Release of suppressed experiences that result in the development of personal memorials for Vietnam Veterans

Steven E. Gustuson

The University of Montana

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RELEASE OF SUPPRESSED EXPERIENCES THAT RESULT IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL MEMORIALS FOR
VIETNAM VETERANS

by

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Release of suppressed Vietnam experiences resulted in the development of memorials for Vietnam Veterans.

Committee Chair: Bryan D. Spellman

The Vietnam experience was so traumatic for its participants that suppression of events and emotions was one of the few alternatives left veterans for dealing with what they had seen and done. After twenty-six years, I revived within myself those experiences and feelings which led to the development of a multimedia presentation known as The Alpha One Program.

The presentation which was designed primarily as a personal informational program has now developed into a larger concept. It now includes visual art collages and has grown from being a self-educational experience to a presentation for community organizations, churches and schools. The opportunity to share my experiences with others revealed that this presentation can offer an outlet for other veterans to share their stories. Consequently, veterans' families and friends also shared stories relating difficulties in communicating with their veterans. One occurrence commonly expressed is the inability to visit the very memorials that were designed to help veterans through their plight. Veterans who were willing to share their experiences each have their own uniquely different reasons for not participating in memorials.

I offer the multi-media presentation to any interested organization. This informational program now includes a search for those veterans who still have a hard time sharing their innermost thoughts regarding Vietnam. This is useful for the veteran who can't or won't come to already established memorials. Instead, the veteran might prefer a personal, more individualized, visual arts collage as a memorial. In order to better serve the veteran community, a program is now being developed for the internet. This program seeks veterans who need to hear the phrase, "Welcome Home."
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CHAPTER 1
THE INTENT OF THE PROJECT

The design of the ‘Alpha One’ presentation intended to help Vietnam Veterans share their feelings through a creative outlet. The design of the project developed out of the healing of my suppressed experiences. The recognition of the healing process evolved within myself through reflective thinking. I developed a multi-media presentation and made it available to schools, churches and community organizations. The presentation was intended to inform the public about my Vietnam experiences through sharing my first-hand knowledge about the performance of Alpha One, an Assault Patrol Boat and its crew. The sharing of my autobiography was intended to aid the participants’ in understanding the treatment of veterans before, during and especially after the war. The audiences’ awareness would be enhanced by revealing events and feelings related to the memorials created in honor of the veteran. After the presentation, veterans or their families were invited to share their experiences publicly or privately. The shared stories or feelings then were used in a creative process that gave the veterans a personalized memorial.
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

One of the first questions asked during my presentations was, "Why did I volunteer to go to Vietnam?" I explained how the philosophical values of mother, apple pie and the American Flag were passed down through my family. My father did his duty during World War II and I was expected to answer the call as well. I joined the Navy to avoid being drafted by the Army. It had always been the choice for our family. After a short time in Vietnam, I became the Captain of an Assault Patrol Boat in the Mekong Delta. I have been asked why I would want to be a boat captain if I really didn't have to. The answer came from within the family belief, 'nothing ventured, nothing gained.' I kept a log of all the boat's activities and took several hundred photographs which have become useful in telling my story.

The Vietnam Experience was so traumatic for me that I chose to suppress the majority of events and feelings. However, I kept those parts of the Vietnam experience that would be helpful. I used the fact that I was a Boat Captain of an Assault Patrol Boat to my advantage even though I felt guilty about it. Employers seemed to hire veterans, including myself, out of appreciation rather than skills. This was evident by how I was introduced to fellow employees. "I would like you to meet Gus, A River Boat Captain," was the phrase most often used in my introductions.

