

Ted Reed wrote an essay on Vietnam to be included in the Class Book. He asked the following from several classmates.

Please send me an email that lays out what you did and how you felt about it then and also how you feel about it now, looking back on decisions you made 50 years ago. Did you make the right decision? Would you do the same thing again? Have your thoughts about Vietnam changed at all?

Here are their stories. If you would like to add your story, email it to Kate Quigley Lynch '82, P'17, '19 (klynch@wesleyan.edu).

From **Prince Chambliss**

As they say, "People don't change, they just get older." I read with interest your admonition about not waiting until the last minute. Really, I don't intend to write anything but it occurred to me that I probably included in my book a reference to my personal experience with the draft. So many things happened in my life that I found so completely out of character. I refused induction. The U.S. Army ordered me to take one step forward & instead I took 2 steps back. I don't think it took a lot of courage. I had finally made up my mind that I would prepare myself for the study of law and try to become a lawyer. Of course, it goes without saying that I knew that going to jail for refusing induction was not the best way to pursue that course. I had 2 uncles who were lawyers and my grandfather had also been a lawyer. It was reported that he had been the first black law school graduate admitted to practice in Alabama.

Corresponding with my Birmingham draft board was good practice for law school. I had several hearings also. In spite of having been raised by my devout Seventh-Day Adventist paternal grandmother in our home with my parents and attended that church's parochial school for the first 4 years of formal schooling, ultimately, my effort to achieve conscientious objector status was denied. I remember thinking of all those early childhood years spent attending Sabbath School & church on Saturday & then again Sunday School & church on Sunday & to have this board find that I hadn't established myself as anti-war. In mapping my plan, I had considered changing my draft board from Alabama to Connecticut, having resided there for 2 years before attending WesU but I reasoned, apparently, correctly, that the draft numbers there would be considerably lower than in a much less overly hawkish northeast. To put that another way, young men in Alabama were eager to sign up voluntarily to march off to show the enemy how wrong it was to resist the might of the USA. To meet its quota, Alabama had much less of a need to call upon those of us who were resistant to being sent off to fight.

From: **Elliot Daum**

Fellow Alums of Wes 1970

Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on one of the more absurd moments of my life. At 173 I made it through to my second semester of law school at Syracuse before receiving my Physical Notice. I had been vehemently against the war and very actively involved in resisting it, yet I had no plan. I did no research, prepared nothing of note for the experience, but simply finished my Contracts class for the day and headed down to the Board. In retrospect I think my "plan" was that if I were drafted, I'd consider heading the few miles north to Canada. That was about it. I dutifully lined up with my fellows in "socks

and jocks” and awaited my turn. When my Arlo Guthrie moment arrived for “inspection and detection” I had noticed that some of my “best new friends” were being sent over to a waiting area and were actually about to be transported somewhere, and probably not Canada. Surely they would allow me to finish my First year and, in the meantime, surely I would come up with something. Wouldn’t they?

As I stepped to the desk across from the man in the white coat things were going swimmingly . . . upstream on Shit’s Creek! He looked me over appraisingly, squeezed my nuts for the “turn and cough”, all very routine, until he looked up at my left shoulder which bore a large and still angry-looking “S” scar from a surgery I’d had 5 years before for a chronically dislocating shoulder. “What’s that?” he asked, bored as could be. I explained my failed sports career as he began to poke and prod a bit, finally asking me to raise my left arm. It went somewhat higher than John McCain’s did after his torture in the Hanoi Hilton. The good doctor pushed it, pulled it, and tried to force it higher to no avail without any resistance from me save my natural physical limitations. Consistent anyway, the lack of resistance.

With a mild frown, the white coat resumed his position at the desk and made some notes. When he looked up he simply deadpanned that he was classifying me 1-Y. “What does that mean?” I ventured tentatively. “The tiniest sardonic smile crossed his otherwise impassive face and he said, “It means that we won’t call you unless the tanks are on the (New York) Thruway.” I walked out of the building and drove back to my hovel. My girlfriend Ann, (Wes ’70) awaited me and my news. There was no celebration, no great hugs of relief, not much reaction at all. We simply went on with our lives. I remain bewildered to this day at my passivity and failure to appreciate the moment for what it was, what it could have been.

See you all in May.

From **Philip Dundas**

My number was 191, low enough to earn a notice to report to my Draft Board in Tulsa for my physical in Early Spring (195 was the cut-off number in 1970). It took a month or two to process the change of location to New Haven. When the morning came to go down to Main Street in Middletown to catch the bus to New Haven which the Government kindly provided, I was pleasantly surprised to find that over half of the people on the bus were fellow classmates.

I had some trepidation about taking the physical because there had been a Black Panther rally in New Haven over the weekend, the National Guard had been called out, and I figured that those at the Army Induction Center would really have it in for us college kids. Nothing could have been further from the truth, and we were fairly treated without resentment. Towards the end of the morning at one of the last examination stations for the physical, the doctor looked at my flat feet and said “Son, you can’t join this man’s Army even if you wanted to!”. Walt and Steve weren’t going to be there to tape my ankles everyday in basic, and with that I received a permanent 1-Y. Those of us who failed the physical were called forward and asked how many years of school we had completed, given a made up score on the afternoon written tests and told we were free until 4PM when the bus returned to Middletown. Ten or twelve of us then headed off to the nearest bar to celebrate.

In September I entered law school, and my neighbor on one side was a Marine helicopter pilot and on the other side an Army intelligence officer with a Vietnamese wife (who had also worked in intelligence), both of whom had been in Nam just 6 months before. These two law school classmates and wife were the first vets that I had encountered and, needless to say, they and other vets provided a perspective different from and unavailable at Wesleyan.

So with that, I never had to make the difficult personal decision whether to go or not. I have the greatest respect for those of our generation who served. They were not making the making the policy and directing the course of the war. And I have the greatest respect for those who chose not to serve, through whatever means, as that was an understandable and often courageous decision.

As for the larger issues relating to the war itself, my basic views have not changed. While I understand the geopolitical drivers, the deceit of our own government was inexcusable and trying to prop up the corrupt government in the South put us on the wrong side of history. It was right to protest the war and try to change policy but not to undermine or blame those who answered the call.

I have visited Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) several times and felt no resentment towards Americans, in fact we were warmly embraced. As I was entering the Vietnam War Museum on the grounds of the former Presidential Palace in Saigon, one of my friends was coming out and I asked him what he thought. He told me that he was put off by what he felt was the propaganda of the museum. I told him that when you win the war, you are entitled to write history any way you want to.

