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The Dark at the End of the Tunnel -- VVA in Hanoi, One Year After

by

Dan Cragg

This December 19th marks the anniversary of the Vietnam Veterans of America's first controversial trip to Hanoi. Now, at long last, a documentary film of this first trip has been released. Last November 1st it was shown on Maryland Public Television stations in Baltimore, Annapolis, Salisbury, Hagerstown, and Frederick. Entitled "Going Back: Return to Vietnam," and distributed by the Public Broadcasting System's affiliate station KCET, the fifty-minute film was produced by Virginia Production.

The controversial wreath-laying at Ho Chi Minh's Tomb is not shown, but hardly are we spared anything else from VVA's six-day adulation fest of communist Vietnam.

Much of the film's dialogue involves discussions about how badly we treated the communists during the war and how desperately they need and deserve U. S. aid to make up for it now. Yet two of the major issues the VVA said the trip was undertaken to explore, Agent Orange and the question of our missing in action, are only lightly touched upon.

At the very end of the film Mr. Muller announces he will help Hanoi get U. S. foreign aid by using the VVA to make a direct appeal to this country's Vietnam veterans to pressure the U. S. government into recognizing communist Vietnam. This is nothing more than the direct "appeal to the American people" approach Hanoi admits it is using to obtain recognition inasmuch as it feels it cannot stoop to doing this through normal diplomatic channels. As the film ends on this note, one must wonder what the real purpose of Mr. Muller's trip was and what purpose its producers have in releasing it at this time.

One also must wonder how much of the dialogue between the veterans themselves was real and how much staged for the benefit of the camera. Mr. Muller, for instance, is constantly pointing out on other occasions how ignorant this country's school children are concerning the "facts" of the Vietnam War. But then, in this film, we are treated to the extraordinary spectacle of Robert Muller, in Hanoi, eleven years after the end

of the air war over North Vietnam, pretending total astonishment when he finds out, apparently for the first time, that U. S. fighter aircraft engaged communist planes in dog fights over North Vietnam!

The following is a transcript of some of the remarks and conversations members of the group made on various occasions during their trip. I would like to thank Lee and Joyce Bandell of Herndon, VA, for their invaluable help in preparing it.

Every Vietnam veteran, and especially those who are still loyal to Mr. Muller, should see this film.



December 19, 1981. Hanoi.

MR. MULLER. These were the people we were wasting. A couple of years ago you'd have gotten medals for wastin' 'em. Now we're sittin' down and they're feedin' us dinner. I like 'em. They're nice people.

MR. HARBERT (on the POW/MIA question): They have a deep desire to resolve the issue...they are attempting to solve these problems. ...they're bitter about being frozen out of the world community, which America has done very effectively. And I think the most poignant point, that nobody from America has officially, or perhaps even unofficially, said "Thank you."

MR. MULLER: And that bothers me

MR. HARBERT: ...Nobody said "Thank you for what you've done, if it's the 76 remains you've sent back or whatever it is." Certainly the government hasn't done that or certainly the American people through an organization haven't done it in a way that it's come to the world's attention.

December 20, 1981. At Ho Chi Minh's Tomb.

Mr. MULLER: That was amazing!

MR. TERZANO: Very sobering and impressive sight.

MR. MULLER: That was very impressive.

MR. BIRD: You know, I feel really honored.

MR. MULLER: You do have an immediate sense of respect, I can tell you that too. Cannot help but have respect for the man. It's like he was right there.

MR. HARBERT: It's like veneration of a leader. What in America we don't put on that level. We have the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Monument, but it is not as personal as seeing the body of the man himself.

December 20th, 1981. In the "American War Crimes Museum," Hanoi.

MR. HARBERT (to a Vietnamese guide): So those stars up there mean the...

VIETNAMESE: The number...

MR. HARBERT: ...of American aircraft that it shot down in dog fights.

VIETNAMESE: Yes.

MR. MULLER: Were there actually dog fights?

MR. HARBERT: Were there dog fights? Every mission there was a dog fight.

MR. MULLER: Are you kidding? Are you serious?

MR. HARBERT: Are you kidding? What do you think we did when we got up there?

MR. MULLER: I looked at you guys as really, you know...

MR. HARBERT: A soft, cushy job? My friend, between the SAMs and the anti-aircraft and these bastards (gesturing to a MIG 21 aircraft mounted on a pedestal in the center of a courtyard) it was no picnic up here. We lucked out getting home every day. You gotta understand, they would send...

MR. MULLER: You really got into dog fights?

MR. HARBERT: Real live dog fights. You know, turning and fighting and us trying to shoot them down. Look at this guy, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14 American aircraft this (admiringly) son-of-a-bitch shot down.

MR. MULLER: Heh, heh.

MR. HARBERT: Now, I mean, if that wasn't a dog fight I don't know what is. But you gotta understand, they had...on any given strike we would have 80 planes coming in and they would send up maybe 4 or 5 of these things.

MR. MULLER. Well, why didn't you blow them out of the sky, if it was so disproportionate?

MR. HARBERT: 'Cause we were...They were after us and we were bombing targets on the ground.

MR. MULLER. Didn't you have escorts that were...?

MR. HARBERT: We had F4s.

MR. MULLER: Then why didn't the F4s...?

MR. HARBERT: These things (indicating the MIG 21) could fly circles around the F4s.

MR. MULLER (disbelievingly): Get outta here!

MR. HARBERT: I'm telling you!



MR. MULLER: How could they have had better weaponry than we had?

MR. HARBERT: 'Cause they had better pilots.

MR. MULLER (disbelievingly): Oh, get outta here! That's ridiculous, seriously.

MR. HARBERT: No, I'm telling you, Bobby!

MR. MULLER (disbelievingly): Don't tell me they had better pilots!

MR. HARBERT: Better pilots and this is a better aircraft than the F4.

MR. MULLER (admiringly): It's a fighting machine!

MR. HARBERT: Oh, ho, ho! It was more the people in it were fighting machines too. I mean, really dedicated fliers. I mean, our guys, everybody is dedicated in war, but there is a difference when you are defending your own land. (Looks up at the MIG) Whew! Amazing!

December 21, 1981. A meeting with the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry.

VIETNAMESE SPOKESMAN: On behalf of the Vietnamese National Committee in...for investigation the consequences of U. S. chemical warfare in Vietnam, I wish to express our happiness at your visit and your presence.

December 21, 1981. In a Hanoi street.

MR. MULLER: And we will be coming back, and we will make the friendship and we will work together and build for peace, alright? And make the very difficult war and put that in the past. And now we look forward, and we will be back.

December 23, 1981. Last night of trip. Saigon rap session.

MR. MULLER: You (meaning the Vietnamese) relate to maybe a square mile of territory, live in these little hooches, take care of your little fields of rice and then all of a sudden out of the skies come these bombs, come helicopters and the soldiers. The violence and insanity of it...that gets to me so...it's not even open to discussion. Like we try and argue with these people that there was some legitimacy to our being here. Forget it! You can't look at them in the face and advance that proposition without feeling stupid about it. There's no way you can justify it.

MR. HARBERT: I must disagree. In a personal sense, the war was fought over nothing, I must agree. I mean, but in reality, the bigger picture, the war was fought so that America and its friends could own the Mekong Delta and what it could produce for the world. Or the oil that was offshore or whatever else they could find here. Because that kind of exploitation, legitimate or illegitimate, is what wars are usually about, because some country wants what some other country has.

MR. BIRD: Michael, what would you like to see enacted, for the benefit of Vietnam, if the right process to implement that which you think will be to Vietnam's benefit is taken into account. What do you want to see?

MR. HARBERT: The normalization of relations between our country and Vietnam so that these people can get in on the real mainstream assistance programs through the Foreign Aid Office of the State Department. That's where the big bucks are. That happens when two countries normalize relations, share embassies and this poor little country can go in and ask for medical supplies and rice and everything else. I mean and food, and so on. I don't know if normalization is policy...possible.

MR. MULLER: If we don't say that, Michael, who else is gonna say it? If the Vietnam veterans that have seen our buddies die and that are closer to the pain and anguish than anybody else, there ain't a politician in America who is going to take the initiatives that we are going to take, alright? If we don't do it, who else is gonna do it? Who else is going to do it, if we don't get out there and say, "The time is now"?

July 13, 1982. Washington, DC, VVA National Headquarters.

MR. PAUL HOWSE (ABC-TV): Muller is asked if the trip was a slap in the face of Vietnam veterans? "Hell no," he retorts. "I fought. My buddies died. And I'm not going to do something that's a slap in my own face, pal. Under no condition." But would he do the trip again, this time without the wreath? Yes, he says, he'd do it again.

\* \* \*

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

-- Matthew, XXIV: 10,11

\* \* \*

July 13, 1982. Washington, DC, VVA National Headquarters.

MR. MULLER: Believe me, I consider myself very much a patriotic American.



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B. The Entertainment Industry

It is our impression that the VVA possesses a number of significant relationships with leading personalities within the entertainment/publishing industry. It is imperative that these relationships be utilized for the benefit of the VVA's overall effort, but it is very important to begin with the fundraising tasks. We want people to put their money where their mouths are.

The following is a list of tasks that must be accomplished to take advantage of the existing relationships.

1. Robert O. Muller must meet immediately with Jon Voight, Jane Fonda and Ed Asner. These individuals should be asked to commit themselves to helping the VVA for the period of 12 months.
2. Each of these personalities should be asked to indicate the method of assistance they consider the most appropriate. They should also be asked to put the VVA in contact with not fewer than five of their colleagues.
3. The goal must be to have, by May 1st, a list of 15 to 20 personalities willing to meet with the VVA and to commit either time, appearances or money during the next year.
4. A major entertainment industry fundraising event should be scheduled for June, 1980, in either New York or Los Angeles. This could be a musical concert, benefit performance, or cocktail dinner party. The goal must be to raise funds, and add some glamour to the VVA.
5. In a fashion similar to the work in the corporate sector, the VVA should identify one or two key personalities who will make

E. BUDGET

While it is impossible to provide the VVA with a precise budget, the following is our thinking at this time. Included in this budget are the essential staff positions that we think need to be filled during the next three to six months. All amounts are annualized.

1. Staff

Executive Director	\$ 35,000 ✓
Deputy Executive Director	30,000
Director of Research	20,000
Executive Asst./Staff Director	17,500
Director, Legislative Affairs	17,500
Clerk/Typist (NY) 2@ \$12,500	25,000
Clerk/Typist (DC)	12,500
Part-Time Staff	10,000

Sub-Total: \$167,500

2. Expenses

Rent (NY)	\$ 18,000 (includes utilities)
Rent (DC)	10,000 ( " " )
Telephones (NY)	7,500
Telephones (DC)	4,800
Furniture (both)	2,500
Copy equipment (both)	7,500
Travel (2 trips per mo.;	
Muller + 1)	40,000 ✓
Transportation (staff)	5,000
Travel & Subsistence	
(Bds. & Cmm.)	12,500
Health Insurance	15,000
Misc. Out-of-Pocket	5,000
Postage/Printing	25,000

Sub-Total: \$152,800

EXTRACTED FROM THE VVA MASTER PLAN PREPARED BY D. H. SAWYER & ASSOCIATES (A NEW YORK PUBLIC RELATIONS FIRM) IN 1979

NOTE: Total estimated budget of \$425,300 after inclusion of \$105,000 for consultant services (D.H. Sawyer & Associates, Freelance Researchers, and Organizers, Special Staff). Does not include funds for public education/advertising program.



June 15, 1982

Albert Santoli  
666 West End Ave. #9H  
New York, NY 10025

Hon. William French Smith  
United States Attorney General  
Department of Justice  
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Smith:

Re: Robert O. Muller  
President, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.

I respectfully bring to your attention and request and/or recommend the Department of Justice direct the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Office of Foreign Agent Registration conduct a full field investigation regarding the above referenced individual and his associates with regard to their acting as agents for the Socialist Republic of Vietnam government.