I found out later, that suppressing my Vietnam experiences also caused me to suppress other true feelings (Appendices, pages 29 thru 32). Stress reaction doesn't settle in until after the effects of external actions. In many
instances these stress related events are deferred to later years. This concept is similar to but not entirely related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As I research PTSD further, I may find this to be highly probable. I have been told by family and friends that at times I seemed insensitive, without care and indifferent about other people and their feelings. Another contributing factor to my suppression was due in part to the reception I received by those who I thought I was safeguarding. The society from which I came had certain beliefs and desires. We looked for things to be a certain way - built around canonical expectations. I expected the same welcome home our fathers received fifty years earlier when they returned from the European War. I received the opposite which reinforced the belief that the higher the expectation, the higher the probability of disappointment. It became very easy to ignore what had happened in Vietnam as well as any reminders of that experience. Unfortunately, the memorials that were designed to aid in the healing of the veterans became reminders of unwanted experiences. After the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was erected, I traveled to Washington, D.C. twice to see it. I couldn't bring myself to visit The Wall because I realized it would have brought back too many memories for me to handle at that time. I felt if I had approached The Wall at that time, I would have reacted inappropriately in some unpredictable manner. The fear of replaying the same scenes or flashbacks was more than I wanted to deal with. I also knew that I had to always be in command of my feelings. If I were to visit The Wall I was afraid of losing control of my feelings.

In 1993, I decided to earn a master's degree at The University of Montana in the School of Fine Arts' Interdisciplinary Studies Program. Naively,
I thought I would write a book about art, take the required curriculum, and acquire my master's. Instead, the program made me reflect and look within myself causing the suppressed Vietnam experience to well up. After twenty-six years, I had no idea what was about to happen to me.
The "Alpha One' presentation is designed to reach as much of the community as possible. It is a program that will appeal to as many people as possible through various art forms: music, drama, movement, visual art, poetry and dialogue. The program can last from one to two hours in length, depending on the question and answer period. The presentation is organized with the use of multiple intelligence techniques. It is delivered in the following fashion:

1. "Still In Saigon", by Charlie Daniels Band is the music chosen to set the tone of the presentation. Charlie Daniels wasn't popular with the larger percentage of Vietnam servicemen. Even though the lyrics to "Still in Saigon" came ten years after the war, they carried a very important message that augments the rest of my program. This song may be moved toward the end of the presentation because of its post war message. In its place, I would insert Steppenwolf’s "Monster." The lyrics and music from the "Monster" album were more representative of that era.

2. The introduction informs the audience that they will be involved in a multi-media presentation containing first-hand knowledge about the performance of Alpha One, an Assault Patrol Boat in the Mekong Delta. The volume of the music is lowered for this section. After the
introduction, the multi-media presentation segues into a series of visual art collages.

3. The collages are the visual art stories about my feelings and experiences related to Vietnam (Appendices, pages 14 thru 20). I give a brief description about each one and tell how they became memorials for me.

As a visual artist, I found it easier to tell my stories through the medium of collage. This medium seemed to be a more natural way of delivering my message. As I created these works of art, the process solidified my thoughts which gave more meaning to the series of collages. These visual stories became my personal memorials, substitutes for other Vietnam Veteran’s Memorials. K.I.A. (Appendix, page 18) was the first collage I created, but the last one talked about in the series because it was a reflection of the worst days spent in Vietnam. It also served as a transition from collages to the flashback dramatization.

4. The dramatization (Appendix, page 21) is a two part flashback sequence. The first is related to the worst day I experienced while in Vietnam and the second is about a sharing of necklaces with a young Vietnamese girl.

The dramatization took form through an apprenticeship in drama during my first summer of the graduate program. The drama sessions showed me that I could share my experiences vicariously through the character of an old man. I found I could be more open with audiences if I took on the role of myself at some time in the future. This has been a very healing period for me. Acting the part of an old man allowed me to become comfortable with audiences and later enabled me to talk
with participants as myself.

The part of the dramatization concerning the young Vietnamese girl was very important. She was the first suppressed experience that welled up during a reflective analogue drawing session. The memories of her caused me to open my sea bag of memorabilia after twenty-six years. Included in the memorabilia was a beaded necklace that was her half of a trade between us. Her photograph, lines from the dramatization and a string of beads were used to create the collage called 'Necklace' (Appendix, page 19).

5. The slide show (Appendices, pages 22 and 23) is a two part presentation. The first is an introduction of Alpha One and its crew. The second portion is a sequential order of events that took place over the same three days mentioned in presentation step number four. The slides are set up in an order that corresponds with the boat's daily log (Appendix, page 24).