From **Gordon Fain**

I WAS AMONG THE PORTION OF OUR CLASS –AMONG THOSE AT WESLEYAN DURING KENT STATE, DURING THE CAMBODIA BOMBING, AND THOSE OF US IN OUR CLASS WHO RECALL THE INFAMOUS FALL OF SAIGON....TO HAVE VERY MIXED FEELINGS AND IDEAS WHEN THE CAMPUS DEMONSTRATIONS OCCURRED.

IN OUR GOVERNMENT CLASSES AS SOPHOMORES AND JUNIORS, WE OFTEN STUDIED DIPLOMATIC, INTERNATIONAL GOVERNMENT, QUESTIONS OF DETERRENCE OF NUCLEAR AND TERRORIST ATTACKS, DISARMAMENT, ETC. OUR YOUNGER INSTRUCTORS IN GOVT., AND OUR HIGHLY EXPERIENCED, VERY WELL RESPECTED PROFS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER RELATED TOPICS, LET ALONE OUR RELIGION DEPARTMENT PROFS, HAD QUITE VARIED VIEWS ON OVERSEAS CONFLICTS, DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN OTHER CONTINENTS, HOW AMERICAN FOREIGN AID AND MILITARY AID WERE VIEWED, ETC....

EVEN THEN, THERE WERE CONFLICTING STUDIES AND CONFLICTING DATA REPORTS. FOR EXAMPLE, ON ONE HAND, OUR NATIONAL MEDIA—AND WE REALLY HAD ONLY THREE MAJOR NIGHTLY NEWSCASTS THEN—PORTRAYED THE TET OFFENSIVE AS A FAILURE OF AMERICAN AND SOUTH VIETNAM INTELLIGENCE AND FIGHTERS. OTHER STUDIES CONTENDED THAT THE VIET CONG WON A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND DIPOMATIC “VICTORY” AT GREAT COST IN THOSE WEEKS, BUT ACTUALLY SUFFERED TERRIBLE CASUALTIES.

ON THE ONE HAND, SEVERAL LEADING VETS, SUCH AS LATER SENATOR KERRY, CRITICIZED OUR GENERALS AND CIVILIAN LEADERS IN FAMOUS CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS.....THAT APPEARED TO BE A COURAGEOUS ACT BUT BECAME CONTROVERSIAL AS THE SAME PUBLIC FIGURES –CIVILIAN, VETERAN, AND POLITICAL, AGED OVER THE FOLLOWING DECADES.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE COUP THAT BROUGHT DOWN THE DIEM REGIME AND LED TO THE DEATH OF DIEM WAS CRITICIZED, MUCH LATER, BY HISTORIANS WHO CRITICIZED HOW PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND HIS STAFF TRIED TO FORCE DIEM INTO EXILE, AND IN EFFECT ACQUIESCED IN THE MILITARY COUP OF SOUTH VIETNAM GENERALS THAT LED TO HIS VIOLENT DEATH. HE REFUSED TO LEAVE AS THE AMERICAN LEADERSHIP SOUGHT TO HAVE HIM DO.....

LOOKING BACK, THE CATHOLIC VS. BUDDHIST ELEMENT(S) OF THAT CIVIL WAR IN BOTH VIETNAMS WERE CLEARLY MORE IMPORTANT THAN MOST OF US UNDERSTOOD.....ALSO, THE HUGE COST OF THE WAR IN NONAMERICAN CASUALTIES, ON ALL SIDES, WAS UNDERESTIMATED FOR A LONG TIME.....THERE WAS LITTLE THE AMERICAN PRESS COULD DO...AND PERHAPS EVEN LESS OUR PUBLIC WANTED TO HEAR....OF INTERNAL SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONFLICTS AND CASUALTIES, AND PRISONERS, ONCE THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION ENDED.

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE VISITED VIETNAM IN RECENT DECADES, AS APPARENTLY OUR CLASSMATE BOB STONE DID, AND AT LEAST ONE RECENT REPORTER HAVE CHRONICLED, KNOW FAR MORE THAN I HERE IN THE SAFETY OF CT, 6,000 OR MORE MILES AWAY.

RECENTLY, ONE REPORTER CHRONICLED HOW AN AMERICAN RETIRED OFFICER, THEN A FIRST LIEUTENANT WHOSE COMMAND WAS KILLED IN AN AMERICAN AMBUSH THAT WENT WRONG, AND THE NO. VIETNAMESE COLONEL WHO COMMENDED OVER 1,500 VIETNAMESE FIGHTERS WHO DESTROYED THE AMERICAN BRIGADE, REVISITED THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE FARMLAND/BATTLEFIELD. IN EFFECT, THE AMERICAN BRIGADE CAME UPON A MUCH LARGER NO VIETNAMESE FORCE WHOSE SOLDIERS WERE STARVING AND HAD WAITED EXTRA DAYS OR WEEKS AT THE SITE, BECAUSE THE RELIEF SUPPLIES HAD NOT COME. THAT IS, BOTH OFFICERS AGREED THAT THE PARTICULAR BATTLE WAS BASICALLY UNPLANNED AND MOSTLY ACCIDENTAL, A TRAGEDY OF WAR RATHER THAN A WELL-PLANNED MANOEUVRE BY EITHER SIDE. THE AMERICAN HIGHER-UPS KEPT THE LOSS STORY LOW-KEY AND GAVE OUT MEDALS TO SURVIVORS....THE NORTH VIETNAMESE REWARDED THEIR COLONEL LATER WITH A CIVILIAN GOVT JOB, AS A HERO. TOGETHER, THEY SPOKE THROUGH INTERPRETERS OF THE COMRADES THEY HAD LOSS....THEY VISITED THE SUCCESSFUL FARM WHERE MAYBE RUBBER TREES NOW GROW. THEY VISITED A VICTIM MAIMED UNDER 15 YEARS AGO WHEN AN UNEXPLODED SMALL AMERICAN BOMB BURIED ON THE FARM WAS STRUCK ACCIDENTALLY IN FARM WORK. THEY SHOWED SURVIVING ADULT CHILDREN OF THE HEROES WHO DIED IN THAT BATTLE WHERE THEIR PARENT OR GRANDPARENT HAD FOUGHT.

THIS IS TOO LONG A PIECE AND TED CAN EDIT IT, CHOOSE PARTS OR NONE, OR WE CAN SHARE SOME MORE DETAILS. THE SURVIVING OFFICERS WERE NOT WESLEYAN RELATED BUT FROM THAT ERA

IN SHORT, THE CALAMITIES, TRAGEDIES, ACCIDENTS AND FAMILY HARSHNESS OF CIVIL AND OVERSEAS WARS ARE, AT OUR AGE, WELL-RECOGNIZED....REGARDLESS OF OUR VIEWS OR LIMITED ROLES THEN,

WE SEE SUCH FACTORS NOW MORE AS OUR PARENTS AND TEACHERS IN THE 1966-1973 PERIOD SAW THEM, PROBABLY....

