

## **A Salute to Vietnam Veterans: The Unsung Heroes**

In contrast, the Vietnam War marked the first time in history that United States military leaders failed to achieve their goals in a foreign war. Americans today still disagree on the country's policies and involvement in Vietnam. Some analysts believe that the United States had a responsibility to help South Vietnam protect itself from the Communist invasion. These people believe that the growing unpopularity of the war hampered the United States from using its full military capabilities to win. On the other side of the issue, many Americans believed our involvement was unjustified and that the United States should stay out of foreign conflicts that do not directly threaten its security or interest. The war became increasingly unpopular with Americans because of events such as the My Lai Massacre, the riots at Kent State, and the publishing of the secret Pentagon Papers.

Unlike veterans returning home from other wars, soldiers who fought in Vietnam did not receive parades, gratitude, or appreciation for their heroism. This was a result of the intense controversy over United States involvement in the war. In many cases, the efforts of Vietnam veterans were totally ignored or criticized even though they had fought under extremely difficult conditions against guerrilla tactics. Some veterans returned home physically disabled, and many were affected psychologically and emotionally. Subsequently, many returning veterans suffered the effects of drug abuse, depression, and high unemployment and divorce rates. In time, however, Vietnam veterans organized protests to alert the country of the emotions they felt.

In recent years, many stories, books, documentaries, and movies have been made portraying the plight of Vietnam veterans and the many intolerable conditions they were forced to endure during their service. Americans now honor and recognize the many feats of heroism shown by the brave men and women who served during the Vietnam War.

## **A Salute to Vietnam Veterans: The Unsung Heroes**

The Vietnam War ended when South Vietnam surrendered to North Vietnam in Saigon on April 30, 1975. It was not until Veterans Day weekend in November of 1982 that people in the United States officially paused to honor the veterans who served and died in the Vietnam War. On this weekend in 1982, more than a quarter of a million people gathered in Washington, D.C. to dedicate the newly completed Vietnam Veterans Memorial bearing the names of the over 58,000 men and women who lost their lives serving this country during the Vietnam War. Eleven years later in November 1993, the Vietnam Women's Memorial was also dedicated in Washington, D.C., making it the first United States memorial honoring women's military service.

### **Why did Americans wait so many years to recognize and honor the approximately 2,700,000 brave men and women who fought in Vietnam?**

Most historians agree that this lack of recognition stems from the controversy over whether United States troops should have been involved in the war at all. When veterans returned home from World Wars I and II, a great sense of purpose and patriotism swept the country. To the American people, these wars were fought to keep the world safe for democracy. Probably no other single event in United States history united this country so strongly as the Japanese bombing of the American Naval Base at Pearl Harbor during World War II. With the dropping of the atomic bomb, the United States and its allies claimed a decisive victory.