Prior to entering the graduate program, on the rare occasions when I showed slides about Vietnam, I was very guarded and not emotional. I found Alpha One’s daily log mixed with all the other memorabilia. After reading the log, I decided it would have more impact on the audiences if the slides were arranged in a parallel sequence with several days from the log. The slide show became an accurate description of an operation involving an assault patrol boat. The last slide in the series is a photograph of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall), National Mall, Constitution Gardens, Washington, D.C., 1982.

6. Stories about The Wall and its purpose for healing the
veterans is demonstrated in this part of the program through the reading of several poems. After reading the poems, the audience is given some time for reflection while listening to a song about The Wall.

The Wall became extremely important during the third summer of the program, because a touring half size version was brought to Missoula, Montana for one week. The group I was assigned to for this last summer asked if I would take them to visit the replica. I knew it was as hard for the group to ask as it was for me to actually take them. At this point I started to believe that people other than veterans were understanding my experiences and feelings. I never realized that the Black Granite Sculpture could be such a powerful work of art. This was evident by the emotions that The Wall evoked from ALL who visited. I took my son and father to The Wall and after twenty-eight years I was finally able to share some of my experiences with them. Unfortunately, my father and I discovered a name of our first karate instructor engraved in the stone. It was this visit that inspired me to write a poem about the memorial (Appendix, page 25). After eight years of friendship I surprised a good friend by telling him that I had been in Vietnam and was planning to take a group to The Wall in Missoula. There was an even bigger surprise when he revealed to me that he was at a fire base at the same time and he wished to go the The Wall with us. The next poem I wrote was 'A Friend Found' (Appendix, page 26).

7. The audience has approximately five minutes to reflect on what they had seen and heard while they listen to "Tough A
Name On The Wall" by Risky Business. When the song fades out the audience is encouraged to become participants and establish a dialogue for a question and answer session.

8. At the end of the presentation, the participants are invited to complete a review form (Appendix, page 27). This review serves as a critique of my performance and gives each participant the chance to ask questions that might have been too embarrassing to ask during the program. At this point, I reiterate the possibility of using my talents to create a memorial collage for any interested person. The collages are similar to the works viewed in the earlier part of the presentation.
CHAPTER 4
EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED RESULTS

The original focus of this presentation was to inform my peers in the Interdisciplinary Studies program about my experiences surrounding the Vietnam War. I was encouraged by my colleagues to share my presentation with others outside the School of Fine Arts. The presentation was designed to be primarily an informational slide show project. I thought it would generate a higher level of interest concerning Vietnam and possibly augment my school’s history curriculum. The first time I offered the program to my classes was on Veteran’s Day, 1994. The questions asked by the students sounded a great deal like those I heard when I returned from Vietnam. The question, “How many people did you kill?”, seemed to be out of context with the informational slides I had just shown. I knew I had to revise the entire presentation and put it into a more active context.

Students who had seen the slides told other teachers and I was approached to present the show to all the history classes in my school. It was suggested that I do the program at the same time the U. S. History classes were involved with the Vietnam Era. It was at this point that I thought of the presentation as a lesson and incorporated those elements that were outlined in Chapter 3.

The unexpected results of the 1994 Spring presentation was the overwhelming acceptance of the program. It didn’t matter whether the audience was Alternative Learning Students or Advanced Placement Students, I could hear a pin drop during all my presentations. The questions asked by all the students were very poignant and well thought out. Finally, the question
"How many Viet Cong did I kill?", became understandable and appropriate. The presentation led to the discovery of veterans who had similar suppressed experiences. When they told me their stories, I realized that there was more to be done in relation to the Alpha One Presentation. The veterans' families and friends also shared stories related to the difficulties they had or have with fathers and grandfathers who still found it impossible to share their emotional experiences with anyone, especially those who were not in Vietnam. Students gave me hugs to welcome me back and thanked me for helping them understand why their family member or friend won't share his story. I found small messages on my desk, in my school box or on voice mail from other veterans telling me what good books there are to read. I have received thank you letters from veterans who are bank executives, school district board members and county jail inmates, all who wanted to share their story and their poetry. On many occasions, I have been privy to incidents that cannot be shared. However, one incident commonly expressed is the inability of the veteran to visit the very memorials that were designed to help them through their plight. Before I was able to go to any of the public memorials, I started creating my own personal memorials made from the memorabilia I brought back from Vietnam. The artifacts were placed into visual arts collages. Memories of the artifacts were used to create poems. On several occasions, a veteran and I would share our stories and out of that a collage or poem would be created as a personal healing memorial. Some of those friends who had an individual memorial still found they cannot go to the Veteran's Memorial at the Rose Garden in Missoula, Montana. One of my poems given to a veteran is now being transposed into lyrics with music. Most of the veterans I talked with didn't know why they wouldn't go to the Memorials and the rest felt as I did: It was
easier to avoid the pain than to deal with it. Now that I am in the process of healing, I hope sharing my story can help others.