From **David Geller**

I came to Wesleyan as a conservative. And I was opposed to the campus-led antiwar movement.

I remember addressing the faculty in the spring of our senior year to oppose the suspension of classes and the granting of passing grades to everyone without requiring exams or final papers.

I believed then that the antiwar movement in our age group was motivated in large part by a desire to avoid service.

Fifty years later, my views have "evolved".

The Vietnam War was a profound mistake.

American national security was never meaningfully threatened by North Vietnam's desire to subjugate South Vietnam. And the American military's confidence that it would prevail with limited loss of life and modest cost was profoundly wrong-headed.

Every military engagement should be subjected to a rigorous "cost benefit analysis"; and the Vietnam War would never have passed any such test.

However, there is another side to the argument.

Although the "domino theory" was false -- our defeat in Vietnam did not lead to the subjugation of Southeast Asia by Ho Chi Minh's acolytes -- America's unwavering loyalty to its principal Asian allies has had an enormously positive impact over the decades since the fall of South Vietnam.

Japan and South Korea are models of how to build and sustain modern democratic societies.

And the Hong Kong protestors are clearly inspired by the American example in their commitment to economic freedom and democratic governance.

The antiwar movement of our Wesleyan years was "right" about the Vietnam War; but American "exceptionalism" remains a powerful lodestar to all who value freedom, justice, and human decency.

From **Marcos Goodman**

Last year, I traveled around Vietnam for a couple of months and visited a number of the "American War" tourist spots. To many Vietnamese, the American War, though devastating, was a short time between the 100+ year French occupation & war and the Chinese war which had existed for centuries and came again after we left. Amazingly to me, according to a Pew Research Center study, the Vietnamese currently have an extremely high positive perception of Americans (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/30/vietnamese-see-u-s-as-key-ally/>), and I felt that from the Vietnamese whom I met. Anyway, I wrote this little story while I was there:

How I Evaded the Draft

The Americans who fought in Vietnam were very much determined by wealth, or lack of it. In the early years, 1964-68, most affluent guys got deferments. But there was still a patriotic group who still believed in the American leaders, and they joined in the fight. John Kerry and Robert Mueller were in the class of 62 together at St. Paul's, an elite prep school, and went on to Yale and Princeton before joining the Marines and going to Nam. They were the rare exceptions. I graduated high school in 66, and very few of the boys from the three affluent high schools that I had gone to went into the military- a few of the more macho guys on the football teams with me and a small assortment of other guys who mostly just didn't know what else to do. Especially after the Tet Offensive in 68, when it became clear that you could be killed fighting a losing war, the number of guys who enlisted plummeted. I wouldn't be surprised if there wasn't one single guy in my 1970 university class who went. Everyone had to figure out his individual method of evading the draft, but they all got out of the military one way or the other. Poor guys or guys from patriotic families didn't have this luxury of evasion.

A friend of mine recently told me a funny story. He graduated from Yale in 70, and a few months later he and a couple hundred other Yalies showed up at the draft board, anxious about how their unique evasion method was going to work. The guy in charge stepped up to the podium and said, "Look, we don't want you guys! Your parents are going to complain to their congressman. If you got sent over to Nam and were given an order, you'd probably say that maybe you had a better idea. Guys like you are a pain in the ass to us. So, when we call your name, come up to the desk and tell us what's wrong with you, and then just go home to Mama."

My own evasion tactics were multi-pronged. First, I did the "I'm crazy" approach. I went to a psychiatrist who I knew, hoping that he'd just write me my get-out-of-the-draft-free letter. However, he said that he thought it was important for us to talk about how things were going. Actually, I really was more than a bit crazy, although I also thought that it was crazy to be "sane". Was I going to be a "good German" during WWII? "My" country was committing mass slaughter of the Vietnamese, who just appeared to want freedom from foreign dominance- French, US or Chinese. In retrospect, I realize that the US leaders weren't total bad guys, that they actually did have legitimate concerns about the spread of communism and that I had a somewhat naïve concept that communism wasn't so bad. However, whatever the rationale, the US political and military leaders were constantly lying about and misjudging the situation, and I certainly wasn't going to be contributing to the burning of babies that I dreamt about all the time. In my world, I was a big guy and somewhat of a fighter, but I would much rather protest against than fight in this war. In fact, I felt tremendous guilt for not fighting as part of an armed resistance to our own government, just like those few who resisted the Nazis, even though neither resistances had much effect and were suicidal. In any event, after requiring me to come back for more sessions, the psychiatrist's judgement was that I really was a paranoid schizophrenic and that I'd probably kill more Americans than Vietnamese. That's what the letter in my government file says.

However, I also had a backup plan. I'd heard about the Universal Life Church, and their literature said that whatever ridiculous thing you thought, that was just as valid as the hogwash that was peddled by the established religions, although they put it more politely. So, if you wanted to become the minister of your own weirdo church, all you had to do was send \$5 to Kirby J. Hensley in Modesto, California, and you'd get your very legal-looking minister's certificate, ready for framing. It was a joke, but I sent Kirby my \$5. A few weeks later, I got back my minister's certificate, with "Reverend Mark Goodman" printed in large embossed letters. I sent the draft board the certificate, and, a month later, I got a letter addressed to "Reverend Mark Goodman" with my 4-D, for "divinity", deferment. I was officially a minister with my minister's deferment! It was hard for me to believe that the ruse had worked, partly because I'd never heard of anyone even trying that approach before, but I was literally jumping for joy!

Though I do believe that many religious believers are also paranoid schizophrenics, I was extremely happy to have gotten the "reverend" side rather than the "schizophrenic" side in the government's flip of the coin on my future. I quickly went down to the department of motor vehicles and had them change my driver's license to "Reverend Mark Goodman". The negative effect of being Reverend Mark was that a couple of times, while under the influence of too much of some mind-altering substance, my delusions of grandeur combined with the official reverend thing to make me believe that I did have a much higher calling. Luckily, that usually wore off before I made too much of a fool of myself. The positive side was that being the Reverend made cops respectful towards me, and I got let off with verbal warnings on a couple of traffic violations in the subsequent years. Once, I even got a minister's discount on a couch that I bought at a furniture store.

culture and politics of the region, all of which reinforced our anti-war position.