My concern relative to this matter is that I am a Vietnam veteran who is fully familiarized with the activities of Mr. Muller and other officers of the VVA. As author of a best-selling book on the Vietnam War I have donated more than \$60,000 to this organization, believing it to be a service organization as chartered by the Veterans Administration. This has not proven to be so. (See enclosure group A)

This past year the VVA has made two highly publicized trips to Vietnam, one sponsored by Penthouse Magazine and the other by the Christopher Reynolds Foundation (a longtime leftwing funding agency that has supported the communist regime with aid and lobby support). Mr. Muller and company has also been involved with international media support for the government of Vietnam as exemplified by an April 7 documentary on France's National Television on the eve of a political visit to France by the Vietnamese Foreign Minister. Mr. Muller is also on a college speaking tour sponsored by Penthouse featuring an anti-draft speech by him and a British made film that compares Vietnam to El Salvador. (See enclosure group B)

I have added as an enclosure the copy of a letter dated June 10, 1982 from Mrs. Kay Bosiljevac, who is the wife of an Air Force pilot still missing in action in Vietnam. The letter indicates a statement made by John Terzano, the Legislative Director of VVA, stating that he told her that the purpose of their trips to Vietnam is "to present the Vietnamese point of view." I wish to bring this to your attention because this is not the first time that this statement has been made in public or in private. Many of us who have been following the activities of the VVA do not believe they are in the best interest of the United States or those of us who served with honor in South East Asia. (See enclosure C)



Hon. William French Smith  
United States Attorney General  
Department of Justice  
Washington, DC 20530  
June 15, 1982  
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Out of nearly nine million servicemen who served in Vietnam, the VVA has a membership of approximately eight thousand, which is less than a tenth of one percent. Mr. Muller has gone around the world claiming to represent all Vietnam veterans and layed a wreath on Ho Chi Minh's tomb with a card that read, "With respect from Vietnam Veterans of America." I do not believe that this represents any of the brave servicemen who fought the communists in Vietnam. Also, there have been many resignations and complaints from chapters and individual members of the VVA who have never seen a full financial accounting of the organization. It has also been brought to my attention that the VVA never filed an IRS 990 Form, as required by law, from 1978 to 1981, even though the organization has brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars. This May, after complaints by membership, the VVA finally filed a tax form that I believe is a cover up for financial improprieties by Mr. Muller and the organization's leaders. (See enclosures D)

It is very clear indeed that there are violations of Federal statutes relative to the operation of VVA. And this organization is very clearly operating as an arm of a foreign government. Statements by its officers in Vietnam recently and in public internationally fully conclude without reasonable doubt that the primary interests of the VVA under Mr. Muller's leadership is to project the Vietnamese communist point of view and consistently advocates the same.

I respectfully direct your attention to a CIA report on Soviet propaganda operations dated April 20, 1978. It was noted by Admiral Stanfield Turner the extent which the Soviets have utilized the media worldwide and veterans movements. (Western veterans organizations, p. 626, to further Soviet causes.)

It is my hope that your office can take appropriate action to insure that the legitimate interests of Vietnam Veterans, the families of POWs, and all American citizens are fully protected. You may desire to take note that many families of the POW/MIA issue are trapped in a Catch 22 situation, whereby if they openly complain about Mr. Muller and VVA's activities they or their loved one still missing could be subjected to abuse by the Vietnamese as they have in the past, relative to the situation presented before the United States Senate and House by former POWs and their wives regarding Cora Weiss. The situation now is no different, except that rather than use anti-war activists, the Vietnamese are now using a Vietnam veterans group to do their cruel bidding.

I would appreciate the opinion of the Attorney General with regard to bringing appropriate legal action. Under what statutes?

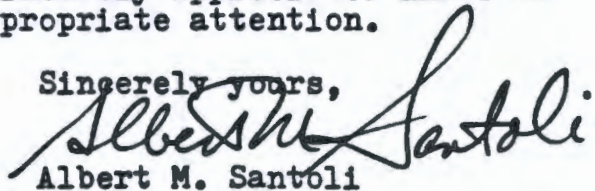
PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Hon. William French Smith  
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Department of Justice  
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It must be noticed that Mr. Muller has replaced the diplomatic process of the United States Department of State in entering into negotiations with a foreign government. I do not believe that this situation is in our national interest, nor do I believe that the Secretary of State would have approved same. This raises some serious questions and may set unwarranted precedent in allowing non-diplomatic personnel outside our government to interfere with sensitive negotiations going on between the United States and communist government officials.

I look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity. Your interest in this matter is sincerely appreciated and I am sure you will give this matter appropriate attention.

Sincerely yours,



Albert M. Santoli

cc: Alexander Haig, Secretary of State  
William Webster, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Branch,  
Holtsville, NY



COVER  
STORY

# Why This Vietnam Veteran Opposes Bob Muller's Visit to Vietnam

by Al Santoli

Special to National Vietnam Veterans Review

Break the will of the enemy to fight, and you accomplish the true objective of war. Cover with ridicule the enemy's tradition. Exploit and aggravate the inherent frictions within the enemy country. Agitate the young against the old. Prevail if possible without armed conflict. The supreme excellence is not to win a hundred victories in a hundred battles. The supreme excellence is to defeat the armies of your enemies without ever having to fight them.

- Sun Tzu, 500 B.C.

If the government of North Vietnam has difficulty explaining to you what happened to your brothers, your American POWs who have not yet returned, I can explain this quite clearly on the basis of my own experience in the Gulag Archipelago. There is a law in the Archipelago that those who have been treated the most harshly and who have withstood the most bravely, who are the most honest, the most courageous, the most unbending, never again come out into the world. They are never again shown to the world because they will tell tales that the human mind can barely accept. Some of your returned POWs told you that they were tortured even more, but did not yield an inch. These are your best people. These are your foremost heroes who, in a solitary combat, have stood the test. And today, unfortunately, they cannot take courage from our applause. They can't hear it from their solitary cells where they may either die or remain for thirty years...

Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn,  
June 30, 1975

## Veterans Question Trip

There have been questions in the veterans' community as to why a number of Vietnam veterans and family members of servicemen still missing in Southeast Asia spoke out in concerned anger and disapproval at the press conference for Robert Muller and his VVA executives who made the highly publicized visit to Vietnam. I am one of the veterans present at the press conference who spoke out. I did so with great reservation and sadness because as a former combat soldier I had always hoped that Vietnam vets could work together. But as a concerned journalist who was covering the trip for *The National Vietnam Veterans Review*, I had thoroughly researched the nature of Muller's trip and the situation in Vietnam today; monitoring Radio Hanoi and the Vietnamese national newspaper during the week of Muller's visit; having worked closely with organizations involved with Agent Orange and POW/MIAs since 1978; talking with the U.S. State Department, the POW/MIA office at Department of Defense, the National League of Families of POW/MIAs; conferring with veterans groups from all over the country; having contributed over \$40,000 to VVA from the proceeds of my book "Everything We Had" and having been disillusioned by Bob Muller and his selfish political motives in the past. After reading the VVA leaders' actions and words in Vietnam in the newspapers and hearing them lie through their teeth in person at the press conference, I had no choice but to confront them to their faces.

## Denounces Trip

My denouncing of Bob Muller and his contingent has no bearing on many of the rank and file membership of VVA who I know to be decent and honorable people who were not advised of Muller's trip until after he left, or the American public who out of a genuine concern for peace wished Muller well. Nor do I have any kind of hatred toward the average Vietnamese villagers. As a member of a combined Vietnamese/American scout platoon our lives were protected by Vietnamese villagers who could have easily given our position away to North Vietnamese soldiers who vastly outnumbered us on the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh Province in 1968. I was able to leave Vietnam, but for the Vietnamese and Cambodians, with 200,000 Vietnamese troops still in Cambodia, thousands more in Laos and in Vietnam there are an estimated 250,000 Vietnamese in "reeducation" labor camps and 50,000 sent to Russia as slave labor. Not only are former ARVN's suffering. Many former revolutionary and communist soldiers and political leaders are now in exile, gulags or dead.

Hoang Van Hoan, a former comrade in arms with Ho Chi Minh and founding member of the Vietnamese Communist Party, was recently sentenced to death by his government. Hoang said in a letter to an American acquaintance: "Le Duan (head of the Viet CP) and company have attempted to push an expansionist drive in Southeast Asia...they defiantly sent troops to dominate Laos, to invade and occupy Kampuchea...therefore, the Vietnamese people cannot but lead a life of utter poverty and misery under war conditions with all their democratic rights and freedoms deprived...All this is brought about by the crimes of Le Duan and company and not the U.S.; as some Americans tend to believe." (The Veteran, March 1980)

With hundreds of boat people still leaving Vietnam every week, for the Muller contingent to come back from Vietnam and say, "The war is over," and demand that the U.S. give reparations to the cruel and repressive Vietnamese government is absurd. This is why I call them a disgrace.

My remarks are not intended to take advantage of a man in a wheelchair. Having been wounded a number of times during the war and having worked in physical rehab with disabled vets in an army hospital after the war, I have learned to judge a man by his actions and motivations rather than by his physical condition, color or religion. All of us who served as combat soldiers have suffered and it has taken a great deal of character and internal strength to survive the homecoming. But I would hope that by our baptism of fire that we could learn that any animal can survive, the important question is what kind of people have we become because of our survival.

## Importance of Penthouse

Some people tend to think that it is not important that *Penthouse Magazine* and the Madison Avenue publicity firm of George Greenfield and Associates who have for the past nine months had Muller speaking at colleges in an anti-war, anti-draft lecture series called "War Stories" both set up and paid for the Vietnam trip as part of the business venture. Muller is paid \$3,500 per college speech and is booked at 20-30 colleges, which comes to \$70-100,000. For *Penthouse's* \$20,000 outlay for Muller's trip and their feature story: figuring a potential readership of 9 million Vietnam era vets at \$3.00 a crack amounts to 30 million dollars in sales. At the press conference there was a giant *Penthouse* banner across the speaker's platform; *Penthouse* girls handing out glossy portfolios on Muller, *Penthouse* and the "War Stories" tour; and there was a pile of *Penthouse* complimentary magazine on the refreshment table. Muller bragged to a reporter that he expected to have a million new members in



Al Santoli kneeling (left) with puppy, as a 19-year-old infantryman in Vietnam.

his organization because of the trip's publicity. (At \$9 annual membership dues per person.)

Bob Muller did not need to take the Penthouse money. This year VVA has pulled in around \$100,000 from members; \$75,000 from Bruce Springsteen; \$100,000 from Charlie Daniels; \$40,000 from my book with another \$25,000 on the way; as well as private donations. Where has all the money that VVA brought in this year gone? They do not have a single service program for their members, nor has any of the regional chapters seen a penny of this money.

## VVA First and Only!

VVA, in all its publicity, claims to be the first and only Vietnam veterans organization in the country and claim they had overwhelming support of veterans for their trip to Vietnam. This is a compound lie. There are over 120 Vietnam veterans groups around the country, many formed before VVA. Groups like NACV, Veterans Leadership Conference, VVAW and United Vietnam Veterans Organization all have larger memberships than VVA and the traditional VFW and American Legion, who Muller has attacked as being anachronistic, each have over 500,000 Vietnam veterans in their organization and their legislative and executive staffs have a high percentage of Vietnam vets. Muller did not consult with his own membership or any of the above mentioned veterans group before leaving for Vietnam. Not only was Muller's trip condemned by the traditional groups and the VLC, UVVO and VVAW (to which Muller formerly belonged), but also by Project Freedom for POW/MIAs, The National League of Families of POW/MIAs and Agent Orange Victims International. In Santa Cruz, California a 250 member chapter of VVA resigned en masse because of Muller's actions on the trip.

## No Experts on Trip

Muller brought no experts with him on any of the issues, no scientists, no MIA family members or officials, no Southeast Asian studies experts, nobody in his contingent spoke Vietnamese. Instead he brought self-appointed officers of his organization (VVA has never held an election): John Terzano as a crew member on a Navy destroyer had never before set foot in Vietnam. Michael Harbert in the Air Force had never before set foot in Vietnam, rather he is a professional political media consultant who creates television and newspaper campaigns for political candidates. Tom Bird is an actor whose story is included in "Everything We Had" where he surrendered to the North Vietnamese and was held for a day. He said that while in captivity: "I didn't remember anything about the Code of Conduct. I don't remember feeling loyalty to anything." Since the war he has also acted in dishonor when New York drama critics exposed him and Rick Weidman (another VVA executive) for plagiarizing the words of other Vietnam veterans at Bird's theatre.

## Who is Robert Muller?

And who is Robert Muller? He is a trained attorney, schooled at the art of debate and

persuasion even if what he represents is fallacious and calculatedly manipulative. Like many corporate lawyers he is adept at lying with a straight face, using words like "peace" and "non-political" and "humanitarian concern" to cover for his bitterness and cold personal political ambition. Who else but the media has appointed him to be the "spokesman" for all Vietnam vets? He surely didn't represent me when he layed the wreath on Ho Chi Minh's tomb. (This action he personally admitted to UPI on December 24 and to reporter Robert Evans later.)

## Communist Activities

To understand the full meaning of the wreath laying one needs to know what was going on in Vietnam at the time of Muller's visit. I had monitored Vietnamese national radio in Hanoi and the Vietnamese newspaper through the U.S. Department of Commerce. Here's what I found:

Muller's group arrived in Hanoi on December 18, the opening day of the Vietnamese Communist Party's Second Session of the National Assembly in preparation for the 5th Party Congress. It was also the celebration of Leonid Brezhnev's 75th birthday. The Vietnamese had an official ceremony in Hanoi to send Brezhnev the "Labor Hero" medal and confer upon him the Ho Chi Minh Order "consolidating and promoting the great friendship, militant solidarity and all-around cooperation between the Soviet Union and Vietnam. This is a political event of specific importance." Meanwhile, in Poland, shipyard workers are being beaten and shot in Gdansk—this was not reported on Vietnamese radio.