One of the most important unexpected results from this presentation is the discovery that there are more veterans than I imagined living in our society who need other avenues for getting out their story. I feel my presentation offers them that avenue. I feel my presentation extends an opportunity for the anonymous veteran to share his story. My program seeks those veterans who need to hear the simple phrase, "Welcome Home."
CHAPTER 5

THE FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

The future of this project is very open ended. I see it as possibly never coming to a conclusion and forever evolving to meet the needs of the people it has been designed to serve.

I will continue presenting the Alpha One program to schools, churches and community or civic organizations.

I will make slides of my collages so that future audiences can see more clearly what I am discussing.

I will improve my narrative.\(^{10}\)

I will show my work in the local veteran associations and read my poems, such as 'The Wall' (Appendix, page 25), at the Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Lewistown, Montana.

I will maintain a good working relationship with public media, such as the Missoulian Newspaper (Appendix, page 28).

I will work collaboratively with local psychologists who have been helping Veterans deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD).

I have started developing a separate presentation designed around 'The Wall'. This has come about due to several engagements that are in symposium format. I will present 'The Wall' in shorter workshops and the 'Alpha One' presentation as keynote speaker.

Finally, I plan to have a home page on the Internet based through Missoula Internet Connect. Until the home page is up and running, gusgulch@aol.com is my E-mail address.
Prior to the development of the ‘Alpha One’ Presentation, I would talk about Vietnam in a guarded way and never express my true feelings. I avoided contact with other veterans, organizations or situations that presented any threat to my anonymity concerning the war. Most people who knew me didn’t know that I was a Vietnam Veteran. While working on my master’s degree, I began to empathize with my peers and with their particular situations and they with mine. Later this empathy would be extended to others outside the program, especially veterans. The effects of the program on my life have not created any significant changes in my life style, but rather enhanced or added greatly to my life. In other words, the problems were hidden so well I felt that there was nothing to change. Instead, it could be said that certain elements in my life that were hidden are now uncovered. I didn’t think that anyone could understand my personal experience, with the possible exception of other veterans with similar experiences. Since the presentations, I have come to believe that people don’t have to understand another’s experience fully because every experience is unique to each individual. However, what is not unique to each individual is the pain attached to those unpleasant experiences. I’ve learned that almost everyone has a painful experience somewhere within their lives and it is the hurt of that experience which we are all able to share. With this realization, I began to trust people’s understanding of what I went through. When I started to trust people more, it became easier to expose and share my emotions with others, including the students I teach. I have not only become less afraid to
share my feelings with a variety of individuals and organizations, but have
developed new ways to help veterans express their emotions through the arts.

I have found that there are many veterans who don’t wish to share their
experiences as I have learned to do. This fact has made me more aggressive in
my pursuit to find veterans who still have a difficulty sharing their story or
emotions.

Currently, the newest feeling I have is that I won’t have enough time to
help as many veterans as I would like or need to.
'Like Father - Like Son' came about when I found my father's dog tag. It is a reflection of how strong family values influence the behavior of their children's actions. The dark photo is actually a negative of my father holding me when I was very young.
The young child in this collage is me when I was ten years old, the same age my son is in 1996. I don’t believe anyone could imagine a child that looks like this being able to do what I did in Vietnam.
After my first presentation of Alpha One, I realized that there were other than Vietnam veterans that would appreciate the phrase, ‘Welcome Home’. Don't let any veteran fade out of memory.
ARE YOU AFRAID OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS?

To the children of Vietnam, the Americans seemed extremely tall and rather ferocious. We never realized how we looked to the innocent young.
'K.I.A.