From **John Griffin**

There was a young woman, whose name I have long forgotten, who guided me through the process of applying for conscientious objector status. I had told the selective service when I registered that I would never serve and knew that if I got a low lottery number, I would apply for CO status. I got a low number on lottery night. But how to go about getting a CO? This young volunteer was committed and tough minded; She understood the process. She helped me with my essays ("no one cares what you think, how are your beliefs the product of your upbringing?") and with getting the supporting documents I needed. And when I had a hearing before the Westchester (NY) selective service board, the board members looked at my history of writing them and the package I put together with the help of my anonymous advisor, and gave my CO within 5 minutes.

From **Maurice Hakim**

I was anti-war but did not express or demonstrate as vociferously as you, Seth, Steve and other classmates. My only participation in a demonstration was in NYC when George Wallace showed up at Madison Sq. Garden in 1968. But that would be categorized under a Civil Rights and not Anti-War demonstration.

As chairman of the SEC, in a dramatic, "stand-up moment", I stood up in the chapel and authorized \$ 3,000 to the Wesleyan Strike Fund. I have no idea what was done with the money. Does anyone?

My other "stand-up moment" was during summer of 1968 when as a guest at a friend's parent's house in Old Black Point, a very Wasp-y summer enclave in Niantic, CT, I questioned the son of a resident's son who was serving the State Department in Saigon and telling us (the association's residents) that all was fine in Vietnam. I was quite skeptical and my comments drew the ire of all but a few. Those few included James Stevenson the noted illustrator and cartoonist for *The New Yorker* who came over after the lecture to say how wholeheartedly he agreed with my sentiments. Those sentiments didn't go over too well with my friend's parents who all but shunned me that weekend and thereafter. Need it be said, I was never invited to Old Black Point again.

From **Bill Jefferson**

I turned eighteen in August 1965 while enroute from the Outward Bound School in Wales to Gordonstoun School in Scotland. At the U.S. embassy in London a middle aged staffer completed my

registration, and informed me that the Marines had just Landed in Danang. "This problem will be taken care of in a matter of months," he assured me, "You have nothing to worry about."

A month or so later my Dad had to hurriedly provide proof of my school enrollment to the draft board back in Evanston, Illinois after they'd rated me 1A, having heard nothing from Gordonstoun. When my British classmates, having read about draft card burning protests in the States, learned of my dilemma, they pleaded to be able to schedule a public auto-da-fe execution of my card which, upon receipt of a replacement 2S card I did allow them. (Though present, Prince Charles did NOT participate.)

Upon being asked to leave Wesleyan after a first semester during which i may have attended as many as ten classes, I spent the next 12 months working at mind-numbing jobs along the CT/NY border, while assuring an Army recruiter that I was interested in signing up for Warrant Officer flight school until, having excelled on the entry exam and passed the physical with flying colors, I was still playing hard to get. He called my bluff and the "Greetings" letter arrived post haste from Illinois, where there was surely no reason to dissuade Local Board #99 from filling their quota with a guy who didn't even live there anymore and thus had no juice.

As a sophomore in high school I'd been persuaded to join a friend and his older sister, along with a tiny group led by a very angry young man, who I suspect was a veteran, on a march through the Chicago Loop carrying signs comparing LBJ in Vietnam with Hitler in Poland. We were told either to chant "Vietnam, No!" or "Vietnam, Now!" I wasn't sure which, so I alternated.

While at Wesleyan, I joined my roommate, Marshall Webb, along with Dwight Greene and a few others, in the Fall '66 march from Central Park to the U.N. where we watched the festivities from my father's office, just across the street and many stories high, and stayed in Marshall's grandmothers' upper east side penthouse.

Establishing myself as easily the worst Fuller Brush man in a White Plains neighborhood, I moonlighted as a Eugene McCarthy rep. When the local party heard of my situation they offered up an experienced draft refusal attorney from the American Friends, who was blunt: After a year of sitting in darkness and denial my options came down to reporting as ordered, leaving the country, enlisting or refusing induction. If I chose to refuse, he promised a group would show up in support at 39 Whitehall Street, but in the end I could expect to serve two to five years in a federal penitentiary. The CO status request I'd filed was outside the deadline and lacking the necessary idolatry of a conventional supreme being, so no doubt went straight to the round file. Was I truly morally opposed to the war, or simply afraid? At nineteen, I didn't know myself well enough to say.

My Dad took me out to a bar for the first time. He said he'd never felt right about dropping bombs on Japanese cities, that he thought the Vietnam war was unjustified, and that if I chose to leave the country he'd do what he could to help out.

Though I'd already spent a year living by myself in another country, the prospect of leaving for good was more than I could contemplate. Enlisting meant more time, and felt like a cop out. The reserves and the Guard were, in those days, impossible to obtain a slot in unless you had extraordinary pull.

That left reporting for duty. The weekend before I was due to show, I rented a pair of downhill skis and headed for Vermont, hoping to break a leg. I was not at the time much of a skier, but that weekend I skied like a pro, naturally, and Monday morning, as the number of troops in Vietnam was approaching half a million, I raised my right hand, along with fifty or so other cowards.

From **Russ Josephson**

In the Summer of 1966, I chanced to meet a guy named Rusty Sachs, who later became a founding member of the Vietnam Vets Against the War. Rusty had been a Harvard student, a contemporary of Sen. John Kerry. We continued to keep in touch through our freshman year.

The correspondence with Rusty made me realize that the troops were just pawns. Need a village destroyed? Just tell the guys that people there were responsible for the death or mutilation of a fellow soldier. The more we corresponded, the more I realized that survival was the name of the game. In hindsight, I cannot believe that it took that correspondence for the light to come on in my brain.

The second semester of our sophomore year, I was in Hawaii as a visiting student. Aside from everything else that was going on in the Spring of 1968, two things happened. One is that I had the occasion to talk to some G.I.s on R&R on the beach at Waikiki, where I had a surfboard in a locker so I could take a bus or ride a small motorcycle over to surf. The second thing that occurred was that, as I looked around at all the beauty of Hawaii, I realized that life was too beautiful to try to solve problems with war, and that I was not going to be part of the Vietnam war. I had no plan, but I made my decision right then.

Junior year I spent talking to everyone I could think of--the more different a person's viewpoint from mine, the better--to figure out exactly what my views were. I also took a small seminar (Prof. Spurrier?) where all sorts of views were kicked around.

As a result, by the time of the Draft Lottery in December, of 1969, I had filed an application for Conscientious Objector and I had begun draft counseling after training at a pacifist community in Voluntown, CT.

