, GIs were an integral part of the peace movement, and should be honored and remembered.



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