"Killed in action" was the first collage I made and it answers the question, "How many Viet Cong did you kill?" The deaths are juxtaposed to the letter of commendation for saving lives. The peace symbol on the 'A' patch signifies the sign of the times and basic attitude of the crew of Alpha One.
THE NECKLACE

The young girl in this collage and I traded necklaces after several days of just staring at each other. I still have mine. The lines are from the short dramatization that is used in the Alpha One Presentation.
COFFIN COTTON

These are the first lines of poetry about the worst three days I experienced while in Vietnam. The embellished dog tag was an extremely personal gift given to me by a colleague.
Dramatization for Vietnam Presentation

Sequence after short period of looking at and discussing artwork at the opening of presentation. Shift or flash to presenter or riverboat situation. Picking up artwork of Vietnam girl.

"Something happened during the summer of '93."

"Renewed an old friendship."

"We were much younger when we met - much younger."

Fade back to rivers of Vietnam Delta.

"Vietnam - 1969."

"Alpha one...Alpha one...Cease fire...Cease fire."

Fall to ground and show signs of holding in a man’s intestines.

"Gotta keep this guy’s guts off the deck.” Standing.

"Someone help me find the body that belongs to this arm."

"Oh god! I’m soul deep in blood - it’s flowing in a stream past my feet."

"I can’t stop the screams."

Slowly come back to present day presenter.

"In the middle of all this crap - a flower."

"She was so young - - - as was I."

"The necklace - - - a gift at our parting."

"I’m sorry I had to leave you in hell."

"It’s OK - - - we both understand now!"

"This is hard - - - because my daddy always said, ‘big boys don’t cry.”"
ONE WAY ALLEY
A slide show presentation that introduces the crew of Alpha One and what a fire fight was like based on the boat’s log.

INTRODUCTION OF CREW AND BOAT:

1. RADIOMAN
2. CREW
3. ASPB-1 (ALPHA 152-1)
4. ASSAULT PATROL BOAT
5. ONLY BOAT WITH A FATHOMETER
6. AND RADAR
7. BASIC MUNITIONS - 20MM ANTI AIRCRAFT GUN - TOP MOUNT
8. SAME ON DECK
9. LINKING AMMO FOR 20MM
10. MARK 20 - HONEYWELL GRENADE LAUNCHER
11. SMALL ARMS
12. AND THEIR AMMO (WHAT’S UNIQUE ABOUT THIS PICTURE?)
13. M60 RIFLE - TWO