As it turned out, I drew 250 in the draft, so I was reasonably safe, except that my hometown (New Britain, CT) had been drafting lots of guys for years and who knew what would happen. As required by Selective Service, I notified them when I graduated and I waited for a call for a hearing of my C.O. application.

The call finally came in October. I drove up to New Britain and presented myself at the Selective Service office in the Post Office building.

The men on the Draft Board aggravated me right off the bat when they asked me to tell them what my claim was. Knowing from my draft counseling training that they had violated procedures in not giving me a hearing promptly, I felt emboldened to tell them that I would wait while they read my paperwork. The spokesman then said, "No, we want you to tell us about it because they all come out of a book anyway." I was really irritated and I said, "No, my claim didn't come out of a book, it came from right here," pointing to my heart.

They insisted I explain my claim, so I did. They skipped the typical question asked by draft boards, "So, wouldn't you have fought the Nazis?" and instead asked if my father had served in World War II. I told them that he had been in medical school and only began active duty in the Navy in 1946. They persisted. "What did he do," they asked. I told them he had served primarily as a doctor, mostly on an expedition with Admiral Byrd to Antarctica. Aside from his medical duties, he had been assigned to be a recreation officer and to serve as a chaplain for other Jewish sailors. (The latter is a real joke as he had no exposure to Judaism as a child--none, in fact until he married my mother.) "Well, don't you think you could do something like that," they persisted.

So, being young and stupid, but also knowing I could appeal a negative decision because they had violated Selective Service procedures regarding prompt hearings, I told them that I couldn't stand the sight of blood, I wasn't very good at organizing activities, and I wouldn't presume to tell anyone about their personal religious views. They seemed to accept that at face value.

Some time later, my mother called me to tell me I had been granted the C.O. status (1-O). But that wasn't the end of it. Although for years I had dutifully informed the Selective Service of my address changes, I got a letter in about 1972 telling me that my status had been changed to 1-H, a holding category. In the event of a need for men my C.O. status would be reviewed. Incensed, I wrote a hot letter to the Draft Board and told them they couldn't do that without a hearing and that I was done cooperating. I enclosed my draft card with the letter and mailed it. I never heard another word.

I felt a great weight lifted and I wondered why I had cooperated as long as I did.

From **Steve Pollicoff**

Although the war was the ugly noise in the background of all our lives, I came to Wesleyan not having paid a lot of attention to it. My sister, who was a student radical at SUNY Albany (where I grew up), had dragged me to a few demonstrations in the summer of 1966, but in truth I was far more drawn to the psychedelic revolution than I was to political upheaval. Overall, LSD had far greater significance to my 4 years there than did anti-war protest.

I was supposed to drive suite-mate Jeff Sarles and others to the March on the Pentagon sophomore year but woke up feeling like garbage and instead loaned him my car (that car went many places without me; I was a totally feckless car-owner). I worked for Eugene McCarthy's campaign in the summer of 1968 in Philadelphia, where my parents had moved. I was not so much animated by belief in his campaign as I was bored and wanting to feel useful. Mostly, I (futilely) tried to get people to sign (largely pointless) anti-war petitions. I got spat on a bunch of times and called *hippie commie scum*; paradoxically this thrilled me and made me feel like I was doing something important (which I wasn't).

I did attend the giant march on Washington in 1969 with the late John Haury and his wife Ellen, and Jim Pickering. We stayed the night before the march in the gigantic home of Paul Moore, the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, whom John and Ellen somehow knew. This was a truly surreal scene, as he had opened up his house to protesters, there must have been 50 of us sleeping on the floor all over the house, which was in a leafy somnolent part of DC. At the march, I got separated from my friends and stumbled into the serious demonstration going on at the Justice Department, which turned violent, and police and National Guard surrounded us and a canister of tear gas landed directly at my foot, which was truly bizarre, as I was possibly the least dangerous protester in American history. But I

fled, screaming and in pain, and wandered in a fog for several hours, having no clue where Bishop Moore's house was. Whichever god watches over fools and wounded souls somehow guided me back to the slightly familiar street. I remember looking up and thinking, *Wow here I am*, having no idea how I got there.

I never feared being drafted. I had a bad foot, the result of a spectacular tobogganing accident when I was 12. My dad was a doctor and knew all the doctors in town, and I received a 4-F without even having to go for a physical. Albany had a notoriously corrupt draft board. It was well known that educated white boys (who stayed out of trouble) did not get drafted in Albany. Not one boy from the graduating class of my snobby private school was drafted.

Although this all seems preposterously long ago, ugly wars and grotesque inequality still hang over us like a dark cloud which will not dissipate. Politicians and newscasters still chide us about the "lessons" of Viet Nam. I have never been sure which lessons those are. The only one I can think of is that endless pointless wars rarely work out well for anyone involved.

From **Ted Reed**

On the night of the draft lottery, I went to Moke's bar in Middletown with Jeff Sarles and watched on TV while they announced the numbers. I got 271. Very pleased with this outcome, I bought beers for everyone at the bar.

However, afterwards, it remained unclear which lottery numbers would be called, so I continued to pursue a CO. I was initially rejected, but I decided I would nevertheless do alternative service, as the CO designation required. So in October 1970 I moved to Philo, Ca. to work for two years on a ranch for emotionally disturbed children. Many of the guys who worked there were in fact doing their alternative service, but my own draft lottery number never came up.

Looking back, I have more respect now than I did then for the people who went to Vietnam. Obviously, I am well aware that we who went to Wesleyan were among the privileged and that due to student deferments and then to the lottery and other methods, many of us were able to avoid going. At the same time, I continue to think that the war was wrong and that in not going I made the right decision.

From **Jeremy Serwer**

What I did and how I felt about it then

Not being extremely political back in the day, I was in the library on lottery night doing my usual: sleeping. I knew something was awry when, upon my return to the Beta House, all lights were out: I was jumped by the brothers and unceremoniously dumped in a cold shower.

I had number 358 – if not the highest in our class, then pretty damn near it, of course. Mike Hurd, Beta '72, had number 1 – and ended up in the next issue of Time magazine.

Of course, I was relieved. That said, since high school I'd wanted a military experience, and particularly for my pursuit of languages: the Army Language School in Monterrey remains the best even today. I thought it'd be cool to perfect my Russian (French major at Wes, Russian minor) and spy on the Russkies. Yikes . . . Really?

I had no intention of applying for conscientious objector. I also wasn't a candidate for exiting to Canada or doing drugs and other unsavory things to fail a physical. Bottom line, I got lucky, and decided I needed well out of academia and into the working world. Haven't stopped since.

