

I wrote in a speech that 'we had won every war we'd been in.'

Upon asking another individual to look over the speech and critique it, he crossed out that statement and wrote 'not true' above it. His objection was that we'd lost the Vietnam War. He defined the 'we' in my statement as the United States.

He applied the historical measurement of victory in war and determined that we'd withdrawn from Vietnam without achieving the objectives of our national policy; therefore we'd lost the war. He was absolutely right—for the first time in our history, our nation had made war and lost!

The 'we' in my statement, however, wasn't meant to refer to the United States. It was meant to refer to the military. *That* 'we' did not lose in Vietnam—the military didn't lose.

Nations make war; the military merely fights them. We seem reluctant to admit that our nation made war, we achieved a military victory, but our nation decided to accept a political defeat.

When our nation accepted this political defeat it caused something to happen to those of us who fought in Vietnam. Maybe it was confusion over how the hell our country could give up this military victory. Maybe it was frustration at being the instrument that had achieved its part of the national policy—military victory—only to have our civilian leadership change the damn policy. Maybe it was simply a 'to hell with it all' attitude. Maybe it was a combination of all of this. Whatever this *something* was that happened to us, it resulted in the the creation of a strange phenomenon that most of us who fought in that war are part of, that which I call 'The Silent Warriors.'

The silent warriors. You know who they are. They're the ones who went to Vietnam, fought and returned home. The ones who returned to fight again. The ones who went to fight—and died. They're the ones who went to war and carried out their orders professionally—with dignity, pride and to the best of their ability. You remember those guys. The hundreds of thousands that didn't go to Canada.

Surely you must remember these soldiers. The hundreds of thousands that weren't involved in fraggings.

You know who I'm talking about. The silent warriors who performed their duty successfully, causing 900,000 North Vietnamese soldiers to die. The silent warriors who didn't believe in the cause of Vietnam but went and fought because of their oath. The silent warriors who are—*us!*

We stayed silent for a lot of reasons. We lived through an unbelievable experience when public opinion forced a pres-

# THE SILENT WARRIORS SPEAK

By CSM John W. Gillis

were maybe a little confused about the psychological importance of a parade for Vietnam veterans. But we didn't go to war for a parade.

It was the same with the Vietnam Memorial. We were certainly in favor of a Memorial, but the media's pursuit of celebrities and those few Vietnam veterans who all cried out for the need as 'absolution for our shameful involvement in Vietnam,' violated the noble death of our fallen comrades.

There are other reasons. The point is, we kept silent—not because we were ashamed, or embarrassed, or believed any less in our country, ourselves or our commitment to duty. It seems we just silently, collectively, withdrew into ourselves.

We were wrong to stay silent as long as we have. We need to tell our side of the story to the NCOs and soldiers we train. We don't need to have our side of the story made into a movie. We just have to make sure those we train know the truth of war, the normal, everyday business of combat. Our side of the Vietnam War won't sell newspapers or cause TV ratings to increase, but will simply create a better understanding of the 'Profession of Arms' in those soldiers we are responsible for training.

Maybe I've been a little over-dramatic in labeling us as the silent warriors. I don't think so. All the NCOs I've known are proud of their service in Vietnam. Yet, none have openly taken the opportunity to call attention to their proud service and thus reinforce the warrior ethic.

I know I've not been over-dramatic in referring to us as warriors. *Webster's* defines warrior as 'one experienced in combat.' It doesn't take a genius to figure out we're among the last. Our legacy shouldn't be one of silence.

Winston Churchill, when talking about his experience in battle as a wartime journalist, said: "There is nothing more exhilarating in life than to be shot at without effect."

Those of us that have been shot at without effect, or at least without fatal effect, have to calmly, purposely and with conviction share our individual Vietnam combat experience with those we train. We owe them more than silence. It could mean the difference for them and for our country in the next battle.

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