## 20 December, Wreath Laid

On December 20 Muller layed the wreath on Ho Chi Minh's tomb. On December 21 was the 37th anniversary of the Vietnamese Army. The following is a composite of excerpts from that day's radio and print news:

"Our people's army is 37 years old today. In the course of glorious construction and struggle, educated and led by the communist party, our army has scored many wonderful combat exploits...In Southeast Asia, the Peking reactionaries in collusion with U.S. imperialist forces are intensively stepping up their activities to oppose and sabotage Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea. Our country, though at peace, has to cope with their war of sabotage... Comrade Le Duan pointed out: We must mobilize the people and the armed forces in all spheres of activities and at the same time, make the best use of the assistance given by the Soviet Union and other countries of the Socialist community to ensure that our country will always have sufficient strength to defeat the enemy under any circumstance and in any form of warfare (remember Sun Tzu's quote at the top of this article—A.S.)...Our soldiers have boundless patriotism, absolute loyalty to the fatherland, ardent love for the socialist regime, a desire to achieve progress, a spirit of socialist internationalism and a deep hatred of the nation's enemies. Our direct and dangerous enemies are the Peking expansionists and hegemonists in collusion with the U.S. imperialists."



# The Buck Stopped at Ho Chi Minh's Tomb

## Others Laid Wreaths

The only other people who laid wreaths on Ho Chi Minh's tomb that week were the Central Committee of their communist party and a visiting emissary from the Soviet eastern bloc. Whose propaganda did Muller benefit by laying that wreath? The answer is very obvious. A form of warfare the Vietnamese have been very successful with has been to use anti-war types and our media to divide us as a nation. Muller and the NY Times reported nothing of the reality of what was going on in Vietnam that week. All that was said is what nice people the Vietnamese were to the visitors as they were paraded around Hanoi and Saigon, meeting with hack communist party officials here and there. One newsreel that circulated around the world showed Muller and friends visiting what he called a "war museum" but in reality the Vietnamese call it a "U.S. war crimes museum." The four veterans posed in front of a Russian MIG jet fighter decorated with 14 stars, and as Muller enthusiastically said on ABC TV's "Nightline", each star stood for an American plane that the MIG had killed. Beneath the MIG was a pile of twisted metal that Muller said was part of the wreckage of one of the planes the MIG had shot down. Imagine the mother of an American pilot killed in Vietnam watching this on her television. And imagine the airplay this footage received throughout the Soviet influenced nations.

## Vietnam and Libya

Throughout the week the Vietnamese media denounced the U.S. While in Hanoi, Muller added to this by calling the U.S. war effort in Vietnam "obscene." (This was quoted in NY Times). Meanwhile, Hanoi radio had this to say about the situation in Poland:

"The socialist community and progressive world public opinion warmly hail and support the positive and necessary measures taken by the Polish state to check the hands of the counter-revolutionary forces in Poland. On the contrary, the U.S. led imperialist forces are panic stricken and embarrassed... Washington and international reactionaries are class enemies of socialism, so they have stopped at nothing to oppose the socialist community... The imperialists and anti-communist reactionaries have drawn a lesson from their bitter setbacks in the previous plots against Hungary and Czechoslovakia... Angered by this, the Reagan administration slanderously alleged that Soviet pressures compelled Poland to take these measures. This statement shed light on the ugly face of the Reagan administration, who fears the current developments in Poland. They also cowardly supported the extremists in the leadership of Solidarity trade union and other reactionary forces in Poland (the Church)."

A Libyan diplomat also visited Hanoi that week. The Vietnamese newspaper had this to say:

"Why has Washington adopted such an increasingly frenzied and hostile attitude toward Libya? Libya resolutely opposes the U.S. staged Camp David agreement and the aggressive acts of the Israeli expansionists Zionists against the Palestinian people and other Arab countries. Washington is also infuriated over the fact that Libya has strengthened its friendly relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries and considers the socialist community as its reliable ally. No wonder the White House has wriggled like a leech in lime and has made every effort to smear and direct its counter attack against Libya."

What these statements show is that the Vietnamese are a part of a concerted Soviet bloc effort to undermine the U.S. The Vietnamese have been the most effective Soviet ally in evoking the sympathies of the American public and dividing us as a nation. To invite Bob Muller and his group during a period of international crisis, especially at

Christmas when American sentiment is most vulnerable, was a clever move by the Vietnamese. Their skill at manipulating U.S. media also came into play, knowing the kind press attention the trip would get, especially from the NY Times and Penthouse who are more concerned about selling a sensational story than the truth, even if that means selling out their own country.

On December 22 the Vietnamese newspaper said:

"Washington and Peking could not obtain the expected results in their machinations against the Soviet Union, Vietnam and other countries in the socialist community by rekindling the so-called 'Afghanistan and Kampuchea problems.' Moreover, public opinion has revealed that it is the United States that used toxic chemicals in three Indochinese countries and is preparing for chemical warfare."

In VVA press releases hyping the trip it was stated that Muller's group had "enthusiastic support of the State Department." This is a lie. The State Department's Southeast Asia Affairs office told me that the Muller group got the ordinary briefing that anyone going to Vietnam receives, asking them not to be used for Vietnamese propaganda.

## First Americans Return

VVA claims that the Muller group were the first Americans to go back to Vietnam. This is also a lie. A number of veterans have gone back to Vietnam, but without media hype or pornographic magazine support. One such veteran is Robert Fitzpatrick from Michigan who was a fellow speaker with Muller and I at a veterans conference in Ohio last summer. Fitzpatrick had just returned from Vietnam where he traveled alone and into the countryside without reporters. Vietnamese officials told him that they were in fact holding bodies of American POWs for ransom from the U.S. government.

## "Four American veterans are coming to Vietnam to denounce the US policy on chemical warfare."

The Vietnamese at the outset of Muller's visit announced, "Four American veterans are coming to Vietnam to denounce the U.S. policy on chemical warfare." To cover for their own use of anti-personnel chemical warfare in Laos and Cambodia, the Vietnamese took full advantage of the four veterans.

## No Contact With League of Families

The 2,500 American servicemen still missing in action is a very sensitive subject to MIA families. Muller came back from Vietnam preaching the Vietnamese propaganda about them not knowing anything about POWs or MIAs alive or dead, but they would allow Muller to bring American veterans to Vietnam to search through the jungles. This is ridiculous. The Vietnamese will not allow any Americans to go anywhere they don't want them to. However, they would be glad to take our tourist dollars and use the vets for propaganda purposes. Muller had spoken with Fitzpatrick last summer. And the day before he left for Vietnam, Congressman Gilman of New York forced Muller to meet with a representative from the League of Families, who Muller had purposely avoided in the past (and in the 3 weeks he has been back in the U.S. he has not as much as returned their numerous phone calls to his office.) Here's why:

## DIA Reports Correct

Contrary to the felonious information Muller brought back, the League of Families and Defense Intelligence Agency have docu-

mented 375 individual eyewitness reportings of western men in captivity from Indochinese refugees. One refugee has testified to having embalmed 400 American POW bodies that are now being stored in a warehouse near Hanoi. Portions of this report have been independently verified by the DIA and the witness has passed many polygraph tests by both U.S. government officials and MIA families.

General Tighe, who was the director of DIA until he retired last summer has stated that the remains of 40 Americans who the Vietnamese admit died in captivity "have yet to be returned. Other men were known to be alive and in the hands of the enemy and some were publicly named, yet we have no accounting of these men."

General Tighe's suspicions were proven correct by the return of 3 American POWs remains in July 1981. There was record of all three former pilots having been captured by the Vietnamese at time of crash, 2 alive, 1 dead at the site. One of the men, Lt. Ron Dodge, was captured alive in 1967 and his

## "You haven't been grateful enough to the Vietnamese."

picture as a POW was used by the Vietnamese for propaganda purposes and appeared on the cover of Life magazine in 1972. Fourteen years after his live capture, the Vietnamese returned the remains of his body without explanation, and pretended to be insulted that the U.S. questioned why they had kept it so long and demanded an explanation as to how Ron Dodge died. During the ABC TV "Nightline" show, Muller arrogantly rebuked Ann Mills Griffith, sister of an MIA serviceman and president of the League of Families. Muller smugly stated "You haven't been grateful enough to the Vietnamese" and the Vietnamese would only deal with him because he is the only one who appreciates them. It seems that the Vietnamese are using Muller to follow in the footsteps of Jane Fonda and Cora Weiss who during the war informed the American media that the Vietnamese were treating our POWs kindly and that the captive servicemen had seen the light and were grateful to their captors.

In reality American POWs were endlessly tortured, while bravely holding out against the communist "reeducation". One can read the accounts of the POW, ordeal in Commander Stratton's Prisoner of War, Admiral William Lawrence's account in Everything We Had, and in John Hubbell's book POW, he says that American prisoners who would not break under the torture were told by the Vietnamese: "We still have French prisoners who did not reform their minds. We can keep you... forever." Prisoners from the French war were still being released or escaping from Vietnamese captivity in the late 1960's.

A former ARVN lieutenant reports that a group of American POWs were working on a road gang and being held in a prison compound in Tan Canh in 1975. When he left the area, the Americans were still building roads. A Laotian refugee who had worked for USAID says he was imprisoned in a cave with 5 American pilots in 1976. The League of Families and DIA has 375 such stories on file.

## Government Suppresses Issues

However, there are elements in our government like Sonny Montgomery, a Congressman from Mississippi, who for years has tried to suppress the MIA issue because it would be embarrassing to certain U.S. officials that we left people behind. Sonny must have breathed a sigh of relief when Muller returned with his cock-and-bull Vietnamese propaganda. Hence Montgomery has supported Muller's effort and was quoted

in print by Mary McGrory to defend Muller against disapproval by MIA families. VVA is now using McGrory's article in their publicity packet. And the Vietnamese are licking their chops hoping that Muller returns. They might pull a few MIA remains out of storage to dangle in front of the American public and make Muller seem legit. But those of us who know the truth will never fall for the macabre bait, nor will the Vietnamese get a penny from the U.S. to finance their concentration camps or murder of Cambodians and defenseless Laotians.

## Who Knows Mitchell?

Muller tried to fool the MIA families by sending out their VVA black minorities officer, Larry Mitchell, who signed a press release calling himself a former POW Green Beret captain. The League of Families ran a check on Mitchell through the Department of Defense and other sources. There is no record of a Larry Mitchell on any POW file since the Korean War. The Army's Register of Officers has no record of a Larry Mitchell ever having been an officer in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. In the Time magazine cover story (where Mitchell says, "There were many My Lai's.") Mitchell lists his captive dates as 1968-71, in his VVA press release he says 1971-73: This is out and out fraud. The League of Families told Muller that Mitchell was a fraud before the trip began. Today Mitchell is still an officer in Muller's organization.

Muller on returning said that the Vietnamese will exclusively only talk with him. Today a Vietnam veteran friend of mine made an appointment with the Vietnamese UN Embassy in New York to meet with their MIA/Agent Orange spokesman next week. The Vietnamese will be glad to talk with any veterans. Any veteran may ask them independently or in a group for a visa. But an easier way is to go through the Orbitours travel agency in Sydney, Australia that has three 8 day tours of Vietnam planned for this year and 21 day tours of Vietnam and Laos, if you don't mind a little "yellow rain."

## "guys who are on the fringe of the veterans' movement who are always interrupting press conferences."

At the press conference, Muller referred to Frank McCarthy and I as "guys who are on the fringe of the veterans movement who are always interrupting press conferences." The truth is that Frank McCarthy is president of the first and foremost Agent Orange victims organization in the country, Agent Orange Victims International. The only other times that Frank has interrupted press conferences was to challenge Jimmie Carter on the Agent Orange issue (which Carter was ignoring) at the White House in 1979, which brought national attention to Agent Orange and forced Carter to form the first official study group on the problem. After the commission was formed and was being stymied by VA director Max Cleland, Frank continually challenged Max publicly with facts on the toxicity of Agent Orange that Max and Dr. Custis (who Muller has publicly supported) were trying to cover up. Frank is a combat vet, 1st Infantry Division 1965.

As for myself, the only other time that I have ever spoken out in anger at a public meeting was in 1971, when as a young journalist working on a book on religions, a black friend of mine in San Francisco took me to an auditorium to see a preacher who was gathering a large following of poor blacks named Jim Jones. The auditorium of 1000 seats was filled with mostly blacks and a few white radical chic types. Jones was a charismatic preacher who claimed to be the salvation of the poor and oppressed. At one point he told the crowd to leave the influence of their traditional churches and follow his

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# Santoli vs Muller on Nam Trip

Continued from Page 7

socialistic community because he was 'revolutionary' and their last and best hope. An old black woman stood up and said she was sorry but she could not betray her church. Jones lashed out at her, calling her a fool because she didn't believe in him.

Afraid for the woman, I screamed out at Jones, "Leave her alone," from my seat in the balcony. The auditorium got quiet. Jones coolly looked up at me and said, "I take in people nobody else wants. I give them a home, and education and something to believe in. What do you do?" There was nothing I could say. I was a journalist, not a Messiah. And I could not debate with the public speaking techniques of a lawyer or evangelist.

In the next couple of years Jones' church and constituency grew. Politicians courted him, he received many donations and was made assistant Housing Commissioner of San Francisco. During the 1976 presidential campaign Rosalyn Carter courted Jones and gave him a laurel from Jimmie in return for his support. In 1978 the world was shocked by the mass suicide of Jones' Guyana community.