How I feel about it now/Did I make the right decision

I have regrets, no question: if I didn't go, someone else clearly went in my place. That's enough to feel some guilt. However, the fact that I made the right decision has been underscored by EVERY Viet Nam vet with whom I've ever spoken (there have been many): have no regrets, it was hell. It has helped that I'm a patriotic sort, both then and now, and it usually comes out in every conversation.

Back then, however, expressing patriotism was equated with killing babies. Not much gray in the day, remember? By our senior year I felt a dichotomy that was very difficult to perceive or accept in those days – a patriotic appreciation for country, yet a visceral anti-war dislike for a warring government back then (historically advanced by BOTH political parties, in fact more so by the Dems at the time). Further, as a second generation Jewish American, gratitude for the Judaic experience in the USA should never be underestimated.

Love of country combined with anti-war activity was a near impossible thought among we youth of those days.

Would I do the same thing again?/Have my thoughts about Viet Nam changed at all?

I easily could have signed up, no matter what lottery number. I didn't, and I would repeat that today: I didn't want to go to an unjust war and protested against it (March on Washington, Colt .45 factory in Hartford, etc). That said, I feel strongly about those who have served, respect their service immensely, and feel I owe something back. I manifest that today by working with post-9/11 transitioning vets as an advisor and mentor (American Corporate Partners) and have thoroughly enjoyed communicating with Wesleyan's Posse vet students, and supporting summer internships for them.

And I make no bones about what we did compared to what those in the military HAD to do: any courage in marching and protesting pales in comparison to the extreme fear and stress of combat. Drafted or enlisted, terrified or not, it required a courage comparable to none other.

While I shared some classmates' obsession about the war at our coming of age, I also share others' thoughts that it should not be all encompassing in our psyche today, and certainly not an obsession, with one clear exception: I believe only those in the military who have seen combat in Viet Nam (or anywhere else) can lay claim to that right. We've all heard the horrors of war; only they have seen, felt, and are left to live with them.

As such, to our classmate Bill Jefferson: welcome home, friend. We're glad you made it. And that video was amazing – took guts to be there the first time; equally the second.

From **John Sheffield**

I'm an original member of the Class of '69 at Wes, but took some time off in 1967, so graduated with Wes Class of '70.

I received a low draft number and, while taking some undergrad courses at Emory Univ in Atlanta in 1967-68, I got a notice to report for a physical. Despite being in excellent shape (long distance runner and tennis player), I was rejected as too great a risk for vision loss (my vision has been correctable to 20/30 for 50 years since). I was willing, but not eager, to serve out of a sense of commitment as a male, US citizen, and was therefore relieved not to go to war. The guilt I felt reading about those young men who went to Vietnam weighed on me however, since I, too, like so many others, didn't see the rationale for the Vietnam campaign.

From **Bob Stone**

The run up to the draft lottery, and lottery night itself, were a sudden reality check that my four years at Wesleyan were almost over and real life was about to intervene. I had opposed the war on principle and participated in some demonstrations, but had not been as active as classmates like Steve Talbot, who showed a remarkable commitment to exposing how wrong it was to be involved in that conflict. I was too busy enjoying other aspects of my college experience. Lottery night was a punch in the gut as I and many close friends received numbers almost ensuring we would be drafted. Mine was 40. Like others, my focus quickly became how to secure a deferment. When I reported to the local draft board in 1970 for my physical examination, I was armed with letters from two ophthalmologists (one a renowned expert who had been treating me since I was very young) advocating for deferment based on an eye muscle condition of mine called "Duane's syndrome," which prevents movement of my right eye to the right, resulting in double vision if I try to look in that direction without completely swiveling my head. As I recall, the eye exam station was the last one in the physical. The examiner, particularly impressed with the letter from the well-known expert, signed off on my deferment, and I went off to law school rather than to Vietnam.

I recognize what a privilege it was to be able to access these medical opinions. I also was lucky to have support from my family. My father, a World War II veteran, was strongly opposed to our involvement in Vietnam on moral and strategic grounds. He actually had begun discussing his views on the subject with me while I was still in high school. I remember writing some history and civics class reports in high school arguing against the war policy of the Johnson administration. That wasn't the majority opinion in my suburban Philadelphia surroundings. Looking back, with the benefit of some maturity and much more information from books and documentaries, I feel my decisions were the right ones. A couple of years ago my wife and I visited Vietnam and Cambodia, gaining additional perspective on the people, culture and politics of the region, all of which reinforced our anti-war position.

From **Steve Talbot**

I had a very low draft number in that lottery -- talk about pure luck -- and escaped the war. If I'd been called I was prepared to go to Canada. During that Vietnam Commencement at Wesleyan, I was one of many signing a pledge not to fight.

I ended up working with a lot of Vietnam vets, and classmate Dave Davis and I made a film about and for Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In 1974, after the peace agreement had been signed, Dave, Deirdre English and I went to North Vietnam to make a film about the ravages of the U.S. bombing. Both of us have revisited those times in other documentaries.

I'm about to start on yet another one, which my producers and I are tentatively calling *The Movement and the "Madman,"* about the October 15, 1969 Moratorium and the November 13-15 marches in Washington, DC.

<https://www.movementandthemadman.com/?fbclid=IwAR0U9d-mGEsrbIHJqwDC3rMeEirpPUIDNXmyoC3m271MgaZVuqLa-fnNCZ8>

And here's a piece I wrote a couple of years ago about the rumored death of "the Beaver" during our college years.

<https://www.kqed.org/arts/13809968/jerry-mathers-died-steve-talbot>

Lastly, and apologies for the length of this email (I'm a little obsessed with the U.S. war in Vietnam), here's something I wrote on Facebook, triggered by watching the Ken Burns series on the war:

Despite our deep (and ongoing) national divisions over the war in Vietnam, there came a time when the majority of Americans turned against the war --when they decided it wasn't worth the sacrifice or was fundamentally unjust and immoral or they just wanted it to be over.

For me, it happened early because of Sgt. Thomas Thompson, who was my drill instructor at my high school.

My school in North Hollywood -- which called itself Harvard (now [Harvard Westlake](#)) -- was kind of a strange mix. It was basically a prep school for boys from well-to-do families owned and run by the Episcopal Church. It was filled with the sons of Republican businessmen and the L.A. political establishment with a smattering of Hollywood producer and actor kids. While I was there, from 8th grade through 12th, my fellow students included the sons of the conservative L.A. Mayor Sam Yorty, Nixon aide H.R. Haldeman, and the "kitchen cabinet" of businessmen who recruited Ronald Reagan to run for governor. (Ron Reagan, Jr. would later attend the school.) Gregory Peck's three sons were also on campus along with the son of comedian Jonathan Winters.

