

## **The Vietnam War November 1, 1955-May 15, 1975**

### **The Impact of the Vietnam War on Alabama and the United States**

When the United States supported the French in South Vietnam to fight the communists in North Vietnam, the people of the United States agreed because they wanted to stop communism. Most people thought communism was a threat to the United States. Many people were afraid there were communist spies in the United States and the government. They thought these communist spies would start a nuclear war or take over the government.

In the 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy from Wisconsin was put in charge of the Committee on Government Operations. He began a search across the United States for people who were communists. He made each suspect come to Washington D.C. to be asked questions by a committee. The main question was, "Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist party?" He questioned hundreds of people over eight weeks. Many government employees were unfairly questioned and lost their jobs. The American people watched it on television. When Senator McCarthy began questioning soldiers who fought in WWII, the American people became angry and stopped the committee from any more questioning.

At the same time that McCarthy was questioning the employees, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was sponsored by a group of congressmen in the House of Representatives. It called people who worked in the movie industry to come to Washington to give the names of their friends at work or at home who were members of the Communist Party. If an actor or a director or anyone else who worked in the movie industry was identified as a communist, that person lost his or her job and was unable to ever work in the movie industry again.

In the 1960s, the opinion of the people of the United States began to change about communism. The people still hated it but they began to think that it might not be a big threat to the United States. Many young people attending college started to disagree with their parents and teachers about many things, including the Vietnam War. They wanted a different hairstyle, a different clothes style, and a different life style, which included religion and jobs. And they were against war. These young people were called Hippies. Hippie or Hippy is a word related to hip, which means cool and not old-fashioned.

Other people in the United States began to ask why the government was sending so many soldiers to die in a Vietnam civil war when the war was between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. A civil war means the war is between two parts of the same country. Many people thought this was a problem for the Vietnamese people to solve by themselves.

In the 1960s, the government was drafting 33,000 young men a month to fight in the war. More and more people became worried and concerned about how many young

men in their neighborhood or church or town were going to war. Many more men began to die. By the end of the war, over 58,000 men died in the war. Many more thousands of Vietnamese men, women, and children were killed in the war.

Fort McClellan was an important U.S. Army training base located near Anniston, Alabama. Fort McClellan specialized in training soldiers for chemical warfare. More than 30,000 soldiers were trained for service in Vietnam at Fort McClellan. Their training included the use of the agent Napalm B, the herbicide Agent Orange, and tear gas. All three chemical weapons were used against the Vietnamese people in the war. Now, 40 years after the war, many of the United States veterans still have health issues because of the chemical weapons that were used while they served in Vietnam.

Below are the words of one Vietnam veteran about his experiences at Fort McClellan:

"I spent 8 months at Fort McClellan as a Chemical Officer. We were trained in Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical weapons systems that Russia and other countries had. The dangerous chemical agents like nerve agents GB, VX, CK -blood agents, and other older chemical weapons (Mustard gas, Phosgene, etc.) were kept in underground bunkers that we inspected periodically to make sure they were not leaking. All biological weapons and agents were ordered destroyed by order of the president while I was there. Although we as Chemical officers trained in controlled settings in the laboratory and the field with those agents, and their toxic decontamination agents, no active lethal agents were used on our troop training. Unlike Russia which did train with live agents and had hundreds of Russian troop casualties. Our job when we left McClellan was to serve at Brigade or Division level commands providing expertise to the commanding officers and generals re: predicting the effects on fighting forces, based on weather conditions, vehicle or building cover, or open field exposure, of a nuclear or chemical or biological attack by enemy forces. I traveled to Germany as the First Infantry Division Chemical officer each year x 2 deployments for a multinational training exercise called Reforger which simulated a nuclear attack on our and allied forces there. I also spent time inspecting infantry and artillery units to make sure that they were up to standard training re: donning protective gear, firing weapons while in protective gear, and recognizing and treating chemical and biological agent weapon attack.