Bob Muller also campaigned for Carter in 1976. In 1980, while Billy Carter was taking money from Libya to do their public relations, the favor that Jimmie Carter and Cleland granted Muller for campaigning was a list of the names and addresses of 2 million Vietnam vets for Muller to use for recruitment for his organization. This list miraculously appeared in Cleland's office over a year after Max had told the lawyers of Agent Orange victims, who needed such a list for the federal class action suit, that no such list existed.

What Frank McCarthy and those of us who have worked on the inside of the Agent Orange issue since Paul Reuthershan's death (Paul was the founder of AOV1 and Frank promised him on his deathbed that we would never give up the fight to win assistance for Agent Orange victims) is that the Vietnamese have already given U.S. scientists all the information they have on Agent Orange when Dr. Tung visited us last year. There have been American and international scientists visiting Vietnam continually since 1968.

Worldwide use of dioxin (the deadly poison contained in Agent Orange) is an international problem. The herbicide is produced by international multi-national corporations' factories in Europe, South America, Africa, the Soviet Union and China as well as the U.S. (The international headquarters of Dow Chemicals, the largest producer of Agent Orange, is in Italy.) There is an international scientific conference on Agent Orange scheduled to be held in Vietnam in December 1982 to compare dioxin research that has been going on all over the world. Bob Muller has had nothing to do with any of this. Instead what he has done is cloud the issue with self-serving hype and by giving the Vietnamese a chance to cover their use of anti-personnel toxic "yellow rain" and try to squeeze some money out of the U.S. to help support their ongoing warfare in Southeast Asia.

Bob Muller has often manipulated the Agent Orange issue to advance his own financial and political ambitions. Six months ago the Australian Parliament sent the head of their Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Tony Messner, to the U.S. on a fact finding mission on Agent Orange since Aussie vets have shown the universal kinds of health problems from Agent Orange exposure. Senator Messner returned to Australia rebuking the vets Agent Orange claims and telling the Australian Parliament and public:

"I spoke with Bobby Muller of the Vietnam Veterans of America and he assured me that Agent Orange was not a problem among American veterans but rather a problem of readjustment to society." Barry Romo in Chicago has this on cassette tape and I have a similar statement by Senator Messner in transcript from the Australian Parliament.

Bob Muller sees Agent Orange as a political football to kick around for his own self-interest and political career. He has personally admitted this to me and others in the past. This is why I left his company a couple of years ago. I kept quiet about it all until the press conference. The buck stopped at Ho Chi Minh's tomb. \*

(Al Santoli is the author of *'Everything We Had, An Oral History of the Vietnam War by 33 American Soldiers Who Fought It.'* He served as a combat infantryman with the 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam 1968-69.)



# The Stars and Stripes

The Weekly Voice  
Of Veterans & Dependents  
Of All Wars Of  
The United States

June

THE ONLY NATIONAL VETERANS' NEWSPAPER

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Have Borne The Battle And  
For His Widow And His Orphan"  
Abraham Lincoln

Our 105th Year

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## Point of View

### The Hanoi Connection— It's Time To Unplug It

By Dan Cragg

Last December, four Vietnam veterans, the national leadership of an organization that calls itself the Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc., made a highly controversial and much-publicized trip to Hanoi.

The group's avowed goals were to discuss with the North Vietnamese, issues of interest to America's Vietnam veterans—the effects of the chemical defoliant known as Agent Orange and the fate of our men still listed as missing in Southeast Asia—and to take the first step toward a reconciliation with our former enemies.

All indications are that the group is planning a return trip as early as the week of the 25th of May. [A]

These men do not represent the majority of this country's Vietnam War veterans, and they are going to Hanoi only to exploit the publicity value of the trip, so why should Hanoi even deal with them at all?

Robert O. Muller, the VVA's executive director, bills his organization as "the only national, exclusively Vietnam era veteran's organization in America." [B] But it is not the strength of their membership that makes the VVA appealing to Hanoi. Of more than nine million Vietnam era veterans, the Vietnam Veterans of America has a membership of perhaps nine thousand—one might contrast that with the American Legion's 700,000 Vietnam era veteran membership or the VFW's 500,000. [C]

Nor is it the representative nature of the views VVA espouses. In regard to his own war service, Mr. Muller commented in May 1980 that "my gripe is disillusionment over the leadership in this country and the f---ing institutions that betray my f---ing willingness to give my tender f---ing young ass in the service of this country." [D]

This bitterness might be considered in the context of the most extensive survey of Vietnam veteran attitudes yet conducted, a Lou Harris poll of Vietnam combat zone veterans released in July 1980, which revealed that 91 percent of our Vietnam veterans are glad they served their country; 74 percent enjoyed their time in the military; and 70 percent—two out of three—would do it all again, even knowing the results of our failed policy.

VVA's trip to Hanoi last year did much to alienate the members of America's Vietnam veteran community. Especially galling to many was the group's acquiescence in laying a wreath on Ho Chi Minh's tomb inscribed, "With Respect, From the Vietnam Veterans of America." [E]

But at the time the trip was well received by America's news media. *Penthouse* magazine acted as sponsor for the excursion and arranged the news conference the four veterans held when they returned.

The *New York Times* sent Bernard Weinraub, its Washington Bureau chief, along to cover the event, and the four appeared on the *Phil Donohue Show*, *Good Morning America*, the *MacNeil-Lehrer Report*, and other national news programs.

The trip was also well received by the North Vietnamese, who an-

nounced in the December 20, 1981 edition of *People's Army* that "the purpose of the delegation's visit is to gather information about the effects of the U.S. chemical warfare in Vietnam in order to denounce it before public opinion." [F]

"It was an unspoken agreement that we were both trying to use each other," Michael Harbert, Vice President of the VVA and a senior partner at D. H. Sawyer & Associates, a New York political consulting firm, said in an interview with *Rolling Stone's* Terry McDonell last March. [G]

Clearly the North Vietnamese were using the VVA for propaganda; the VVA was using the trip (not the Vietnamese) to establish themselves with the American people, a great cost—the perception of Vietnam veterans by the world community.

"I can only conclude that this group (the VVA) believes that hurtful publicity is better than none at all," said Arthur J. Fellwock, Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. [H]

*Dan Cragg, who spent 5½ years in Vietnam with the U.S. Army, resigned from the VVA in December 1981. In October 1980 he retired from the Army after completing 22 years' active service.*

Robert O. Muller has gained much credibility as a Vietnam veterans' activist and self-appointed spokesman for Vietnam veterans since he founded the VVA in 1978. Much of that credibility is based on the fact that he was wounded in action in April 1966 and is a paraplegic, confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

This credibility also served him well in the early 1970s, when he was a very active national spokesman for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Eleven years later Robert Muller is still spreading the same old anti-draft, anti-military, anti-war message among America's young people.

By his own calculation, Muller made more than twenty lecture appearances on college campuses across the nation during February and March of this year alone. Sponsored by *Penthouse* magazine his lecture, "Vietnam War Stories," costs \$3,500 and is Muller's warning to America's youth of what might happen to them if they should decide to serve their country in its armed forces. [I]

Its tone is very left-of-center in its focus on defense and foreign affairs issues, and the 60-minute "documentary" film shown with it draws parallels between the Vietnam War and the situation today in El Salvador.



Entitled *Heroes*, the film was produced some eighteen months ago by Englishmen David Munro and John Pilger. One California vet who saw the whole show told me afterward, "I couldn't believe Muller was saying those things! I he a Communist?"[J]

In 1971 Muller was featured in *The New Soldier*, by John Kerry and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (Macmillan, 1971). In this

book he said: "I think Vietnam may have served a purpose and this is where my personal hope for the future lies: that Vietnam was the catalyst that precipitated a social revolution, and I hope it's a revolution because it has to happen fast. It has to happen very fast."[K]

That Muller is making these speaking tours is not generally known among the membership of his own organization, and for good reason. First, the politics would not wash with very many of the men and women who gathered under the VVA rubric for other reasons.

In addition, many of those members have some hard questions that the elusive Mr. Muller avoids answering. When Muller spoke to the students of Niagara Community College at Buffalo, NY, last March 30th, members of the local VVA chapter somehow got word that he was to talk (he never informed them himself that he would even be in town) and were in the audience.

The president of the Buffalo chapter stood up and accused him outright of using VVA seed money to make a downpayment on his \$200,000 Long Island home. Muller brushed the accusation aside by promising to discuss it and "other stuff" privately, after the lecture, but he never did give the chapter president an answer.[L]

The VVA is a very shaky organization in other respects as well. No public accounting has ever been made of any of the money it has raised during the five years of its existence—an estimated \$500,000 last year alone; not much

organizations raise, but a lot of money for one as small as the VVA.[M]

After five years the VVA has only recently (after formal complaints to the IRS) filed a corporate income tax return, as non-profit organizations are required to do under section 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code when annual gross receipts exceed \$10,000.[N]

Another organizational problem is with the personnel who are appointed to lead the VVA and manage its affairs. They have a tendency to be charlatans.

One such was Larry E. Mitchell, late director of minority affairs for the VVA. He was featured in *Time* in July 1981 as an up and coming young Vietnam vet, an ex-Army officer and an ex-POW.[O]

The truth is he was never an Army officer and he was never a prisoner of war, and when this was virtually shoved down VVA's throat, they were forced to let him go. At last report he was in the Philadelphia area, working for CORE, trying to raise support for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War rally held in Washington this past May 12-15, still palming himself off as an ex-Army captain and former POW.[P]

Thomas A. Bird, co-founder of the VVA, currently a member of the VVA board of governors, and artistic director of the Veterans Theatre Company of New York, is one of the three who went to Hanoi with Muller. He has been telling

people that he will head the upcoming return trip.[Q]

Bird's claim to fame as a Vietnam vet is that as a member of B Co., 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Air Cav Division, he was captured by the North Vietnamese when his unit was over-run during the battle of the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965.[R]

The North Vietnamese took eleven other men along with Bird, held them all for 24 hours, abused them and then, inexplicably, left them naked and trussed up like chickens to be rescued eventually by advancing friendly troops. This is the story Bird told Al Santoli and it was recorded by him in good faith in his best-selling oral history of the Vietnam War, *Everything We Had* (Random House, 1981).[S]

The facts are that Bird's unit was part of the relief force sent to help beleaguered elements of the 7th Cavalry that had been severely mauled and cut off by the North Vietnamese at the Ia Drang fight, but all the official reports of the action show that Bird's unit was never

heavily engaged with the enemy, never over-run, and had only sixteen men wounded during the whole period, July 1st through December 31st, 1965.[T]

I have interviewed Bird's ex-battalion commander, Robert V. Tully, now retired and living in Grand Prairie, TX, and his ex-company commander, Bob Lenderman, who is also retired and lives in Virginia. Both officers categorically repudiate the story Bird told Santoli as false.[U]

Michael Harbert, the consulting firm executive mentioned earlier, also went to Hanoi with Muller. The highlight of the trip for him was the 30-minute crying jag he put on in the courtyard of the "U.S. War Crimes Museum" in Hanoi after seeing the wreckage of U.S. Air Force planes displayed there. The sight brought back sad memories of the air war over North Vietnam for the ex-sergeant who claims to have flown 47 combat missions there between 1967 and 1968.

In Terry McDonell's *Rolling*

Stone interview with Harbert, published in the March 18, 1982 issue, Harbert told him that upon seeing the bomb damage still visible around Hanoi, he realized that he "was directly responsible, not only for the loss of life but for the damage to property, and everything else that had been put upon those people" and that he "had great difficulty in accepting the fact" that he was seeing what he had done.

"To see it from a slow-moving plane, as opposed to seeing it at 400 or 500 miles an hour, at 10,000 or 15,000 feet... was too real to me," he confessed.

He also claimed to have had a "flashback" to his days of aerial derring-do. "Suddenly I was back on my last combat mission after the Long Binh Bridge, over the Red River. I closed my eyes and I was right back in the AWACS, directing an air strike... and the MIGS are in the air and the surface-to-air missiles are after us. And hearing the explosions... it was all right there... Again."[V]

Harbert as a member of the 964th Airborne Early Warning and Control Squadron, which was based at McClelland Air Force Base, California, throughout the Vietnam War.[W] But the 964th had responsibility for "College Eye" missions which were flown in EC-121D aircraft—not "AWACS"—flying radar stations and airborne control platforms equipped with sophisticated electronic gear.

"College Eye" missions were flown in orbital patterns in secure zones, generally over Laos, near the Plain of Jars, while directing the operations of attack and bombing missions along the North Vietnamese-Laotian border.[X] The Plain of Jars is 150-200 miles west of the Hanoi and Red River Valley areas of North Vietnam, well out of MIG and surface-to-air missile range.

Harbert's only overseas service was with the 964th on Taiwan, Republic of China, from November 28th, 1967 to April 9, 1968. According to his Air Force service record, he holds the Air Medal with one oak-leaf cluster; his record shows no award of the Vietnam Service Medal.

In an interview recently with a reporter from the *Wall Street Journal*, Harbert confessed that he has resigned from the VVA in protest over the way the organization is being run and the direction it is taking under Muller's leadership.

Last year's trip provided good propaganda for Hanoi from Mr. Muller's visit to Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum and his hero-worship of the North Vietnamese war effort. It also basked Muller's organization in some very warm media glow. But it produced nothing in the way of resolving either the Agent Orange or the POW/MIA issues.