Harvard -- the boys school -- had been founded as a military school and while the emphasis had shifted to academics and sports by the 1960s, it retained a mandatory Jr. ROTC program run by an active duty major in the U.S. army and two sergeants who had fought in Korea. Sgt. Thompson was one of them.

Some of the Harvard students really liked the military program, earned medals, and got to wear swords at dress parades attended by Beverly Hills mothers wearing fancy hats in the school reviewing stands.

But my close friends -- like [Richard Baskin](#) whose dad co-created Baskin-Robbins Ice Cream -- and I never took the military program seriously. We chafed at the regimentation, we were liberals in a conservative school beginning to question war in general. Our heroes were a handful of young, progressive faculty like our English teachers and JV football coaches Nat Reynolds and [Paul Cummins](#).

Major McCarthy was our hard ass foe with a hair-trigger temper. Sgt. Franklin, a good old boy from Kentucky who had lied about his age to join the army at 16, was friendly and crude and willing to tell us jokes about his beer drinking and sexual adventures during military classes.

But Sgt. Thompson was a guy we neither laughed at or challenged. For one thing, he was 6' 4" and very imposing. But really it was his manner. He had a gentle face and he was soft-spoken and taciturn. He'd fought in Korea, but he wasn't boastful. He commanded a certain respect.

We boys wore army uniforms every day, learned how to shoot in an old armory, drilled once a week, and visited missile bases on field trips. We once staged a war game, setting fire to the dry Coldwater Canyon hills.

All of this required military activity felt mostly like an annoyance -- while providing an occasional opportunity for mischief and mild rebellion -- but staring early in 1965, late in my junior year, the mood changed.

In military class, we started learning about this new, far-off war in a place we'd never heard of: Vietnam. We were told that's where we might go -- as officers. That seemed far-fetched (and of course nearly all of us fortunate sons would end up with college deferments) but it did make us listen. Sgt. Thompson and Sgt. Franklin showed us Pentagon training films about Vietnam. I remember feeling like we were being let in on a secret. Narrators reassured us that even in the jungle we could be rescued quickly by helicopters and rushed to modern medical clinics where we'd be patched up fast.

Then, one day, Sgt. Thompson disappeared.

When we returned from summer vacation and survived another August football training camp, we were told that Sgt. Thompson had been called up for active duty and sent to Vietnam. That news was disturbing enough. But what we heard later was truly shocking. He'd been badly injured -- blown up by a landmine and paralyzed from the waist down.

That Fall -- October 8 to be exact (I looked it up) -- Harvard observed "Sgt. Thomas R. Thompson Day" and we played a football game in his honor. The opposing team was weak but our coaches reminded us we better win this one -- there were a lot of prominent people in the grandstands. We autographed the game ball for him and our coaches and co-captains presented it to him and his wife on the field. They later telephoned him at the hospital in San Francisco where he was being treated. At some point we heard that President Johnson himself had called Sgt. Thompson to express his gratitude.

My overwhelming reaction was that none of this made sense. For one thing, Sgt. Thompson was "old"

especially to us teenagers. (He was 34.) He had a wife and son. After nearly 20 years in the military -- and having survived combat in Korea

-- he was on the verge of retirement, teaching "toy soldiers" like us. Why did they have to send him off to Vietnam? And what kind of pathetic "honor" was it for us to give him a damn football?

I realized later -- and was reminded by last night's episode of the Ken Burns / Lynn Novick [The Vietnam War PBS](#) series -- that 1965 was the fatal turning point in the war when President Johnson and his "best and brightest" cabinet (including Defense Secretary Robert McNamara) dispatched the first contingent of U.S. ground troops. It began in the spring -- when I was a junior watching those U.S. Army training films -- and by the end of the year, we were in deep in a foreign war and already taking heavy casualties in a conflict that would last a decade and kill 58,000 Americans and between 2 and 3 million Vietnamese.

Sgt. Thompson had been part of that first rapid escalation. Just over a month after he arrived, he and a small group of U.S. advisers attached to a South Vietnamese military convoy were blown up when their jeep went over a Viet Cong (NLF) land mine.

As futile and senseless as this all seemed, it did not immediately turn me against the war. I was a liberal and I was increasingly rebellious toward the Jr. ROTC program I was in, but I also felt patriotic. That December, my friend and classmate Clint Sherman and I raised money and collected gifts to send to GIs in Vietnam for Christmas.

But Sgt. Thompson's near death -- and the prospect that he might be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life -- did more than give me pause. It shook me up. I hardly knew him well. But it seemed such a waste. And it made me begin to question everything, especially the war. What were we doing there? What was it really all about? Was it worth fighting and perhaps dying for?

My final semester in high school was a blur of learning as much as I could about the war -- while becoming so rebellious about our school military program that I was constantly reprimanded and threatened with expulsion. (My brother, [David Talbot](#), would have an even rougher time at the school in 1969 when things were more polarized at the school and in the country.)

When I went off to college at [Wesleyan University](#) in 1966 I was embarrassed about having gone to a military high school. My great friend [David Davis](#) and I both shuddered at our photos in the freshman facebook -- we were wearing our high school uniforms.

But I discovered I had one advantage. Thanks to Jr. ROTC and Sgt. Thompson, I found that I already knew a lot more about Vietnam than most of my classmates. When campus elections rolled around in the spring of '67 I got elected class president on a platform of promising to organize a blues festival (I hired Muddy Waters and his band) and a Vietnam teach-in. That was the beginning of what became for me many intense years of anti-war activism, including making one of my earliest scrappy 16mm films about Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

I never spoke to Sgt. Thompson after he came home wounded from the war. I don't know what became

of him. I hope he miraculously recovered. I did find a few news articles about him, including this one from the Los Angeles Times in January 1966, "L.A. Area's First Vietnam Paraplegic Returns Home." And I dug up this photo of him from our high school yearbook.

If I had spoken to him after the war, I suspect we would have disagreed about the war itself and whether it was justified and worth the sacrifice.

From **Bruce Williams**:

I matriculated at seventeen and did not register for the draft until halfway through first semester. I do not remember registering for the draft. Then, at Christmas break, Doug Knight and I decided to take some time off, what might now be called a "gap semester." One cannot get a student deferment if one interrupts one's normal progress through college, so I spent 1967 through 1970 classified 1A.