The use of Napalm and Agent Orange, flame throwers and flame tanks were used in combat areas when needed but the then unknown after effects on many of us, years later, are still being dealt with."

This was the first war the American citizen could watch on TV. In the 1960s, there was no cable TV. Instead, at 6 pm every evening, each channel would host a news program. Most Americans would watch the news of the day at 6 pm. Reporters sent films of the war to the news stations. The Americans could see the battles and the people being killed on TV every night. One night they watched children running and screaming from their village after it had been burned by agent Napalm B. These images made the American people more against the war than ever before.

The protests of the American people grew and grew across the United States. In 1966, 50,000 people protested the war in New York City. In 1967, 100,000 protested in Washington, D.C. and in 1971, 300,000 protested again in that same city. Just before the war ended, many soldiers who fought in Vietnam protested the

war when they got home. In 1973 the United States combat units were withdrawn from Vietnam after the signing of the Paris Peace Accords. North Vietnam won the war and North Vietnam and South Vietnam became one country again. Thousands of Vietnamese men, women and children came to the United States as refugees from the war in the late 1970s. These Vietnamese people supported the United States soldiers when they were fighting in Vietnam in the war. In 1995, the governments of the United States and Vietnam became friends again even though Vietnam is a communist country.

After the Paris Peace Accords and the American troops came home, many service men and women were missing. The US government and private citizens worked to find out what happened to these people. They were believed to have been killed in action or taken as a prisoner. Citizens of the United States often purchased bracelets with the name of a missing person. These MIA (missing in action) or POW (prisoner of war) bracelets were worn to pay tribute to the missing person and create awareness that he or she had not been found.

Below is an article by Steve Hartman of CBS News published on May 20, 2011, about an Alabama veteran, James Leslie Moreland, who was finally found and his remains were returned to the US to be buried. Kathy Strong, the lady mentioned in the article below, bought a StepStone for Mr. Moreland and came to the Alabama Veterans Memorial Park and dedicated it to him. His StepStone is permanently placed under the American Flag at the Park.

“MONTEVALLO, Ala. - In Alabama this weekend, closure came in a flag-draped coffin. After 43 years missing in Vietnam, the recently identified remains of an elite Army Green Beret soldier finally made it home.

"We thank you today Lord, that James Leslie Moreland has returned to the land where he came from," the preacher said Saturday.

[PICTURES: After 43 years, MIA in Vietnam War hero buried](#)

CBS News correspondent Steve Hartman reports the service marked an end to four decades of uncertainty for Moreland's friends, family and one totally devoted, total stranger: Kathy Strong.

Strong never knew James Moreland - but will never forget him either. "I made a promise and I wanted to keep it," she says.

It was a promise she made Christmas day 1972 when Kathy, then 12 years old, got a metal bracelet in her stocking. It was one of those [MIA-POW bracelets](#) which were a popular fad in the 1970s. Each bracelet bore the name of a soldier who was either still a prisoner in Vietnam or missing in action. The idea was to wear the bracelet until your veteran came home.

Strong took the commitment more seriously than most. As her photos can attest - long after the other kids had moved onto bell bottoms and moon rocks, Kathy was still wearing her bracelet.

In fact [when we first met her in March](#) - there it was, same place it'd been every second of every day for 38 years.

She says she's never taken it off. "Nope, had an MRI, had to keep my arm out of the machine, that was difficult," she added. She was determined to only take it off for him.

"They showed footage back in the day of the soldiers coming off the planes and I always thought 'I'm going to be there and have him put it on his arm,' and that's how I always pictured it," Strong says. "But that wasn't meant to be."

Over the years Strong has really gotten to know James Moreland through, his 2 surviving sisters -- who invited her to sit with them at the funeral. Strong also got special recognition Saturday from Col. Paul Longgear, Moreland's commanding officer - and perhaps Kathy's biggest fan.

"This is quality that we just don't hardly find in America anymore," Longgear says. "A commitment to her word even though she was a child."