Muller claimed that the trip paved the way for a Defense Department visit to Hanoi that occurred in February, but an aide to Mr. Richard Armitage, the official who headed the delegation, informed me last March 22nd that the "move forward on the trip was made months before the VVA went to Vietnam." [Y]

Those Defense Department officials, headed by Mr. Armitage who himself spent six years in Vietnam, and joined by Air Force Lt. Col. John Fer, a true-to-life survivor of North Vietnam's torturous POW camps, are truly the men who went to Hanoi in the name of all this country's Vietnam veterans.

Meanwhile, the VVA plans to go back again, for further discussions that will do little more than feed the Communist propaganda machine, and at a time when the United States properly honors those who served at American cemeteries. On Memorial Day.



## Hanoi Connection From Pg. 6

Robert O. Muller needs the North Vietnamese much more than they need him and this nation's Vietnam veterans need Muller not at all. It is high time we pulled the plug on both of them.

### SOURCES

[A] Carol Bates, National League of Families of POW and MIA in Southeast Asia, 1608 K. St., NW, Washington, DC 20006. (202) 223-6346. Mr. Frank McCarthy, Agent Orange Victims International, 27 Washington Square, NY, NY 10003.

[B] Letter signed by Muller on February 5, 1982.

[C] VVA membership was put at "under 10,000" by Richard Weidman, VVA membership service director to Dave Zien of Medford Wisconsin (715) 748-2704 on March 30, 1982.

[D] A. D. Horne, ed. *The Wounded Generation*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981, p. 151.

[E] Terry McDonell, "The War Goes On," *Rolling Stone*, March 18, 1982, p. 11.

[F] English translation with original of story in *People's Army for December 20, 1981* in *Stars and Stripes* files.

[G] McDonell (Note F), p. 11.

[H] Remarks by Fellwock at the VFW midwinter 1982 Conference,

Washington, DC, 28-30 March 1982.

[I] National Lecture Bureau brochure. The figure, \$3,500, was mentioned to me by Bill Tolliver of the NLB (212) 472-2321 in January 1982.

[J] John Frost, Inland Empire Chapter, VVA 4954 Arlington, Riverside, CA 92504, (714) 689-4069 on April 3, 1982.

[K] John Kerry and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. *The New Soldier*. NY: McMillan, 1971, p. 104.

[L] This accusation was made by Pat Kelly, 63 Williamstown, Buffalo, NY 14227, (716) 684-5269. Copies of complete tape recordings are held by the National League of Families (see note A) and Peter Joannides, 3909 West Ox Road, Fairfax, VA 22033 (703) 620-6262. I have a typed transcript of these tapes which I prepared with Mr. Joannides' assistance.

[M] Financial Capability statement obtained from the VA under the FOIA, and *Rolling Stone* article from the October 1, 1981 issue in *Stars and Stripes* files.

[N] Letter from Cragg to the IRS dated 24 February 1982 in *Stars and Stripes* files.

[O] Lance Morrow, "The Forgotten Warriors," *Time*, July 13, 1981, p. 22 and letter by Cragg and Long to *Ebony* dated December 30, 1981. See also the *New York Times* for March 28, 1982, p. 46.

[P] Dave Christian, United Vietnam Veterans Organization, 47 Canal Run West, Washington Crossing, PA 18977 (215) 943-6048.

[Q] Bird told this to Frank McCarthy (see Note A).

[R] Profile on Bird circulated by the VVA in April 1982.

[S] Al Santoli. *Everything We Had*. NY: Random House, 1981, pp. 34-43. I have worked closely with Santoli on this project and he is in complete agreement that it must be published, no matter how it may affect the credibility of his book. He may be reached in New York City at 352-6616.

[T] History, 2nd Bn, 5th Cav, 1 July 65-31 Dec. 65 and Combat After Action Report, 1st Cav Div, 11 March 68. Also see John A. Cash, "Fight at the Ia Drang," in *Seven Firefights in Vietnam*, Washington, DC: OCMH, DA, 1970, pp. 1-40; Edward Hymoff, *The First Air Cav*, NY: Lads, 1967; and *The First Team*, Tokyo: the 1st Cav Div, 1970. Also, Mr. Kevin Generous, *U.S. News and World Report* Book Division (202) 861-7997 has been very helpful to me in developing this information.

[U] Col. Tully was interviewed on April 20; Lt. Col. Lenderman on April 29. Col. Tully's office telephone is (214) 641-0000, ext. 3237; Lt. Col. Lenderman's is (202) 452-5302. Both officers have given me their permission to use their names and to quote them exactly if I so desire;

both described Bird's story as "b-a-l" [V] McDonell, p. 12 (see Note E).

[W] Obtained from the USAF Historical Reference Division (202) 767-5088. Harbert's unit is given in a letter from Muller published in the February 1982 issue of the *National Vietnam Veterans Review*, published by Chuck Allen of Fayetteville, NC (919) 488-1366. I also have a FOIA request for an extract of Harbert's service record pending from the Department of the Air Force National

Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, MO.

[X] See Carl Berger, ed. *U.S. Air Force in Southeast Asia*. Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1977, pp. 226-227.

[Y] Col. Carr, military aide to Mr. Armitage (202) 695-7005. Also see *New York Times* for December 21st and 22nd, 1981 for dispatches from Hanoi covering the group's activities while in North Vietnam. ★



VIETNAM VETERANS of AMERICA

1. Transcript of ABC News "Radio Perspective" broadcast 10 October, 1982.
2. Note page 3.

G. Paul Howes  
ABC Radio "Perspective"  
October 10, 1982

Ordinary People for an Extraordinary Task

They came home not as heroes, as veterans of earlier wars had. They served during a period of national self-doubt, replete with unprecedented news coverage and demonstrations over the war's controversial politics. But the Vietnam war was like any other war. Two-point-seven million Americans went to Vietnam. About 1.6 million saw combat duty. Fifty-eight thousand lost their lives. All of them lost their innocence, baptized by stark reality. But they were no different from veterans of Valley Forge, Flander's Field, Corrigedor, Korea. Add to that list the Delta, the Highlands, the Arizona Territory, LZ Stud, Liberty Bridge, Au Chau, Khe Sanh. There's no doubt that Vietnam veterans, if called, would serve again.

One recent study shows Vietnam veterans, particularly POW's, rank higher in the affections of the American people than any other group. And a 1980 Harris poll shows that pride, not shame, is the common characteristic:

- Over 90% are glad they served their country;
- Almost 75% enjoyed their military service; and
- 2 out of 3 would fight again in Vietnam.

Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage fought for 6 years with South Vietnamese river forces. He says Vietnam veterans "never received any kuddos, nor did they ask for any," but "they did the tough job when it was demanded." He knows first-hand that Vietnam veterans who went in to hold up the Eisenhower-Kennedy-Johnson domino theory can say, "I told you so," citing the horror stories of the boat people -- what Armitage terms the "hemorrhage" from South Vietnam."

Congressman Don Bailey, a highly-decorated Army infantry officer, knows a free press in wartime is invaluable to the people back home, but he'll never forget that it was hell on the kids he led in the field; what he terms "commercialized images for the sake of impact or sensationalism." With passionate advocacy he declares: "Don't try to turn Vietnam veterans into baby killers or immoral fighters for the wrong reasons. I believe I did the right thing, fought for the right people, for the right reasons, and I would do it again, and again, and again, and again." Armitage and Bailey see service for country as a lesson passed down to generations. In Armitage's words,

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N.B.: November 10, 1982 marks the opening of Vietnam Veterans week, a nationwide salute to the men and women who served in that war. The 5-day salute coincides with Veterans' Day, Nov. 11th, both of which pay homage not to the politics of particular wars, but to the courage and devotion to service for country of all veterans.



"I think as a parent it's a personal responsibility...I would not blame the offspring for a lack of desire to serve. I would blame the parents."

Vietnam veterans have been described as the "wounded generation." Indeed, many were wounded, and many more carry the inevitable emotional scars of their experience. All of them share a lasting bond, the "brotherhood of the Nam." Part of that brotherhood goes on in Nashville where Mac McGarvey, 32 now, sells golf carts and motorcycles. It's been 13 years since he carried a radio for 3rd platoon, Delta Company, 5th Marines. He was 19 the morning he lost his arm, when the scout ahead of him stepped on a land mine. If he had to choose now between going back to Vietnam, knowing he would lose the arm, or evading the draft, Mac says he'd enlist again.

Mac's backed out of more than a few pool halls. After all, who would take a one-armed Harley-Davidson salesman for a pool shark? He says, "I don't know of any price I wouldn't pay to have that arm back." The toughest part: trying to button his left sleeve. But needing it? Mac says, no, he doesn't need it, "because it wouldn't have been right to go to Canada." Straight talk from a guy who, on his first trip out of the hospital after the arm was gone, in uniform, took a Marine buddy who'd lost both legs to a bar in Philadelphia -- "City of Brotherly Love." Some guy asked where Mac lost the arm. Mac said Vietnam. That patriotic American then spit on Mac's tie. Mac crushed his beer mug in the guy's face, but to no avail -- six or seven other patrons beat Mac, with one arm, and his buddy, with no legs, bloody. Mac McGarvey didn't go out in public again for over three months, so afraid he would be identified as a Vietnam veteran.

Mac's buddy, Tom Martin, is at home on Steppingstone Farm near Franklin, Tennessee. He drives a specially-equipped 4-wheel drive tractor to mow and up into the woods to hunt. He, too, was with 1/5 -- Dying Delta -- when it took 56 casualties in 6 weeks during Operation Pipestone Canyon. As he led a squad up a hill in June 1969, Tom was shot in the back by a turn-coat Marine working for the Viet Cong. He's paralyzed from the waist down, but he views his wheel chair as a vehicle, not a burden. He says "there's often an inference that because Mac lost an arm or I was paralyzed that somehow we've been diminished by our experience. Clearly, we've been enriched." Martin went to Vietnam expecting the worst. In his words, "If the worst is dying, it didn't happen to me. What I gave, the gift I had to give, was nothing more than dedicated service."

For Tom's wife, Maryruth, it's a loving challenge to live with a man in a wheel chair who fought in a war she didn't support. Over the years, she's come to "understand why they were there, what it means to them and why they feel they would go back. I don't know if I would make that kind of choice, but I understand why they would."

Martin and McGarvey reject the "wounded generation" tag. They say Vietnam veterans were just ordinary people called



upon to serve. Martin, lawyer-trained after he came home, says America has yet to come to grips with Vietnam -- both the depth of the loss of men, and an appreciation for their devotion to service. Tom concludes, "I don't think as a country we've shared what benefits we could from the Vietnam experience, because we've been too caught up in the pain of it."

The voice of the so-called "wounded generation" is Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc., with headquarters in Washington. VVA's executive Director is 36-year-old former Marine Lt. Bobby Muller, who founded the lobbying organization in 1978. Muller, like Martin, is confined to a wheel chair, the result of North Vietnamese gunfire in 1969. In the early 70's he was a national activist for Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Asked if he would fight again in Vietnam, he responds with a knowing, wry smile, "Maybe not in the Marine Corps again, I'll tell you that one for sure."

Muller's goal is to provide a focused voice for the needs of Vietnam veterans. He claims some 60 chapters and about 7,000 members, but there are growing defections over his policies. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been raised in VVA's 5-year history, much of it from concerts by Charlie Daniels, Pat Benetar, and Bruce Springsteen. But so far, there's no VVA-established veteran's claim service for which the Veteran's Administration certified VVA. Muller says VVA "has failed miserably, and it's not for want of recognition or the opportunity, but because there has not been specifically a voice for the Vietnam veteran. We've stepped into a void, a vacuum...and we haven't served as a catalyst to galvanize our constituency."

Muller rails against the Reagan cutbacks on Vietnam veteran programs, against inaction on Agent Orange problems by the VA, and against Vietnam veterans in Congress for their lack of support. But the VVA's titular head made the task of galvanizing his constituency much more difficult by taking three of his national directors to Hanoi last Christmas. The avowed purpose was to inquire about MIAs and to establish protocol for in-country study of Agent Orange problems. But most damaging was the group's acquiescence in laying a wreath at Ho Chi Minh's tomb inscribed, "With respect, from Vietnam Veterans of America." Muller is asked if the trip was a slap in the face of Vietnam veterans? "Hell no," he retorts. "I fought. My buddies died. And I'm not going to do something that's a slap in my own face, pal. Under no condition." But would he do the trip again, this time without the wreath? Yes, he says, he'd do it again.

In 1969, Jim Webb was a company commander fresh out of the Naval Academy -- a true believer in duty, honor, country, raised on a family tradition of service. He was severely wounded. Webb's one of the most decorated Marines from Vietnam, awarded the Navy Cross and a chest of medals. But he remembers that most of his troops were younger than he was at 23. (He learned that the Marine Corps Officer's Guidebook said little



about how in a war of attrition -- not the Marine's standard take the beach and move ahead -- he had to nurture his men, try to get them back alive, back to what they called "the world." He says life in the bush was the most apolitical environment he'd ever been in: "You talk about whether you're getting mail, what patrol you have, whether you'll get a change of utilities." Rather than the politics of the war, Webb says it's the old saying, "'When you're up to your neck in alligators, you don't sit around talking about why you came to drain the swamp.'"