BOAT’S PERFORMANCE DURING AN OPERATION

14. OPERATION - READ FROM THE BOAT’S DAILY LOG
15. 17 MARCH - MRB
16. MOBILE RIVERINE BASE
17. AT DONG TAM
18. 0700 - BRAVO CHARLIE MEETING (BOAT CAPTAIN’S MEETING)
19. 0900 - UNDERWAY FOR CAN THO AREA UNDER WATER MOVEMENT
20. PLAN CTG 117-2
21. 1200 - STILL IN TRANSIT
22. 0300 - ARRIVED CAN THO - UNDER FIRE
   18 MARCH - CAN THO TO A.O. (AREA OF OPERATION)
23. 0900 - WAKE UP - REFUEL AND REARM
24. AND REST - 1600 - B.C. MEETING - HEADING FOR ROCK JAW - A.O. ONE WAY ALLEY
25. 2300
26. UNDERWAY - LONG NIGHT
   19 MARCH - A.O.
27. 0600 - ARRIVED VI THAUG
28. TO PICK UP ARVN TROOPS
29. ALPHA ONE TO SWEEP RIGHT BANK
30. 100 YARDS IN FRONT OF COLUMN
31. 1000 - INSERT TROOPS
   1300 - TAKE WOUNDED V.C. (VIET CONG) TO UNIT 2, "OH SHIT! WE’LL BE SWEEPING FOR THE REST OF THE OPERATION
32. 1600 - DONE FOR THE DAY
   1900 - B.C. MEETING - PHEW! UNDERWAY AT 0330
   20 MARCH - A.O.
33. 0330 - U/W
   0710 - RECEIVED HEAVY ROCKET AND AUTOMATIC WEAPONS FIRE
34. BEACHED TO MAKE REPAIRS
35. WATERLINE HIT TO BOW STARBOARD SIDE
36. WITH B-40 ROCKET
37. SECOND WATERLINE HIT ON PORT SIDE - B-40
38. 0900 - PREP BEACH AND DROP TROOPS - DAMN NO CHANCE TO
39. REST - SWEEP HERE, SWEEP THERE, SWEEP WHERE YOU ARE! FOXTROT JULIET IN
40. CHARGE - A REAL KNUCKLE
41. 2030 - SNIPER FIRE - NO CASUALTIES
42. 2115 - B.C. MEETING: EAGLE FLOAT AT 0730 TOMORROW
43. 21 MARCH: A.O.
44. 0900 - U/W FOR EAGLE FLOAT
45. SWEEP RIGHT BANK
46. 0840 - UNDER FIRE - RETURNED AND SUPPRESSED FIRE
47. RECEIVED 3 - B-40 ROCKET HITS
48. 0900 - TWO MORE ROCKET HITS
49. BEACHED TO INSERT TROOPS
50. 1000 - 1100 - HIT 3 MORE TIMES, HEAVY AUTO FIRE AND SNIPERS 10 FEET OFF
51. THE BOW - RETURNED FIRE AND RETRACTED EACH TIME
52. 1130 - RECEIVED FIRE FROM SOUTH BANK - ONE ROCKET HIT ALPHA 2
53. 1130 - 1400 - ONE CONTINUOUS MOTHER F**KING FIRE FIGHT - GOD GIVE US
54. STRENGTH
55. RECEIVING SUPPORT FROM
56. AIR CAV
57. 1415 - ARRIVED H.Q. SECTION FOR REPAIRS
58. ONE B-40 ENTERED LEFT SIDE OF COXSWAINS FLAT
59. TRAVELED THROUGH
60. AND EXITED
61. THE RIGHT SIDE
62. 1415 - SHRAPNEL EVERYWHERE
63. 1500 - TWO B-40 HITS ON THE
64. MARK 20 SHIELDS
65. ONE RPG THROUGH THE FANTAIL
66. ONE RPG THROUGH THE D.C. LOCKER
67. ONE B-40 HIT
68. ONE FORWARD MOUNT
69. ALPHA ONE TO COLLECT CASUALTIES
70. POPPED SMOKE
71. MEDIVAC EFFECTS
72. THE RESCUE
73. W.I.A. - CORNELL: SHRAPNEL IN UPPER LEFT AND LOWER RIGHT ARM - MEDIVAC
74. GUSTUSON AND LOW: HIT W/ SHRAPNEL IN HEAD AND HANDS - STAYED ABOARD
75. 1830 - ARRIVED RENDEZVOUS FOR NIGHT
76. 1900 - RECEIVED HEAVY AUTO WEPS FIRE AND MORTAR - HAVE TO RETRACT
77. AND MOVE - "SHIT! DOESN'T CHARLIE EVER SLEEP."
78. 22 MARCH: A.O. TO M.R.B.
79. 0600 - WE'VE BEEN TAKEN OFF SWEEP - THANK GOD!
80. STILL SITTING ON BEACH
81. TRYING TO GET SOME REST
82. 1300 - B.C. MEETING: SUMMERY
83. 1400 - V.C. KIA AND 10 CHU-HOI
84. CAPTURED: MORTARS, MORTAR STANDS, AK-47, MINES, B-40'S AND RPG'S
85. AND ROCKET LAUNCHER
86. 0230 - U/W FOR REPLENISHMENT AND REARMING
87. WISH WE COULD RETURN TO
88. THE M.R.B.
89. THANKS JANIS FOR GETTING US THROUGH THE HARD TIMES
90. RESERVED FOR THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL (THE WALL) PHOTOGRAPH
14 MAR 69 WEED (CONT)
AO: Air to Air
12:15 Received heart attack from Southern Burma. 2 Jet fighters fired hit a trash can.
12:15—14:00 One continuous (M.F.) light—God gives up against.
14:15 Arrived Head Quarter Section for Repairs:
* Replaced Both 60Mm
* Mk 20
* Casualties (Personnel)
* Council - Shrapnel in upper left arm
* Lower Rt Arm
* Medically
* Low—Shrapnel in fingers—left ear
* Gustaw—Shrapnel in hand (LT)
17:30 Passed on for night.
19:00 Received heavy auto. weapons fire. Hope to many shrapnel doesn't check ever sleep.

