

## Remembering Vietnam

Vietnam occupies that part of the mind that is not shared solely by memories. Our collective memories will recall that ten years ago this spring, America's involvement in Vietnam came to an end. It is a date that will live in ambiguity. In Ho Chi Minh's own words, "The Americans don't like long, inconclusive wars... and this is going to be a long, inconclusive war." It was.

Let others use this occasion to explain why we were there, what we accomplished, what went wrong, and who is right. We seek here only to draw attention to those who served.

They gave their best and, in many cases, their lives. They fought not for territorial gain, or national glory, or personal wealth. They fought only because they were called to serve. Some returned intact, some physically and emotionally maimed. Others never returned and are immortalized in a national memorial in Washington, D.C.

Perhaps they questioned why they were there. Certainly some complained. Yet they served. Many lie today beneath white crosses or buried in our personal memories. They all were soldiers.

No one wants war — not the civil leaders who proclaim it, not the civilians who suffer from it, least of all the

soldiers who must fight it. Yet we must not forget that in the words of Plato, "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

Whatever animosity lingers in our consciousness, whatever regrets we may have, whatever "might have been's" or "if only's," whatever people may say on this anniversary, let us not forget the Vietnam veteran.

It was on July 8, 1959, that the first American was killed in that war. For 16 years they died. Then, on April 30, 1975, the last Americans left Vietnam.

In a larger sense we all are veterans of Vietnam. It is part of our history.

Those who served in Vietnam deserve better than we.

As a nation we have failed to do what is right. Let us begin by remembering them.

Etched in granite on the face of a Vietnam Memorial in Buffalo, New York, an inscription should be etched in our hearts:

*They answered when called.  
Asked for little, but gave much.  
And made a nation proud of their sacrifice.  
But poor is the man  
In remembering the dead.  
We must face the living.  
For we ought to remember  
Better than we do.*

**UNITED TECHNOLOGIES**

A Rambo alternative

# Blood from Stone

by MARK PIESANEN

Oliver Stone's critically acclaimed new film, *Platoon*, has arrived just as America was reaching some sort of reconciliation over Vietnam. Recent treatments of Vietnam in film have been plagued by arrogance and revisionist jingoism. *Platoon* explodes these myths and splatters the ugly reality of Vietnam across the screen with all the subtlety of a bullet in the brain.

The movie chronicles the experiences of a young soldier from his arrival as a fresh-faced volunteer, through his combat initiation to his descent into the endless horrors of Vietnam. It is, however, as much about a "civil war" which divides the platoon into two camps, each loyal to rival sergeants.

An unauthorized execution of a Vietnamese villager precipitates the split between soldiers who are brutally expedient and those who are trying to remain conscientious. The division becomes a metaphor which pits idealism against pragmatism, optimism against nihilism; good against evil. "There's

the way it is," says Sgt. Barnes, the pragmatist, "and the way it ought to be."

The characters are painful portraits of men pushed to their limits, molded under extremes of emotion. Sgt. Barnes, with his hideously scarred face and "kill-em-all-let-God-sort-em-out" approach, represents consummate evil, and is hauntingly believable.

Sgt. Elias is too much the noble archetype of conscience. His betrayal scene is unbearably melodramatic. Bullets smash into his body in slow motion. A string of oboe booms as he collapses with his arms reaching skyward in a pathetic tableau. It is one of the few instances where the movie departs from its brutally realistic perspective.

The film would have been effective without Chris Taylor's (played by Charlie Sheen) narration. It begins in the form of letters to his grandparents, but quickly descends into poetic

proselytizing. Sheen's voice is remarkably similar to father Martin's, so much so that at times I was half expecting to hear some pseudo-intellectual spiel about the jungle and its heart of darkness.

One of the most shocking aspects of Stone's depiction of Vietnam is the omnipresence of death. It waits at every turn on a jungle trail and arrives as fast as a flash of tracer fire or as slow as torture. In *Platoon*, death is grisly, horrific, graphic, unheroic and unromantic. The soldiers are left without hope of salvation. Neither idealist nor pragmatist is assured of survival.

I shall leave it to others to proclaim that *Platoon* represents the Vietnam experience, "the way it really was." I left the theatre convinced of Stone's commitment to realism and honesty. I was stunned.



Reproduction of "Remembering Vietnam" courtesy of Bruce Barber.

## Thanks Don, It was a slice

By Michael Vlahos

Sixteen years have passed since Don McLean's "American Pie" hit the charts. But if there was any suggestion that he has been around too long, it was dispelled by his performance in front of a full house at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium last Friday evening.

A veteran performer, McLean handled the audience and the program with ease and confidence. His sincere smile and solid eye contact established a warm rapport with the audience from the beginning of his performance.

The program consisted of many of his older ballads as well as some songs composed by Buddy Holly. McLean also sang Roy Orbison's popular composition "Crying". The show was highlighted by McLean's internationally acclaimed hit singles, "Vincent" and, of course, "American Pie," both of which were performed with exceptional enthusiasm.

His powerful stage presence aside, McLean's talent as singer, songwriter and musician is truly remarkable. He plays his acoustic guitar with a picking style that creates a wide range of captivating rhythms and more subtle

notes when needed. His lyrics focus on many problems that plague humankind and are filled with emotion. McLean also applies his unique style to the traditional folk songs and ballads from cities around the world.

By the end of the show, McLean had established an intimate closeness with his audience and sealed this bond with his last song in which he had the audience sing along. Perhaps his decline to play an encore disappointed the audience somewhat after an appreciative standing ovation, but it was hard to deny a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

McLean has been recently working on the music for a children's program called "Flight of the Dragons". His current project is a television mini series entitled "American Pie" which is about American affairs over the past thirty years. He also has plans to make another album later in the year after his touring schedule lightens up a little. It has been four years since McLean has released an album. That break had obviously had little effect on his performing ability and I'm sure it won't have any influence on his abilities as a recording artist.



It's not "Bye, Bye" to Don McLean. The balladeer is still delivering American Pie to folk-loving audiences.