Webb came home, went to law school, served as counsel to the House Veterans Affairs Committee. He cites studies that show Vietnam veterans today are less likely to be in prison or on drugs than are non-veterans. He says, like America's veterans before them, Vietnam veterans gave the most and grew the most. Webb believes Americans were never told that "the American military was never defeated on the battlefield in Vietnam. That Vietnam veterans served their country well, they are healthy, they are strong, they are proud they served." And Webb wonders -- in an age when the 6:30 news brought the war into America's living room every night -- why the rest of the truth can't be told.

Webb is best known for Fields of Fire, his Vietnam novel, about what it was like over there. He reminds us that over 90% of all Vietnam veterans are proud of their service, saying "When was the last time 90% of Americans agreed on anything? Doesn't sound like bitterness and a wounded generation to me."

As Veteran's Day 1982 approaches, almost a decade after the last combat troops left what was then South Vietnam, one can still debate the politics of the war: from the left of Howdy Doody and to the right of Atilla the Hun and at each ideological point in between. But for the veterans of Vietnam, the war may have been a strategic failure, a practical failure, even a political failure. But from the groundpounders who served their time on the Magical Mystery Tour to POWs like Admiral James Stockdale who survived with dignity and honor for 8 years in Hanoi's prison, Vietnam was not a moral failure. Rather, it was a noble cause, carrying on the honorable tradition of service, devotion to country. As veterans they share with their brothers the gifts of unselfish comradeship, pride, dignity, and self-worth. Today, the Vietnam veteran's message is clear. They're saying, "I'm proud of what I did. I'm 36 years old. I've got the rest of my life to live. I'd like the rest of the country to be as comfortable with what I did as I am."

VIETNAM VETERANS of AMERICA

1. Transcripts of TV interviews following December, 1981 VVA trip to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.
2. Analytical articles on VVA's trip appearing in the press.



# RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20015 656-4068

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FOR VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

PROGRAM Good Morning America STATION WJLA TV  
ABC Network

DATE December 28, 1981 7:00 AM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Interview with Vietnam Veterans

DAVID HARTMAN: On Christmas Day, four Americans who are Vietnam veterans arrived back in this country after spending six days in Vietnam. Here you see Robert Muller, one of those. They went to Hanoi at the invitation of the Vietnamese government. They were the first American combat veterans to visit Vietnam since the war ended.

Two of the men who traveled there are with us this morning. Robert Muller you see right here as he came back, and here you see him with me this morning. He's a former Marine Corps lieutenant. He was paralyzed from the waist down in the war. He's Executive Director of the Vietnam Veterans of America. Michael Harbert (?) is the Associate Director of the organization. He's a former Air Force sergeant. He flew 47 combat missions over Vietnam. And Steve Bell, who covered the war in Vietnam, also, by the way, is joining us in Washington.

First of all, Bob, 25 -- what came to my mind when I realized that you all were going and coming back, the first thing that came to my mind were the 2500 or so families and friends of those who have been unaccounted for, the MIAs, the people we don't know about, what happened to them. You've been there now, to Hanoi, and talked to these people. What can you tell those families and friends of the MIAs this morning of what you learned, how much hope that we will ever know what happened to them? What can you tell us?

ROBERT MULLER: We didn't receive any specific information about the identification of any of the remains of those missing in action. What we have is impressionistic. And we have the clear impression that the Vietnamese government is willing to renew its efforts to provide a full accounting for those missing

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in action. What we learned was they felt very upset over the official response of our government to their efforts in having returned earlier this year three sets of remains from servicemen that were missing, and that they didn't desire to continue working any longer with the Reagan Administration. They said, "We will work with you directly, as the Vietnam Veterans of America." And with that, they can now go back to their people and, as they said to us, call upon them for that extra effort in going out and trying to find the crash sites and where bodies may have been buried in the past.

HARTMAN: Are you saying, then, that you believe there is information potentially available that can be gotten?

MULLER: That's clearly the impression we received. And what's most important is -- I think if you appreciate how consistently in their rhetoric they distinguish between the people in this country and our government, what they've said is they're going to work with us, as the Vietnam Veterans of America. And there was clearly an indication that there would be a renewed effort to provide a full accounting. And we're very hopeful that in the months ahead, as we continue this process of dialogue, additional information will be forthcoming.

HARTMAN: Mike, this is the first time you've been back, obviously. What was your impression? What surprised you the most about what you saw?

MICHAEL HARBERT: Pardon me. My voice is gone for the last couple of days.

The strongest impression was flying over Hanoi and not having surface-to-air missiles and antiaircraft guns going off, flying in in a peaceful situation; and then the stark reality of seeing the countryside outside of Hanoi. The airport is about 30 miles away. The bomb craters are still there. The effects of the war are still there, in terms of the topography of the land. And it was eerie for me to drive out of the airport past some MIG-21s and some captured U.S. F-105s that are now being used by the Vietnamese and have all of this in peaceful quiet.

Once I got into the town and got to know the people, I went through another kind of dramatic change, of becoming at peace with myself and my relationship to the psychological role that Hanoi played in my mind. I mean I'd bombed it 47 times, and it was always this big phantom, enigma of the headquarters of the enemy. And I was back in a peaceful situation, which made it very easy for me ultimately to become at peace with myself about what I did in the war.

HARTMAN: Bob, what were your impressions?

No F-105's  
where can-  
turn 600!



MULLER: It was an emotional roller coaster for the six days there. There were so many contrasts in sitting down and having discussions with the enemy. The doctors that we met with in working on the Agent Orange issue, one had been the personal physician to General Giap for 20 years. Another was the personal physician to Ho Chi Minh.

What perhaps struck me the most was how stark everything was, especially in Hanoi. These people have nothing. The deprivation and the very spartan existence that they live was stunning.

I think the second thing that was a strong impression for me...

HARTMAN: You're talking about now.

MULLER: Now -- is how friendly the people were. We had the ability to go freely throughout Hanoi. We went into restaurants and shops, and we just introduced ourselves to people as Americans. And, in fact, there was no hostility, no animosity. For us, it was stunning.

When we arrived and the door on the airplane opened and you see this NVA soldier come, with his uniform and insignia, we all tightened up.

HARTMAN: Were you frightened?

MULLER: There was a strong sense of being alone.

HARBERT: I was a little frightened. Tom Byrd, one of the guys with us, who had been captured by the NVA in the South, froze and had to turn around and go back into the plane for a few minutes.

It was the reality of looking a former enemy face-to-face, not thinking that you were in a combat situation.

MULLER: He didn't freeze as much as he had a desire to go after him. But he cooled down.

We went down. We were met by -- we were treated like diplomats, I'd say. They had a full procession of cars, and we were given the VIP treatment for the whole tour. And it was really quite a trip.

STEVE BELL: What do you think, realistically, you achieved on this trip?

MULLER: I think we achieved a little bit more than we expected to, which was to open a line of communication and

start talking with the Vietnamese government. We got a commitment on four specific points. One, that they would work on a renewed effort, directly with us, to provide a full accounting for the missing in action. Two, they would agree to have United States scientists and doctors into Vietnam to work with their scientists and doctors, as well as to go to areas that were heavily defoliated by Agent Orange on fact-finding missions to get the answers we need so that finally programs of assistance in this country can be provided for the Vietnam veterans suffering from Agent Orange. Third, they agreed to receive continuing delegations of Vietnam veterans, through our organization. And four, through our organization again, they want to develop a program of cultural exchange, where we can get veterans and others to come through and exchange artwork, plays, etcetera.

BELL: Now, you talk about dealing directly with the Vietnamese, going -- in other words, bypassing the United States Government. Isn't this a bit of a dilemma, in that the United States Government holds down its dealings with Vietnam precisely because the Vietnamese have invaded Cambodia; there are accusations of the Vietnamese using chemical warfare in Cambodia and Laos; and the government, in effect, is saying you can't have the kinds of relationship you're talking about when you have the Vietnamese doing what they're doing?

MULLER: Okay. Steve, let me say very quickly we are not playing the role of diplomats. We're going there not to deal with the geopolitical issues that are overriding all of the considerations in all of Indochina. We're going there simply as veterans who fought a war and have some real, immediate, particular concerns that result from that war.

The question of the missing in action is something that for our constituency, Vietnam veterans, is a great concern. And if we can do anything to advance that issue and try and get a full accounting, we'll do it.

On the second issue, with Agent Orange, our guys are suffering tremendously because of toxic chemical exposure in Vietnam. For years -- and you know because you've reported on this issue enough times on this program -- we have worked with our government, we have worked with the Congress and the respective Administrations to get programs of assistance, and they have denied that. And they've said until we have the information that we feel strongly, a trip to Vietnam and having U.S. scientists go there and doing works up and epidemiological studies, etcetera, will provide, we're not going to get the program.

So, on a humanitarian basis, with the specific agenda items that we discussed, we're all very comfortable and opening up the dialogue with the Vietnamese government and trying to resolve that.



BELL: I've got to tell you that I got calls from Vietnam veterans after you left on this trip expressing concern that you would in fact be used by the Vietnamese for their political purposes. And there were a number of statements, propaganda statements against the U.S. Government that came out during your trip while you were there. I wonder how you feel about that.

HARTMAN: To what extent you're being used, in about 40 seconds. Go ahead.

MULLER: Okay. Two things. We got a tremendous number of phone calls and telegrams from Vietnam veterans around the country, overwhelmingly in support of the initiative we took here.

In terms of propaganda, I'm not aware that were any statements that were used in ill effects. Are you?

HARTMAN: The concern this morning -- just very briefly -- the New York Times, one of the headlines this morning suggests this morning the welcome you got is seen as a step by the Vietnamese to sway American opinion.

HARBERT: I think they were transmitting through us a willingness to become more friendly with the United States. They say that the United States always plays the China card, and therefore they can't deal with the United States on that level. If we can be at least an avenue of communication, it's good for all of us.

HARTMAN: Michael Harbert, Robert Muller, welcome home. Thank you.

HARBERT: Thank you. It's good to be home.

*BOUL  
SHIT*

# RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

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FOR VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

PROGRAM The Today Show STATION WRC TV  
NBC Network

DATE December 28, 1981 7:00 AM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Veterans Return from Vietnam Visit

JESSICA SAVITCH: The first American servicemen ever granted visas to return to Vietnam are now back home here in the United States after about a week in Vietnam. They are with us in our studio this morning. They are Tom Byrd, a former infantryman. Now runs a theater. And John Terazano (?), a former seaman, who works with a private veterans group. The gentlemen are here this morning to share their experiences with us, their experiences in Vietnam.

An emotional experience for both of you, I would imagine. What were your feelings when you went back to the country where you had fought?

TOM BYRD: I went back with a kind of excitement. I had real good feelings about going back. And upon landing in Hanoi, all these unexpected feelings came up, warlike feelings. I just -- I don't know where they came from. I felt like I was in conflict with the good feelings I had in going over. Once I landed in Hanoi, one of the first people I saw was a Vietnamese soldier. All sorts of kind of very aggressive feelings came up. And for a couple of days, I had a real hard time with those aggressive feelings. About the third day, I settled down.

SAVITCH: Mr. Terazano, how long did it take you to settle in and not experience any flashbacks?

JOHN TERAZANO: It was nine years to the month when I left Vietnam. I left Vietnam in December of 1972. So for myself, personally, it was very rewarding trip, to be able to go back there.

I think we all experienced what Tom went through for a



certain period of time. The amazing thing was, though, after we got to know the people, after we walked the streets and got to know the little children and whatnot, the tree lines were no longer exploding, the villages were no longer being burned in our minds, and whatnot, and that was all put aside. We could see the countryside for what it was today.

SAVITCH: This is a real breakthrough. Nobody, really, has -- the Vietnamese have not talked to any Americans, really, except in an unofficial capacity. Is this some kind of breakthrough for the United States to possibly normalize relations with the Vietnamese? Have either of you been debriefed or plan any debriefings with government officials?

TERAZANO: We are going to be talking to the State Department and tell them about our experiences and whatnot. We're not politicians, we're not diplomats.

SAVITCH: But it's a bridge.

TERAZANO: It is a bridge.

SAVITCH: ...going to go after this.

TERAZANO: Most definitely, it's a bridge. And that's why we feel we were very successful in our trip. What we wanted to do was to open the lines of communication, to be able to talk to the people and possibly be the link back and forth, you know, irrespective of what the governments are going to do. And to open up that dialogue, I think, is a tremendous accomplishment.

SAVITCH: You said before you left, the entire delegation was quoted as saying you want to talk with the Vietnamese officials. One of your priorities was the 2500 American servicemen still listed as missing in action. The time of the bracelets and the POWs is over now. American wants to put behind it, we are told, the feelings of the Vietnam War and everything that engenders. And yet there are still these 2500 servicemen listed as missing in action.

Do you feel you accomplished anything on that level, Mr. Byrd?

BYRD: Yes, I do. Up until now, there's been an impasse between our government and the Vietnamese as to a fuller accounting of that issue. And what we were able to do was gain the trust of the Vietnamese government to serve as a conduit for information, of dialogue concerning that issue, and keep the issue in discussion. And hopefully we'll come to a fuller accounting of those 2500 MIAs.