For too many of us, "supporting the troops" is nothing but lip service. Patriotism nothing but what we wear on our sleeve. Strong, however, with her bracelet, has shown us what being a truly proud American entails

And finally, as for that bracelet, Kathy did with it what she always said she would. The morning before the funeral she took it off and slipped it on the sleeve of Moreland's uniform.

"It's going to be hard. It's going to take some getting used to," she says. But I've come to learn that whether I'm wearing his bracelet or not, he'll always be with me every day of my life."

In 2018, President Trump designated March 29<sup>th</sup> to be recognized each year as Vietnam Veterans Memorial Day. In 1982 a two acre Vietnam Veterans Memorial was built in Washington, D.C. which honors service members of the United States armed forces who fought in the Vietnam War and sacrificed their lives in the Vietnam War. Inscribed on the black granite walls are the names of more than 58,000 men and women who gave their lives or remain missing. 70.06 percent of the killed in action (KIA) were nineteen years old or younger.

Listed below are some interesting statistics about the Vietnam War.

- There are 58,267 names now listed on that polished black wall, including those added in 2010.
- The names are arranged in the order in which they were taken from us by date and within each date the names are alphabetized.
- The first known casualty which was over 50 years ago was Richard B. Fitzgibbon, of North Weymouth, Mass. Listed by the U.S. Department of Defense as having been killed on June 8, 1956. His name is listed on the Wall with that of his son, Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Richard B. Fitzgibbon III, who was killed on Sept. 7, 1965.
- There are three sets of fathers and sons on the Wall.
- The largest age group, 33,103, were 18 years old.
- 12 soldiers on the Wall were 17 years old.
- 5 soldiers on the Wall were 16 years old.
- One soldier, PFC Dan Bullock was 15 years old.
- 997 soldiers were killed on their first day in Vietnam.
- 1,448 soldiers were killed one day before they were to be going home
- 31 sets of brothers are on the Wall.
- 54 soldiers attended Thomas Edison High School in Philadelphia. I wonder why so many from one school.
- 8 Women are on the Wall, nursing the wounded.
- 244 soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Vietnam War; 153 of them are on the Wall.
- Beallsville, Ohio, with a population of 475 lost 6 of her sons.
- West Virginia had the highest casualty rate per capita in the nation. There are 711 West Virginians on the Wall.
- The Marines of Morenci - They led some of the scrappiest high school football and basketball teams that the little Arizona copper town of Morenci (pop. 5,058) had ever known and cheered. In quieter moments, they rode horses along the Coronado Trail, stalked deer in the Apache National Forest. And in the patriotic camaraderie typical of Morenci's mining families, the nine graduates of Morenci High enlisted as a group in the Marine Corps. Their service began on Independence Day, 1966. Only 3 returned home.
- The Buddies of Midvale - LeRoy Tafoya, Jimmy Martinez, Tom Gonzales were all boyhood friends and lived on three consecutive streets in Midvale, Utah, on Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Avenues. They lived only a few yards apart. They played ball at the adjacent sandlot ball field. And they all went to Vietnam. In a span of 16 dark days in late 1967, all three would be killed. LeRoy was killed on Wednesday, Nov. 22, the fourth anniversary of John F. Kennedy's assassination. Jimmy died less than 24 hours later on Thanksgiving Day. Tom was shot dead assaulting the enemy on Dec. 7, Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day.
- The most casualty deaths for a single day was on January 31, 1968 ~ 245 deaths.
- The most casualty deaths for a single month was May 1968 - 2,415 casualties were incurred.
- 8 of the 35 students in a graduating high school class at Pantego High in Pantego, NC. went to Vietnam and incredibly all 8 returned – half of the 8 left behind some blood and other parts.

The stories of two Alabama men, Bill (Matthew) Leonard and Tommy Hill, who were killed in action (KIA) can be read on the website for the Alabama Veterans Memorial Park. [www.alabamaveterans.org](http://www.alabamaveterans.org).