

## Captain Ralph Parrott

Captain Ralph Parrott Supply Corps, US Navy (retired) gives a layman's analysis of the unheeded lessons of Viet Nam:

My name is Ralph Parrott. I am a 65 year old retired Navy Supply Corps Captain and retired businessman from Fairfax Station, Virginia. I served in the US Navy from March 1963 until September of 1990, over 27 years.

I make no claim of being a war hero. My service in the Viet Nam war consisted of two Tonkin Gulf deployments in USS Intrepid CVS-11 in 1967 and 1968. As a Supply Corps officer I served in a support role. But unlike our President, Vice President and most of their neoconservative fellow travelers, I served.

I have been drawn to political activism by the realization that my generation is failing in its obligation to leave this country to future generations in better shape than we found it. We are failing, I believe, because we have failed to incorporate the bitter lessons of Viet Nam into our national life and our national strategy.

The parallels between Viet Nam and the current disaster in Iraq are astounding despite the Bush Administration's apologists claims to the contrary:

- \* War waged on false premises
- \* Flawed strategy due to lack of knowledge and appreciation the culture
- \* Lack of shared sacrifice on the part of the wealthy and elites
- \* Compliant "Rubber Stamp" Congress
- \* Erosion of civil liberties
- \* Failing to provide returning veterans proper care and support
- \* "Hollowing Out" of the Armed Forces
- \* No accountability for failure

False Premises – The Viet Nam War was started in an atmosphere of hysteria over the threat of Monolithic International Communism and its attendant "domino theory". Both ideas were false but were flogged to promote fear in the population. They were used as a bludgeon to beat down any dissent of which there was very little. In this environment it was very easy for the Administration to manufacture a cause belli, the Tonkin Gulf incident, to extract a blank check from a compliant Congress and the rest, over 56,000 dead and defeat, is history.

In like manner the Bush Administration exploited the very real tragedy of 9/11 to stoke fear in the population with such extravagant claims as terrorism threatening our very survival which it clearly did not. With fear spread throughout the land it was a short step to exaggerating and downright lying about the supposed Iraqi threat and the totally bogus tie between Saddam Hussein and the terrorist. By some accounts if we had the same level of field medicine today as during Vietnam our death toll would exceed 15,000 already.

Flawed Strategy – In Viet Nam we never understood the complex village culture that permeated the countryside and the relationships among the Viet Cong and the villagers. This lack of understanding lead to widespread "burning the village to save it"; with the resulting strengthening of the bonds between the population and the Viet Cong.

Similarly, in Iraq we did not fully appreciate the tribal loyalties that abound in the society nor did we understand the role of Islam and the mosque. Further we did not fully appreciate that dropping bombs on peoples' homes with the inevitable "collateral damage" (dead civilians) would not endear us to a population that was already predisposed to support the local militias and immans of their various sects and tribes.

Lack of Shared Sacrifice – In the beginning the Viet Nam War was fought with draftees conscripted within a draft system generously ladled with exemptions of all kinds, but especially student exemptions. Also, in those days a much smaller portion of the population went to college. So college became the refuge of choice for the children of the wealthy and the elites. For those not in colleges the reserves and National Guard also became an attractive refuge. In the early days of the War and throughout LBJ's build up to 500,000 troops the sons of the wealthy and the elites were largely unaffected. There was also very little, if any, protest. When the injustice of this situation finally became unbearable the draft lottery system was instituted and the draft became a reality for everyone including the sons of the wealthy and the elites. In short order the campuses erupted, the war ended with the fig leaf of "Vietnamization" and the all volunteer force was implemented. On the fiscal side of the equation, the costs of the war were largely financed by debt in order to provide both "guns and butter"; and keep the tax payers

in the dark about the true cost of the war. The resulting inflation and stagnation of the economy took years to fix.

In the Iraq War the sons and daughters of the wealthy and the elites are protected by the all volunteer force. There is no obligation to serve. After the experience of the Viet Nam War, I never encouraged my children to serve because I did not want their lives wasted in a misadventure such as Iraq. Financially, the cynicism of the current administration is worse than during Viet Nam. At least during Viet Nam much of the "butter" was devoted to lifting up the poor. This time around the "butter" has exclusively gone to the wealthy and the elites that have avoided service. I keep asking my senators and representative (Republicans all), "Is it moral to cut taxes for the rich in wartime while passing the bill to future generations?" Of course, they do not answer.

"Rubber Stamp" Congress - There were two "no" votes in the US Senate for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska. Both were iconoclast and were roundly pilloried as unpatriotic. In the coming years Congressional oversight of the war was virtually non-existent, until the campuses erupted and the political pressure became unbearable.

To their credit many Democrats opposed the Iraq War from the outset, but the Republican majority has been able to essentially quash any attempt at oversight. The few inquiries conducted have been buried and any critical reports have been effectively "mushroomed" as the Republicans have done the Administrations bidding. Critical information has been shrouded in a "National Security Blanket". It is outrageous and destructive of our fundamental values of self government. The Republican majority must be replaced.

Erosion of Civil Liberties - During the Viet Nam War the domestic spying operation of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI was dramatically expanded to target dissenters and war protesters. The CIA joined the party with it its own brand of domestic spying. It took the Watergate outrage and the Church Committee to finally bring it to light. The center piece of the fix was the FISA court.