SAVITCH: And another priority was the discussion or

the possibility of some kind of mutual U.S.-Vietnamese cooperation with regard of the effect of Agent Orange.

Mr. Terazano, how did that turn out?

TERAZANO: That turned out tremendously. We got the agreement from the Foreign Minister, Mr. Cao Thuc (?), to allow U.S. scientists and doctors to come in and work with their scientists -- for example, Dr. Tung, who's been studying this issue for over 10 years now -- and to help bring the American scientists into the laboratory where it actually was used. And I think that's a big accomplishment, because we'll never get the answers back here in the States. We need that firsthand information that, you know, going to Vietnam would provide us with.

SAVITCH: Could you each briefly comment on your reactions to how things looked in Vietnam, the changes, the people, your freedom to move around, how people responded to you?

BYRD: Hanoi was a very cold -- you know, the weather was very cold and damp. A very spartan existence in Hanoi, poverty, and conditions were very severe. I mean it was really hard to take.

SAVITCH: And briefly, Mr. Terazano, your comment?

TERAZANO: I would say the same. There's a tremendous contrast between Hanoi and Saigon. Saigon was a bustling city. You can see the remnants of the French and American influence that we had, you know, almost 20 years in the country. But the people were what made it for us, what made it for me, personally. They were very warm, they were very open, they were very hospitable. And, you know, surprisingly, there was no animosity towards us, and they treated us very, very well.

SAVITCH: Just back from Vietnam, two Vietnam veterans who -- would you recommend this to other veterans, to go back and to look at where they have been?

TERAZANO: Very much so. The experience with the Vietnamese people was so peaceful and warm, and it did a world of good for all of us. And I think it would do a world of good for all Vietnam veterans.

SAVITCH: Gentlemen, thank you very much. And welcome home.



# Beleaguered Vietnam Vets group fighting for its life

By James Coates  
Chicago Tribune Press Service

WASHINGTON — As they head toward next weekend's Memorial Day observances, a group of Vietnam Veterans find themselves under fire again — and many of the enemy are from within.

Leaders of the Vietnam Veterans of America said they had hoped they were on the verge of becoming a large scale group on the order of veterans organizations such as the American Legion when the following happened:

- Many angered VVA members defected in protest over a trip the group's top leaders took to Hanoi last December where they spent \$40 to buy and lay a wreath on the grave of Ho Chi Minh.

- Defecting former insiders filed complaints with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) charging VVA's executive director Robert O. Muller with failure to report hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations from rock stars, country singers, Muller's own \$3,500 fee for each speaking engagement and other sources.

- Leaders of the American League of Families, the group concerned with obtaining an accounting of the 2,500 service people still listed as missing in action in Southeast Asia, have condemned VVA's actions.

- Adversaries have produced documents that raise questions about claims of Muller's top associates about their personal war experiences in Vietnam.

AS THESE CHARGES swirl about, VVA plans to make an effort for more favorable public attention.

Sometime this week or next, VVA plans another trip to Hanoi, this time with guest Mike Wallace, the television muckraker; Joseph Papp, the Broadway producer; Bob Holcomb, the sculptor; and Gary Belkirk, winner of the Medal of Honor.

Unlike last time, Muller vowed the Americans will refrain from laying a wreath on the grave of Ho Chi Minh.

"Bobby" Muller, paraplegic Vietnam war hero, Penthouse magazine-sponsored lecturer, focus of five Phil Donahue programs about the plight of those who fought America's most unpopular war, shifted his dead legs in his wheelchair and recalled that wreath-laying ceremony.

"BOY O BOY," Muller said with a shake of his head, "this is the one thing that has cost us. That hurt us."

VVA, chartered with the Veterans Administration as a "service organization" just like the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars, was on its way to building a large membership among the estimated 9 million Vietnam era veterans when Muller and VVA leader Tom Bird, Michael Harbert and John Terzano made their ill-fated trip to Hanoi.

Now VVA leaders find adversaries are trying to stop their group and are having their own personal accounts of war service questioned. In one case, VVA has now admitted that it cannot support the claims of its former leading minority member about his war experiences.

THIS MEMBER, LARRY Mitchell, whose account of spending several years as a POW was dramatically highlighted in a Time magazine cover story about the war last year, resigned after a check with the Pentagon by the League of Families found that Mitchell's name appears nowhere on lists of American POWs.

Mitchell, who had been minority affairs director for VVA, was unavailable for comment.

Led by Albert Santoli, author of an oral history of 33 Vietnam returns — "Everything We Had," Muller's adversaries gave the Internal Revenue Service VVA documents indicating that between 1979 and 1981 the group had told the Veterans Administration that it had collected more than \$250,000.

AT THE SAME TIME, according to IRS documents obtained by Santoli under the Freedom of Information Act, VVA had reported to the agency that its assets were under \$10,000.

Muller acknowledged in an interview that the group had "fallen behind" in filing its reports with the IRS and said that after Santoli filed his complaints, VVA hired accountants and submitted financial statements for the years 1979, 1980 and 1981.

Countering Santoli's attack, Muller charged the author with "betrayal" and said that Santoli was motivated by a financial dispute over a contract he signed with VVA for producing the book.

Santoli said in an interview that his



Robert Muller

The wreath ceremony at the grave of Ho Chi Minh "is the one thing that hurt us," he says.

book earned \$100,000 in hardcover sales and that he "split" the funds, giving VVA \$80,000 and keeping \$40,000 for himself.

"I'M NOT DOING this for the money," he said. "I will give the money to somebody else but Bobby Muller must be stopped. Every dime he takes, every time he goes on TV or makes a speech he is taking something away from the veterans of Vietnam who deserve more than to finance an organization that exists solely to boost Bobby Muller's ego."

Beyond the conflict of personalities between Muller and Santoli, others raised the issue that the VVA is taking attention and funds away from war veterans.

Joan Maiman, spokeswoman for the Chicago-based Vietnam Leadership Con-

ference, said, for example: "They (Muller's group) are capitalizing on a very negative message, that the average person who went to Vietnam emerged a poor whacked-out and crazed lost soul. They emphasize guilt about the war."

"IT'S THE SAME old story," said Maiman in a phone interview. "Instead of supporting the military and civilians who served in Vietnam, they want to go on the same liberal guilt trip as in the 1960s."

"It is becoming chic to have a Vietnam veteran at your fancy party just like it was chic to have a Black Panther before."

Muller acknowledged that he has gone to the world of art and show business for support.

"The more conventional sources, the corporate world and the entrenched veterans groups, did us no good at all," he said.

Muller recalled how in 1979 he went to McGeorge Bundy, who was then president of the Ford Foundation.

"Bundy said he would give us \$25,000 because that was the maximum he could without going to his board. He also told us that we wouldn't get far with most of the establishments."

"People don't want to be reminded of Vietnam."

SIMILAR EFFORTS were made to get

backing from Exxon and other corporate giants.

"We thought for awhile that if we could get the most prestigious foundation (Ford) and the country's biggest company (Exxon) we could get support from the more traditional sources," Muller said.

Muller, who was active in the controversial Vietnam Veterans against the War in the early 1970s, recalled how many potential corporate donors complained about his antiwar activities. At one point Muller threw his war decorations over the fence of the White House in protest.

"So," he recalled, "we went to the world of culture for our support."

ROCK STARS Bruce Springsteen and Pat Benetar both gave concerts that netted VVA upwards of \$50,000 each.

The Charlie Daniels Band gave concerts and donated proceeds of records, including one called "Still in Saigon," to the VVA.

Muller said he also mortgaged a \$200,000 house he owns on Long Island to donate \$40,000 to VVA and turned over roughly \$75,000 he made this year doing college campus lectures sponsored by Penthouse. There have been grants from Playboy magazine, the Chicago-based Joyce Foundation, Avon Products and others, according to VVA tax records supplied to The Tribune by Muller.

MULLER SAID HE believes the purpose of VVA is to lobby for legislation to benefit all Vietnam era veterans — programs, ranging from increased GI student benefits to establishing a national monument to those who served there.

The purpose of the trips to Hanoi, he said, was to seek help from Vietnam, to learn what happened to the 2,500 missing. In addition, the Hanoi trips are to discuss ways to bring American scientists into Vietnam to study the effects on the local population of the Agent Orange herbicide used to defoliate the jungles.

Such scientific study could help determine the extent of health effects being suffered by U.S. veterans from Agent Orange, Muller said.

ONE REASON WALLACE is going on the next trip is to do a story about the plight of the children of GIs left behind in the war, Muller said.

Maiman of the Chicago leadership conference said that such a project "is exploitative and typical of VVA's attitude."

Muller defended his tactics saying, "I'm convinced you have to raise the level of concentration. You don't talk about benefits, you talk about the psychic effects of the war."

Maiman countered, "If you promise benefits, you should do something tangible like setting up centers where people can go and get help. It doesn't help people when Bobby Muller gets on TV."



# The war among the vets

By RICHARD SISK

**I**T IS HARD to imagine that the Vietnam war would have another fight left in it for Americans, but the battle lines have already been drawn and old wounds are opening in the minds of the survivors.

On one side is a group called the Vietnam Veterans of America—backed by Penthouse magazine, corporation and foundation grants, rock concert

VVA calls its critics "irresponsible" and "lunatics." Its detractors call VVA a "fraud" that has been turned into a "propaganda tool" of Hanoi.

The controversy is, perhaps, the inevitable legacy of America's longest war, a conflict that left a gaping rift in American society and maintains its capacity to divide the nation in peace.

What brought matters to a head was the controversial trip last December to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) by a four-member VVA delega-

## The Vietnam Veterans of America visit Hanoi today amid questions about their motives and funding

benefits and generally favorable media coverage—which is seeking to mold the estimated nine million Vietnam-era veterans into a political force.

On the other side is a diverse collection of groups and individuals, ranging from the American Legion and the Afro-American Veterans Association to the wives of missing pilots and disillusioned VVA members.

They question the motives, goals, tactics and funding of the VVA, as well as the combat credentials claimed by some of its leaders.

tion led by the group's executive director, Robert Muller, a former Marine officer whose Vietnam wounds left him a paraplegic. The visit was paid for with about \$20,000 of Penthouse money.

What will keep matters boiling is the current trip to Vietnam by a nine-member VVA delegation that will coincide with Memorial Day and the presence in Hanoi of Mike Wallace and a "60 Minutes" film crew.

Muller said the trips were set up to

*(Continued on page 102)*



Bob Muller's Vietnam Vets of America is one of Penthouse's pet projects.



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discuss the Americans still listed as missing in action (MIAs), the effects of the defoliant Agent Orange, cultural exchanges and programs to aid the offspring of American servicemen and Vietnamese women.

VVA's critics fear that Hanoi will seek to use the visits to turn attention away from the plight of the boat people and U.S. charges that Vietnam has used "yellow rain" chemical warfare in the invasion of Cambodia.

The fears apparently have some justification. An official Vietnamese report on the first trip said: "The purpose of the delegation's visit is to gather information about the effects of the U.S. chemical warfare in Vietnam in order to denounce it before public opinion."

**OTHER VETERANS'** organizations were outraged that the VVA delegation on the first trip laid a wreath marked "with respect" at the tomb of Ho Chi Minh. Muller, in an interview last week, said: "If I had it to do over again, we probably would not have gone through with that wreath-laying exercise."

A lot of the criticism of the VVA focuses on the combat credentials of some of its officers.

● Larry Mitchell was formerly the minority affairs director of VVA. Last year, he approached Ann Mills Griffiths of the National League of Families, a private group that wants Vietnam to give a full accounting of the MIAs, and represented himself as a former Green Beret officer and prisoner of war.

She became suspicious and checked his credentials. She could find no record of Mitchell's ever having been an officer or a POW.

Muller says Mitchell is no longer with the VVA. "It's my fault personally for not pursuing further" Mitchell's background, he said.

● Michael Harbert, a former Air Force sergeant, was with the VVA delegation that made the first trip to Vietnam. While there, he spoke movingly of the destruction he personally had inflicted in his many bombing missions over North Vietnam. He also appeared on the Phil Donahue Show and spoke of his missions in F105 fighter-bombers.

Harbert may have meant to convey that he had a part, as an apprentice radar operator on surveillance aircraft, in coordinating air strikes made by F105s, but that was not the impression he gave.

Patti Sheridan, of Wichita, Kan., is executive secretary of the Red River Valley Assn., an organization of pilots and crew who flew missions in Vietnam. The group takes its name from North Vietnam's Red River.

She saw Harbert on the Donahue Show and says she couldn't believe that Harbert, as a sergeant, had ever flown in F105s. Through the Freedom of Information Act, she obtained data on Harbert from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. The records show that Harbert did not receive Vietnam Service or Vietnam Campaign Medals, which routinely went to all who served anywhere in, around or over Vietnam.

"There is no way he could have flown the missions he claims to have flown. We're furious," said Mrs. Sheridan, whose husband, Francis, flew more than 100 missions over Vietnam.