20 MAR 69 Thu (Cont)
AO: Eagle Lord at 1700 tomorrow.
21:54 Received suicide fires.
No casualties.

21 MAR 69 Fri
AO: Eagle Lord
5:00 Y/N Eagle Lord. 60mm enemy fire.

22 MAR 69 Sat
AO: Eagle Lord
5:00 Y/N Eagle Lord. 60mm enemy fire.

23 MAR 69 Sun
AO: Eagle Lord
5:00 Y/N Eagle Lord. 60mm enemy fire.

We've apparently been taken off sweep. Thank God. We're still sitting on the beach trying to get a little rest.

In the last two days, we have killed 10 and captured 1.

We were coming two days before.
We left the area. They didn't know about the fuel. The fuel and it messed up some of the ambulances.
Captured: MORTAR BUNKERS
2-20s, 3-60s.

Enemy weapons: 12.7 mm.
A few more.

We are up against the NVA - suspected 1 hit.
THE WALL
By
Steven E. Gustuson

Shiny black, I'd say
Reflected over the youngster's eye.
Father, son and grandpa's most honored day
The tenth of July.*

Cobbled corn, watermelon and pie
Roughed-out pointed boot.
Big buckle for a little guy
Wide brimmed hat shade'n his snoot.

Western cut shirt
That's been through some play.
Elbows covered with dirt
"What dirt", the little feller'd say.

Pants are rolled once, then twice
To make sure of a good fit.
Mom's idea of just be'n nice
Knees worn light, father's son can't sit.

White letters - those who took the fall
Hidden in flat ebony - one of such fame.
To a little cowboy in boots too tall
Finally able to touch Grandpa's name.

* The tenth of July was the day The Wall (replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial) came to Missoula, Montana.
A FRIEND FOUND
by
Steven E. Gustuson

A friend found is a passionate past -
A past that finally welcomes both back home.

My story slices silently through a march mist -
A mist that lays coffin cloth over cold water.

His story lingers loudly through a November night -
A night that lays body-bags over black ground.

A friend found is a wiser world -
A world that finally allows both back home.
1. Was the presentation well organized? Explain!

2. Were the visual aids effective? Explain!

3. Did the guest speaker answer questions honestly? Explain!

4. Did the guest speaker use a variety of media to emphasize his experience? Explain!

5. Was the presentation worthwhile to you? Why or why not?

6. Do you have any relatives or friends who were involved in the Vietnam War?

7. Is there a question you would like to ask that did not get discussed during the presentation? How may I get in touch with you?
Veteran finds peace, new path through his art

By GINNY MERRIAM of the Missoulian

At the end of last period at Sentinel High School on Thursday, a girl with a small voice and a big Oakand Raiders jacket approached an art teacher Steve Gustuson in the auditorium.

My grandpa, she told him, was a Green Beret. He tells stories, she said, and it's kind of scary. I'm glad you told what you said because now I understand better.

That's just what Gustuson wanted. Gustuson - "Mr. Gus" to his students - spent Thursday afternoon with students at Sentinel High School, where he teaches art.

Gustuson, a 60-year-old captain of an Alpha boat on the river of Vietnam. For most of 25 years, he didn't talk about the things that happened to him and his crew on that 'killing machine.' On Thursday, he spent all seven periods of the school day talking about it, showing a video he made and reading from his journal of the time while he showed slides.

"My hope is to make people aware that there's still a lot of veterans out there that don't feel welcomed home," he said. "I think I just like to teach. This is my way of helping."

Gustuson began talking in 1993, when he went back to school to earn a master's degree at the University of Montana in the School of Fine Arts' summer program for teachers.

"I thought, 'I'll just go and write a book about this, get my master's, move up the line,'" he said. "I had no idea what would happen."

The program though, makes it possible for people to do what they want. One of his students, on the other hand, "this Vietnam stuff welled up." he said.

Gustuson's final project, due in July, will present his own experience and that of others in collages he made using memorabilia of his own and others, his videos, art by students, poetry and a paper.