I got a Z-card and shipped out of Tacoma on an old Liberty ship, up the Puget Sound to load whole trees, then coastwise down to San Francisco, San Salvador, Buenaventura, more dirty little port towns in Peru than I care to remember, and finally, as far south as Arica, Chile. I was crew mess. With the money I made I bought a Mercury Cougar and drove it back east to Middletown in September. I was then eighteen. Like John Yurechko the year before, I was ordered down to New Haven for the indignity of a physical, except in my case there was no official SNAFU. I was 1A. They had me. All I could think to do was to refuse to sign the loyalty oath. The FBI took my fingerprints, and two *federales* sat me down for an interview. I claimed higher loyalties. We got to chatting, and I gathered that I could not be drafted so long as I was enrolled as a fulltime student and that I should cover my ass come summertime. Any thought of a career in the State Department was out the window. Just as well.

In October 1967, with Bob McIntosh – remember our classmate Bob McIntosh? – and two girls, I drove my Mercury Cougar, decorated with Student Mobe placards, down to the March on the Pentagon. There were a lot of people there. I did not see the Dead, let alone Norman Mailer. I would see them later. We had a lot of fun, stayed in the Washington suburbs with a cousin who was a defense contractor. That evening we watched the news. Footage of riots and fisticuffs, nothing like anything I had seen. True, it had been quite the mob scene, a three-ring circus with sideshows. I suppose the CBS Evening News was most interested in the sideshows. Shortly thereafter, Bob disappeared, called home to Seattle, something to do with a power struggle in the NAACP, perhaps with the Panthers, as I recall. Never heard from him again. I tried.

My opposition to the war in Vietnam was steadfast. It grew out of a deep revulsion to the injustices and stupidities of racism in America. I knew very well that our society could not be trusted to do the right thing. I read James Baldwin, Richard Wright, John Howard Griffin. Then, the summer between my 7th and 8th grades – the summer of 1961 – Dad moved the family from Pennsylvania to North Georgia, Lookout Mountain, overlooking Chattanooga. The evening news led with Freedom Riders, then later, Birmingham, Wallace, the murder of Medgar Evers. Like Steve Talbot and Dave Davis, I wore a uniform to school every day. We had classes in military history. Lesson number one: stay far away from the military, especially the infantry, especially if there is a hot war on.

I was in the crack drill team. It was less boring than the usual marching to and fro. Also, I got a special cord for my uniform to go with the Glee Club cord, one on each shoulder. The girls liked those cords.

Racism was an unthinking mundanity. My classmates were White Supremacists, rather by default. I was a “Goddamn-Yankee-[N-word]-Lover” and grew adept at defending equality and the oneness of humanity. My swimming coach was a Wes grad. He commended the school to me and me to the school.

Towards the end of junior year, Dad moved the family to Southern California, where, ironically, I was called “Tennessee Williams.” 1965. That summer, the day before all hell broke loose, I was in Watts buying scrap metal with my new swimming coach. I sat up on Palos Verdes Peninsula welding a camera tower together as the smoke rose up from the LA basin. Later that year, I applied for early admission to Wesleyan, had an interview on Sunset Boulevard, spent over an hour discussing the history of racism in America, and left thinking it was such a lively conversation that I certainly would be admitted before Christmas. Perhaps John Hoy thought I would also help out the swim team, but I was sick of doing laps and let down the side.

I ramble. In my mind, the war in Vietnam was an extension of a long history of violence, lynchings, race riots, police assassinations, toppling of elected governments for our own profit, and imperial wars. I took two trimesters at UCLA, the summers of 1968 and 1969, to remain constantly enrolled. My draft board was full of John Birchers. The LAPD liked to pull me over for driving with long hair. I got clean for Gene, worked the Connecticut primary, then the California primary, where I recorded Bobby, as I sat at the foot of his podium. He winked at me. I should have kept those tapes, but I delivered them to McCarthy headquarters. I was in the parking lot of the Ambassador when Bobby was shot. I skipped Chicago. I had had enough.

Senior year was quite pleasant. I made movies. I was #76 in the lottery. I got Landed Immigrant status in Canada and formed a film company in Toronto – Artichoke Productions, Ltd. As a graduation gift, Joe Reed gave me his painting of an artichoke, oil on board. I look at it as I write this. It needs a professional cleaning after fifty years. In Toronto I received a work visa for Colombia. I rather thought I would prefer Colombia to Canada, if drafted. After graduation, I actually got ye old “Greetings” letter, but luckily, I was filming in Germany and thus had 90 days to appeal instead of 30. I was driving cabs in Manhattan when I was ordered to report to 39 Whitehall Street for another physical. I claimed I was a CO, citing all my many Quaker friends in Pennsylvania. (“God damn thee! What did thee bid?”) Sent upstairs to a shrink, I agreed to a 4F for psychological incompatibility with military service. That seemed about right. A short while later, to celebrate, I flew to Barranquilla and spent six months hitchhiking through the Andes. I was still just a kid. We were all just kids.

But I owe him. Although I hardly knew him, Sgt. Thompson's fate opened my eyes to a war I might otherwise have blindly stumbled into.

From **John Yurechko**

WELCOME TO WESLEYAN JOHN YURECHKO

YOU’VE BEEN DRAFTED

I was drafted by the Army right after I started my freshman year at Wesleyan. The Vietnam War was expanding. I was scared shitless. Somehow Wesleyan had screwed up my student deferment. I was

ordered to report to New Haven for a physical exam prior to induction into the US Army. I had no choice but to go while Wesleyan tried to figure out what had gone wrong and fix All the paperwork. I remember going through the Army physical; a very humiliating process which ended up with me standing buck naked in a room with 30 or 40 other inductees. Someone dropped a nickel that rolled across the floor in front of us. It was a form of protest. The Army medical doctors didn't think it was funny.

It turned out that Wesleyan thought it had submitted my deferment form, but they had confused my form with another freshman named Peter Yurchenko. This mishap would plague the two of us throughout our time at Wesleyan. My deferment eventually went through and I didn't have to go into the Army. Then the government instituted a lottery to accommodate the draft callups. My dormmates filled the TV room to watch the lottery selection process. There would be groans when some one's birthdate came up early. My birthday - - - April 12 - - - came up near the end at number 342 - - - virtually assuring me of escaping the draft.

My "You're in the Army Now" experience and my 342-lottery brought the Vietnam War right into my face. I had participated in protests in high school and continued doing so at Wesleyan. When I graduated in 1970, I decided to pursue a doctorate in history at the University of California, Berkeley campus. It was the summer of Cambodia. When I arrived in Berkeley there were massive protests, huge clouds of tear gas, and volleys of rubber bullets. I got gassed and a friend next to me was shot in the leg by one of those rubber bullets. We ran into one of the university buildings and stuck our heads in a water fountain. It was the Music Department building. On a piano, someone was playing Mozart.