Harbert's records and VVA promotional material state that he was attached to the 964th Airborne Early Warning and Control Squadron during parts of 1967 and 1968. VVA material

Corp. in Texas, was a lieutenant colonel and Bird's battalion commander.

"This guy and I weren't in the same war," Tully said. Bird's account was "full of inaccuracies," the unit "did not take heavy casualties" and "to my knowledge, nobody was captured," he said.

At a meeting with Bird and Muller, Bird was asked if he knew Tully.

"Yeah, Lt. Col. Tully, yeah," he said. Then he walked out of the room.

Muller's comment: "I'm not going to let discussions deteriorate to this level. There's no way in hell we're going to be able to substantiate, oftentimes in a majority of cases, what our tours of duty were."

Yet the questions persist on just how representative the VVA is and whether it genuinely serves the needs of the veteran.

It is undisputed that thousands of

## The first VVA delegation to Hanoi laid a wreath marked 'with respect' at the tomb of Ho Chi Minh

says "he flew 47 combat missions over North and South Vietnam."

Military records show that the 964th had headquarters in Taiwan but also had forward deployment at a base in Thailand which flew EC121s, a version of the old propeller-driven Super Constellation that was modified for radar surveillance and radio jamming.

The unarmed planes would have been easy prey for missiles and Mig fighters. Warren Trest, of the Air Force Historian's office in Washington, said "It's highly doubtful those planes ever flew over Vietnam. They were most likely on the periphery in border areas."

Harbert was unavailable last week to answer questions on his claimed combat record. The Manhattan public relations firm where he works said he was in Alaska.

● Tom Bird was with the first VVA delegation to travel to Vietnam and is leading the second visit.

He gave a compelling account of being captured, tortured and released by the North Vietnamese in the well-received oral history of the war, "Everything We Had," by Al Santoli. According to Bird, the incident in October 1965 occurred during a fierce firefight in which his unit was overrun and took many casualties.

Bird served with the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, of the 1st Cavalry Division. Robert Tully, now a training coordinator with Aerospatiale

Vietnam veterans have had problems coping with their war experience, but the methods for dealing with the problem are diverse. While other veterans' organizations focus on meeting individual needs, Muller says that "Services are not our primary task."

He said the goal is to "organize ourselves into a viable political constituency so that we can argue for expensive benefit programs from a position of political strength."

**P**OLITICS IS money, and the VVA has been raising it in a variety of ways. There are \$9 dues from the estimated 8,000 members that VVA claims, and Muller has also been successful in attracting grants from Exxon and the Ford, Luce and Joyce Foundations, among others. There have also been VVA benefit concerts by Bruce Springsteen, Charlie Daniels and Pat Benatar.

Muller produced tax returns for last year and a report by a Manhattan accounting firm that he said justified all funds taken in and spent. But former VVA members said he was not so forthcoming in supplying financial information to them.

Pat Kelly, director of an upstate, federally funded job-training program, was president of the Buffalo chapter of VVA. "We requested information as to what was being done with the dues and other money," he said. "We never got answers." (Continued)

# The war between the veterans

John Terzamp, Robert Muller, Michael Harbert and Thomas Bird meet the press: questions linger about their war records.



# Charge Hanoi is using vets

# MIA kin hit 'cruelty'

By RICHARD SISK

Families of American servicemen missing in action in Vietnam yesterday welcomed word that the remains of four more servicemen will be returned but condemned what they called Vietnam's "cruel and callous" use of the MIA issue for political ends.

"The sad thing is that they've co-opted Vietnam veterans into working for them," said Kay Bosiljevack, of Omaha, Neb., whose Air Force husband, Mike, was shot down over Hanoi on Sept. 29, 1972, and is still listed as missing in action.

Hanoi's "discovery" of more remains of American servicemen—announced through a visiting nine-member delegation of the Vietnam Veterans of America—was no real surprise to Pentagon officials and many of the families of the missing.

Mrs. Bosiljevack told the Daily News yesterday: "This is exactly what we thought was going to happen. I'm not surprised that the Vietnamese would do this. It's just their same old ball game of using the remains of American servicemen in such a cruel and callous way."

U.S. OFFICIALS are convinced that Vietnam is warehousing the remains of hundreds of Americans missing in action. They fear that Hanoi is manipulating the POW/MIA issue for leverage in seeking U.S. war reparations, as well as to sway U.S. public opinion.

The middleman role of the VVA also has been criticized.

He said it was his understanding that the purpose of the VVA was to set up services to provide legal advice and help with veterans' benefit claims. "None of those services ever came to fruition," Kelly said.

Kelly is but one of a number of members—and whole chapters—who have resigned from VVA to protest the direction taken by Muller.

Despite the resignations, Muller said, "We've had overwhelming support for our initiative last December. Every single chapter has endorsed what we're doing."

But it appears that at least one claimed endorsement—that of the State Department—was never made.

JAMES MENARD, of the East Asian desk, said the State Department as a courtesy provided briefings for the group before both Vietnam trips; the VVA portrayed this as an endorsement by the administration. "That was not the case," Menard said, "and they apologized."

VVA promotional material advertises the group as "the only national organization working solely on the problems of Vietnam veterans." Muller said, "I don't know of another group that carries that distinction."

This would seem to deny the existence of more than 100 Viet vet groups ranging from storefront operations to the United Vietnam Veterans Organization, which, according to a spokesman, has 167 chapters nationwide and 15,000 members, almost twice the size of the VVA's claimed membership.

The UVVO was formed by Dave Christian, a highly decorated former Army officer who resigned from the VVA to protest Muller's direction, the spokesman said.

The controversies surrounding VVA have led many veterans' organizations to denounce the group and Muller in exceptionally harsh terms.

Cooper Holt, executive director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said "They're just in it to raise money and promote themselves."

Joan Malman, a leader of the Chicago-based Veterans Leadership Conference and a former Red Cross nurse in Vietnam, said the VVA's tactics are "disgusting, absolutely disgusting. We've had unbelievable feedback from vets. People have had it up to here with Bobby (Muller)."

Rev. Charles Smith, executive director of the Afro-American Veterans Assn., said: "They're shams. They're just a political front."

Muller said the aim of the VVA was "to relate to the Vietnamese as people instead of relating to them as I tended—as gooks. The question has to be asked more and more 'Why did we fight these people?' And that's something that should be reflected upon this Memorial Day."

New York Daily News, May 31, 1972

This is the second trip to Vietnam by a VVA delegation. After the first trip in December, the National League of Families, representing relatives of the missing, criticized the VVA for failing to brief them on the results of the visit.

United Press International, quoting news reports reaching Bangkok, said the remains to be returned are those of:

- Navy Ensign Donald Patrick Frye, 24, Los Angeles.
- Lt. J.G. Frederic Woodrow Knapp, 24, Huntington, N.C.
- Air Force Col. Roosevelt Hestle, Jr., Orlando, Fla., an F-105 jet pilot. His age was not available.
- Navy Lt. J.G. Joe Russell Mossman, 26, Springfield, Ore.

A State Department spokesman said: "We will accept remains of MIAs from any source, but we do believe it should be done on a government-to-government basis."

The U.S. currently lists 2,453 American servicemen as unaccounted for, as well as 41 American civilians. By a Pentagon count, Vietnam has returned the remains of 73 Americans.



## Prominent Vietnam Vets Group Is Returning to Hanoi

By DAN CRAIG

Last December, a delegation from the Vietnam Veterans of America made a widely publicized trip to meet with representatives of the Vietnamese government in Hanoi. The group was led by Robert Muller, the executive director and moving force of Vietnam Veterans of America. That trip may in the end prove fatal to the VVA.

Mr. Muller's suggestion that the delegation visit Ho Chi Minh's tomb, and his acquiescence in laying on the Communist leader's grave a wreath inscribed, "With respect, from the Vietnam Veterans of America," has cost him immensely in terms of credibility among veterans who served in Vietnam. But the long-lasting damage to the VVA's reputation comes from the fact that Mr. Muller's visit did little more than convert the group into a propaganda conduit for the North Vietnamese.

In its Dec. 20, 1981, issue, the Hanoi daily newspaper Quan Dol Nhan Dan (People's Army) announced: "Following the request of the Vietnam Veteran Association of America, a delegation of representatives of that organization led by its president, Mr. Robert Muller, arrived in Hanoi to work with the National Committee to investigate the effects of U.S. chemical warfare in Vietnam. . . . The purpose of the delegation's visit is to gather information about the effects of the U.S. chemical warfare in Vietnam in order to denounce it before public opinion. . . ."

However difficult it is for many Vietnam veterans to see what good can come from what Mr. Muller describes as his "dialogue" with the Hanoi government, there is evidently little doubt in his mind about the VVA's growing relationship with Vietnam's Communists, because the group

is making another trip. As of this writing, another VVA delegation plans to leave within the next few days from New York to meet with Vietnam's government in Hanoi.

Mr. Muller isn't making this trip (a VVA associate is leading the group), but it is not likely that the visit will escape public notice—the delegation includes Mike Wallace of CBS's "60 Minutes" and Joseph Papp, the New York theatrical producer.

Mr. Muller promotes the Vietnam Veterans of America as "the only national, exclusively Vietnam-era veterans' organization in America." As a legitimate combat casualty and a paraplegic, Mr. Muller has enormous credibility. He is always welcome on talk shows like the Phil Donahue Show, sought out by reporters and writers as an expert on Vietnam veterans' affairs and asked to participate in symposia and discussions. In the national angst over the Vietnam war, Robert Muller managed to emerge as a legitimate spokesman for America's nine million Vietnam-era veterans. In March, a spokesman put the VVA's membership at "less than 10,000."

Disclaiming any expertise in diplomacy, the VVA went to Hanoi last December to conduct talks on what it described as a "veteran-to-veteran" basis, hoping to "lay the groundwork" for "serious" government-to-government negotiations on the POW/MIA and Agent Orange issues. The group has shown a conspicuous lack of results on either score.

Though Mr. Muller says he went to Vietnam to resolve the POW/MIA issue, only reluctantly and at the last minute did he confer with anyone knowledgeable about the issue. And he returned from there only to spout off the same old and discredited propaganda that Hanoi has been trying to feed us for over a decade.

Indeed, Mr. Muller devotes considerable time to giving lectures on campus, which

feature what a promotional brochure describes as a "documentary film on the Vietnam War, Vietnam today and the U.S. military involvement abroad, with comparative film clips of fighting in El Salvador and Vietnam." Titled "Heroes," the film was produced by Englishmen David Munro and John Pilger some 18 months ago, and features Mr. Muller, among others.

One of the others is David Christian, a highly decorated Army officer and founder of the United Vietnam Veterans Organization, who confesses he has never seen the film. "The filmmakers kept asking me did I feel any guilt over what I did in Vietnam. I said, 'What guilt? I'm proud of what my men and I did in Vietnam,'" Mr. Christian told me. The film also includes clips of veterans throwing their medals over the White House fence during the 1971 VVA anti-war demonstration. That Mr. Muller is making appearances where this film is shown is not generally known among the members of the VVA. The film's decidedly left-of-center focus on defense and foreign affairs issues does not represent the majority opinion of the people who make up the VVA's membership.

If, as looks to be the case, the press is going to treat Mr. Muller and his organization's dealings with Hanoi as a legitimate news story, then perhaps reporters like Mr. Wallace could ask Mr. Muller some questions about what he's doing:

Just what does Mr. Muller expect Hanoi to do for him on the Agent Orange issue? And does it bother him that the Vietnamese have said in their party newspaper that they are interested in Agent Orange as a means of denouncing the U.S.?

Does Mr. Muller have any reason to believe that the Vietnamese will give his group substantive information about U.S. soldiers missing in action? The MIA rumor mill has been rife with reports of sightings

of U.S. prisoners in Vietnam. It is generally thought that if U.S. prisoners do exist, the Vietnamese will use them to try to extract economic concessions from the U.S. This is about the most volatile issue left over from Vietnam. Does Mr. Muller think what he's doing will make things better or worse for the MIA families in the U.S.?

Since Mr. Muller and VVA seem intent on establishing a continuing relationship with the Hanoi government, would Mr. Muller be willing to give his opinion of what has become of Vietnam in the aftermath of the war—his opinion of the government's concentration camps, the boat people, the economic collapse?

Finally, Robert Muller is a prominent spokesman for Vietnam veterans because the press made him prominent. Would it be too much to ask reporters to take a close look at this organization? How are the VVA's dues spent? To finance these trips? Where is the money coming from for this week's trip? IRS rules require nonprofit groups to file financial statements each year, but the VVA has never given its members an accounting of how its money is spent.

I joined the VVA in October 1981. I wanted to make a positive statement about the war and its veterans, and I made it by joining the VVA. At first I wasn't disappointed—the men and women who make up the organization's rank and file are among the finest, most dedicated individuals I have known. But when Mr. Muller acquiesced in laying that wreath on Ho Chi Minh's tomb last December, I and seven other members of the Washington, D.C., chapter quit.

The VVA is a changed group. When they and their companions make their splash in Hanoi this week, one hopes the public will not confuse the Vietnam Veterans of America with Vietnam's veterans.

*Mr. Cragg, who spent five and one-half years in Vietnam, retired from the Army in 1980 after 22 years active service.*