Today the Bush Administration and its lackeys in Congress are proceeding on numerous fronts to strip away citizens' fundamental liberties in an atmosphere of fear mongering. The list goes on and on. Here are but a few:

- \* Warrantless searches and wiretaps effectively bypassing FISA
- \* Imprisonment without charge, remember Padilla
- \* Data mining phone records
- \* Warrantless seizure of financial transaction records

The outright attack upon citizens' liberties is nothing compared to that being perpetrated on non-citizens:

- \* Kidnapping
- \* Renditions to other countries for torture
- \* Secret CIA prisons
- \* Torture

Of course, not to worry these people are all terrorist, correct. Well maybe not all, as the gentleman from Canada who was kidnapped, sent to Syria and tortured will attest. Now we have the curious situation where the "Rubber Stamp" Republican majority has made much of this stuff legal with those paragons of integrity Senators Warner, Graham, and McCain duly falling in line after their Andy Warhol fifteen minutes of fame. Almost makes me a conspiracy theorist. Shameful, disgraceful, immoral, are among the adjectives I would use to describe this situation. History will blame us as a society unless we take back our government and demand redress of these outrages. Empowering Veterans intends to begin with helping throw Senator George Allen of Virginia out of office in November.

Failing to provide returning veterans proper care and support - The treatment of returning Viet Nam veterans was shameful. People with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were denied treatment for years. In fact, there was an underlying hint that sufferers were malingerers. Similarly, the foot dragging and denial associated with the government's stance toward Agent Orange was borderline criminal. The list could go on and on. This situation finally got so bad that the Congress reluctantly set about to make it right after untold thousands needlessly suffered.

The same thing is happening today largely under the radar screen. The Republican majority has a favored vehicle to avoid voting up or down on increases in funding for veterans. They simply refuse to waive the Budget Reconciliation Act's pay as you go provisions. Of course, they could never raise revenues and take away some of the \$1.3 trillion in tax cuts for the wealthy. Of course, they conveniently waived the pay as you go provisions to enact these obscene tax giveaways in the first place. This hypocrisy alone should be enough reason to vote them out.

"Hollowing Out" - When I left USS Intrepid in 1969 I served on the staff of the Atlantic Fleet Naval Air Forces. My job was to oversee the outfitting of carriers with aircraft spare parts and components in preparation for deployment. By that time the "hollowing out" was apparent. Shortages were the order of the day and non-deploying units were routinely cannibalized to make the deploying units as ready as possible. In 1971 I was transferred to the Naval Aviation Supply Office where I was responsible for managing the inventory of spare parts and components for the A-7 Corsair II aircraft. The shortage of money to buy and repair items was part of my daily life as the

consequences of neglect and the resulting "hollowing out" continued unabated. After a two year hiatus at Duke University for my MBA I reported for duty in Washington in 1976 as a staff officer responsible for Navy-wide budgets for buying and repairing spare parts and components. Again, my job was to manage the shortages of money as inventories continued to decline and the backlog of components requiring repair steadily grew. I could go on, but suffice it to say the Navy was a "hollowed out" force and the situation did not improve until the Reagan buildup.

I think the following first person story from Lt. Colonel Daniel Sullivan, United States Marine Corps (retired) best illustrates the "hollowing out" that is underway today. I repeat it here in its unedited entirety:

"I watched as almost every last infantry unit in Okinawa and other pointy-end forces throughout the theater departed to take up arms in Iraq, a completely different theater; stripping away the resources promised the theater commander in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan. Paper tiger? Hollow force? Certainly for any immediate response to a developing strategic or operational challenge in the Pacific. The entire theater was left uncovered for months at a time without a MEU\*, despite what the JSCP, Rumsfeld's document, promised. We had to beg, borrow, and steal a MEU bound for SW Asia to respond to the tsunami in SE Asia because ours was already on the ground in Iraq.

Units deploying from home station on rotation to Okinawa, found themselves suddenly redeploying to an entirely different theater. Individuals who were transferred to Okinawa on permanent assignment with families in tow, found themselves ordered for months at a time to Iraq to augment various staffs, leaving their wives and children twice displaced. Equipment readiness was a story in and of itself. All a shell game. As a result, it is impossible to measure the add-on cost to the effort in Iraq.

I participated in sessions for security concepts that we had no idea how we were going to execute if the plans we wrote to support them were ever ordered. We wrote some pretty imaginative plans that only Stephen King could rival. But, the Secretary has surrounded himself with sycophants who either are woefully inadequate military professionals (they accepted our plans) or who won't say the truth because that would be professional suicide.

And I haven't even talked about the way our allies and potential coalition partners view us. At the behest of a strategically challenged administration Secretary Rumsfeld has crippled the national security posture apparatus. They have thrown out the "Win-Hold-Win" doctrine and replaced it with the "we can respond to any challenge at anytime, anywhere, throwing anything at it and bully our way to success" philosophy that is working so successfully in Iraq. "Hold-Borrow-Rattle the Saber" is the new reality.

\*Marine Expeditionary Unit

No Accountability for Failure &dash; In Viet Nam no high-ranking officer or senior civilian got fired.

During the Iraq War the only high-ranking officer or senior civilian that got fired was General Shinseiki, Army Chief of Staff, for daring to tell the truth about the forces levels required to secure Iraq. Enough said.

This failure to heed the lessons of the past has caused the unmitigated disaster that is Iraq. It is a record of gross incompetence and the most callous form of neglect and misuse of the Armed Forces by the Administration and their lackeys in the Republican controlled Congress. They have truly forfeited their right to govern.