

Episode 7

The timeline from episode 7 reflects my last year in the Marines.

I was still at Camp LeJeune and now I am the Non Commissioned Officer in charge (NCOIC) of Riot Control for the 10th Marine Regiment. Because of demonstrations, I was spending more time on standby and I started to take things personally. I wanted to go home on the weekends and see my girlfriend but these demonstrators were messing things up.

I finally got fed up. We were on standby again to go to Washington and I told everyone that if a protester threw a rock, a bottle or anything else, I wanted everyone to empty 1 magazine into the demonstrators. I thought that this would end these demonstrations. My commanding officer found out what I had said and I was immediately removed as NCOIC and was no longer allowed to have anything to do with riot control. A magazine holds 20 bullets.

We were now getting ready for a cruise to the Island of Vieques to play war games. I was now the embarkation NCOIC and was using the 6 weeks of embarkation training that I received in Little Creek, Virginia.

Next we went on a cruise to Europe. We visited Italy, Greece, Turkey, Malta, Sardinia and Spain. This turned out to be a shock to me. I was extremely ethnocentric. I believed that the United States was the best country in the world, that everyone loved us and wanted to be like us. I thought that we had the right to overthrow other countries and remake them in our image.

Well, my belief structure was shaken because everywhere I went I wore my uniform and people let me know that they did not support the war in Vietnam and that the USA was a criminal government. It was strange to me that no one held my government's policy against me personally.

I was raised to hate the enemy, all of them. I never distinguished between a government and its people. I hated all of the Russians, all of the Chinese and all of the Vietnamese. In Europe I saw another way to view things.

I was starting to learn but had a long way to go.

In 1968 I was finally old enough to vote. My family members were Democrats and I had been taught that the Republicans represented the rich people and the businesses and the Democrats represented poor people like us.

I voted for George Wallace, I thought that he would take care of the problem with all of the rioters and that Curtis Lemay would take care of the Vietnam problem. I was Red White and Blue.

At the end of July 1969, I became a civilian.

Tonight's Episode 7, "The Veneer of Civilization":

Our leaders are still lying, the death and destruction continue, and it is obvious that we are not accomplishing anything positive with our sacrifices. It kills me to see the waste. The battle to save Khe Sanh ends with us walking away. This is really the crux of how the whole war went. We would lose men taking a hill, then abandon it and take a different hill. Later we would fight for the same property again and of course this gave the enemy enough time to come in and plant mines and booby traps, which accounted for about 80% of our casualties. I just accepted it.

General Abrams takes over the war and it is still about body count and kill ratio.

He appoints General Ewell to kick ass. General Ewell says, "I basically felt that the Hearts and Minds approach can be over done". Ewell's men kick ass and about 11,000 Vietnamese die. It later turns out that half of the killed are unarmed civilians and no one is held accountable. Ewell brags about his 45 to 1 kill ratio; he "only" lost 242 Americans, so to him it was a win - "Brute Force is the only way to win".

Someone said, "War awakens a savagery in people". I can certainly attest to that.

Tim O'Brien said he ended up in Vietnam because he lacked the ability to face his family and country and say "No, I don't think this is right." He called

it a "Failure of Nerve".

When my 13 months ended, I extended my tour, I had been wounded once but I did not want to leave my friends in a fight. I was wounded a second time after I extended. When that extension ended, I tried to sign up again. I didn't really want to stay but I did not have the courage to say I had had enough and wanted to go home. Thankfully my First Sergeant could see that I was spent and did not allow me to stay. I am really thankful for that. Tim and I both suffered from the effects of peer pressure and patriotic intimidation.

The tapes from Michael Homes to his family moved me. I wrote many letters home and did not want my family to worry so I usually did not say much about what I thought would make them worry.

There was a lot that was the same for Americans and Vietnamese. They both dealt with a draft to feed the war machine. The rich and well connected were protected and did not have to serve. The war was fought primarily by the working class and poor. Vincent Okamoto, the most decorated Japanese American to survive Vietnam, talked about this. A Vietnamese said that the poor were especially receptive to the slogans but I think that it also applied to us. I highly recommend Christian Appy's book, Working Class War.

There was the interesting distinction that was made between spontaneous killing of people and premeditated killing. I don't think that it makes much difference to the dead or their loved ones.

On the Ho Chi Minh trail, those going to fight passed those that were wounded going in the opposite direction. I remember being at the airport in Okinawa waiting in line to board the plane to Nam. There was this other line of people going to CONUS. These guys looked like they had been through hell and they had. Now they were going home to the Continent of the United States. Looking at them made us pause in silence; they represented our future selves.

The Phoenix program, a program to kill enemy supporters, dealt with

81,740 suspected Viet Cong. It is said that between 26,000 and 41,000 of those were assassinated. Episode 7 underreports these numbers and says more than 20,000 were killed.

There was talk about how the South Vietnamese economy was thrown out of kilter because of all of the corruption made possible by American money and resources. The spending of money by military personnel corrupted the Vietnamese culture. I could get laid for 50 cents but paid 7 dollars for a block of ice.

There was talk about how great our technology was and specifically about the planes we called sniffer planes. They were planes that had monitoring devices that hung from their bellies and registered ammonia content in the jungle. The planes would fly over the jungle and when the meters read above a certain number, it meant humans were below and we would bomb that area.

The North Vietnamese found about this technology and hung buckets of urine in the trees, away from their camps. With a waste product, they neutralized millions of dollars of our technology and literally had us bombing the piss out of the trees.

Back at home, things weren't any better. The politicians continued to lie to the public.

It was the same thing in North Vietnam. To keep public support, both sides lied to their public.

At the Democratic convention there was a police riot in Chicago, Walter Cronkite said that the convention was being held in a police state. After seeing the police riot on TV, a Gallup poll said that 56% of the public approved of the way that the demonstrators were handled. This was the beginning of the war against those who were against the war.

I will never be able to forgive Nixon for his treason. He undermined the peace effort while he was talking peace. LBJ knew what Nixon had done but he did not want to acknowledge that bugging and surveillance were taking place. So the treason was allowed to stay hidden and Nixon would be re-elected before he was forced to resign for other crimes. This treason

cost 22,000 Americans and an unknown number of Vietnamese their lives.

The war dragged on.