In the video, he acts the part of himself at 90. It opens with a pan of a room set with a Jimi Hendrix poster and an American flag and the sound of the song "Still in Saigon."

"Has anybody found the boy that belongs to this arm?" he shouts on the screen.

To reach Steve Gustuson, call his voice mail at Sentinel High School at 728-2403, extension 7511, or write to him at his internet address: gugulich@aol.com.

"My hope is to make people aware that there's still a lot of veterans out there that don't feel welcomed home."

Students look inside themselves. Once he did that, "this Vietnam stuff welled up," he said.

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Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - What is it?

Many years ago an observation about people was made stating, "we are the sum of our experiences." Everyday we add to this total for we are forever changing and our past continues with us. We are affected, changed, by both good and bad experiences. The more dramatic or for some, traumatic, the greater the lasting effect.

People are likely to experience events directly or indirectly so our of the ordinary it places them in a state of shock. Sense of reality is challenged. Examples might be in experiencing rape or an airplane crash, or a severe explosion in a building with related loss of life and confusion. A person witnessing an event my be unhurt physically yet show several symptoms after the event. Thus the name Post Traumatic Stress.

Following the event serious symptoms can be identified. Intrusive thoughts and flashbacks may occur [sic]. Do you replay the scene again, and again searching for a different outcome?

The disorder of post traumatic stress is common among military personnel though not unique to them. Remember those first daays of basic training? From
civilian life to that "uncivil" life or army or marine basic. Every moment was traumatic. Then combat with its constant tension, fear, and anxiety. Each of you can recall your own experiences, through most would rather forget, but can't. Basic training was sever [sic] stress but not enough to be PTSD. Combat more closely relates.

Not forgetting is a symptom often triggered by a smell, sight, or sound similar to the original event. PTSD has many clues in addition to those just mentioned.

Do you take your anger out upon inanimate objects? Are you subject to a quiet masked rage which frightens you and those around you? Is your anger unexplainable or inappropriate -- excessive to the situation? Do you believe God abandoned you in combat?

Another is isolation. Do you attempt to isolate yourself from family members either emotionally or physically? Do you have a "leave me alone" attitude about your loved ones, or feel you need no one? Do you think of becoming a hermit or [sic] move away from problems or responsibilities? Do you believe no one can understand you or would listen if you tried to talk about your experiences?

Emotional numbing is common. Do people see you as cold, aloof, uncaring and detached? Do you often fear losing control, or that if you began to
release
your pain you might never stop crying? Are you concerned about your emotional
distance from your children, or how strongly you show your anger toward them?
Do you repress feelings? Are you unable [sic] to talk about personal emotions?

How about anxiety and nervousness? Are you startled by fireworks and other loud noises? Are you uncomfortable when people walk closely behind you or sit behind you? Do you believe you can trust no one?

Has depression become a part of your life? Do you avoid doing things then rationalize reasons for inaction? Do you find yourself blaming others, or situations as, "beyond your control"? Do you feel a continual sadness, but ignore it? May be [sic] you have an ongoing "don't care" attitude?

Do you use alcohol or other drugs regularly to numb your pain, relieve guilt, or hide memories? Do others think you drink or drug too much?

Some of these symptoms of PTSD may hit pretty close to home. In fact, I may have just tripped your wire. You say [sic] be feeling some anger. If so, that's a normal reaction to have. Its [sic] O.K. It is not O.K. to remain angry for a long time. Do you want to learn more about PTSD, its effects on a person, family, friends? Information and help for change is available through POINT MAN

4/23/96 America Online: GusGulch Page 3
MINISTRIES. Ask someone soon.

For more information or how you can become involved in helping other veterans
write to:
PMIM-EW - E. 817 Providence - Spokane, WA 99207 or call
1-800-877-VETS.
REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

CHAPTER 1 - THE INTENT OF THE PROJECT


CHAPTER 2 - BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

- Subject: Veterans Helping Veterans, PTSD - What Is It?, G75rrp@aol.com.


5. Related to reference number 2.

CHAPTER 3 - ALPHA ONE PRESENTATION


CHAPTER 5 - THE FUTURE OF THE PROJECT