

# Vietnam: The Power of Protest. Telling the Truth. Learning the Lessons

March 6, 2015

We are writing to everyone who signed the letter to General Kicklighter to challenge a Pentagon commemoration of the Vietnam War that propagandized rather than educated Americans. Our collective protest appears to have led to serious correction, although the revised historical time line has not yet been posted or vetted by independent scholars.

We and the Pentagon will be engaged in this debate for a decade, until the 50th anniversary of peace in 2025. The apparent roll back took place when then Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel brought to bear the passion of his Vietnam combat experience.

*"The Wall reminds us to be honest in our telling of history. There is nothing to be gained by glossing over the darker portions of a war, the Vietnam War, that bitterly divided America. We must openly acknowledge past mistakes, and we must learn from past mistakes, because that is how we avoid repeating past mistakes."*

*Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel on Veterans Day, November 11, 2015*

Institutional self-interest and pro-interventionist political agendas are surely pushing back, aspiring to morph from honoring the veteran to honoring the war, mission creep redux. While the most obvious distortions of history will be removed, we doubt that recognition will be given to how broad based and determined protest inside and outside the military ended an unjust and misguided war.

On May 1 - 2 at New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington we will assert and document the power of a peace movement that helped stop the war, bring down two presidents, and change many American lives forever.

Later this week you will receive the agenda, speaker highlights and a registration form for the peace commemoration. The event is designed to recall, and learn from, a history that is in danger of being forgotten, despite the resonance of its message for current and future conflicts. Regular mailings will keep you informed about our plans and you may receive a phone call encouraging your participation and support.\*

The agenda will include topical mini-plenaries and break-out groups / workshops formed around the many ways we opposed the war. They offer an opportunity to reflect on what was accomplished and what was learned as well as implications for opposing current and future wars (and probably a chance to reconnect with old friends). The current draft list of discussion groups can be previewed [here](#). If you see something missing or misstated, or feel you could

make a special contribution to one of the sessions, please let us know as soon as possible.

There will be a lot of sharing of memories, analysis of lessons for present challenges, some great music and a moving walk by the Vietnam Memorial to gather at the Martin Luther King memorial. We not only want you to join us in Washington but also ask your assistance to assure the diversity and younger generation involvement that is not guaranteed, even from the extraordinary list of letter signers.

For planning purposes, could you let us know whether or not we'll see you in Washington by spending two minutes on a survey, available by clicking [here](#)? Your answers also help us decide how to assign rooms for mini-plenaries and break out groups / workshops.

Finally,

If you live in the Washington area and can volunteer time or housing for out-of-towners or can provide outreach to your own organizations and networks, please contact Terry Provance <[terryprovance@gmail.com](mailto:terryprovance@gmail.com)>.

If you can help with calling people in your state or region, contact Barbara Helmick <[helmick.b.a@gmail.com](mailto:helmick.b.a@gmail.com)>.

If you have leads to major donors or foundations, contact David Cortright <[David.B.Cortright.1@nd.edu](mailto:David.B.Cortright.1@nd.edu)>.

### Planning Committee

Ira Arlook  
Sally Benson  
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Terry Provance  
Capitol Coordinator

**Barbara Helmick**  
**Recruitment and Fund Raising**

*\* If you prefer to only receive occasional follow-ups like this*

*to the letter to General Kicklighter but not to get special mailings or a call about May 1-2, please tell us "do not mail" and/or "do not call". E-mail your opt out to [director@ffrd.org](mailto:director@ffrd.org) and to [helmick.b.a@gmail.com](mailto:helmick.b.a@gmail.com)*

## **News of the Pentagon Commemoration**

Terry Provance attended on February 20 a public meeting of the official Commemoration Advisory Committee. His report can be read [here](#). Staff seem committed to revision of the controversial time line. They have a very ambitious national outreach campaign, including college football game half times and a strong emphasis on reaching middle and high school students.

"...many middle schools and some high schools require their students to do service projects and he has proposed and some have adopted the idea for students to identify a local Vietnam veteran, interview the veteran, take a photo, write up a report and make a video with music included."

Terry concludes, "In the next 3 years they will have sponsored over 40,000 events to honor veterans and promote their version of the war."

## **The Letter to General Kicklighter**

We have grown to 1470 signers, twice the initially publicized list. Please continue to share the link. Many of your friends, family and coworkers will be equally surprised and disturbed about this potential misuse of public funds. <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/vpcc>

The complete annotated list of signers of the letter as of February 20th is [here](#) thanks to the volunteer effort of Susan Wind Early. (If you can't find yourself, check if you were alphabetized by first or middle name or initial. Still no luck, let us know. If you signed after the 20th, look again later this month.)

## Associated Projects

### Visit Vietnam for the 40th Anniversary of Peace: April 19 - 30

Registration has reopened due to three last minute withdrawals. This is a unique opportunity to discover or rediscover the countries and peoples whose lives so affected ours four decades after the war ended, including participation in the April 30 celebration in Ho Chi Minh City. The draft itinerary for the program and costs can be seen [here](#). For further information, please contact quickly [director@ffrd.org](mailto:director@ffrd.org).

Pre-Vietnam programs are available for Cambodia and Laos April 14 - 19 or for a sightseeing visit to Ha Long Bay April 17 - 19.

Participants are welcome to remain in the region for additional personal travels, but the schedule allows return to Washington by May 1 to share the trip's experiences at the Washington commemoration. **Extended deadline for registration March 12**

### "The Vietnam War Then and Now: Assessing the Critical Lessons": April 29 - May 1

NYU-D.C. Global Academic Center, 1307 L Street NW, Washington, D.C.

This pre-Peace Commemoration academic conference is sponsored by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame; Provost's Global Research Initiatives, New York University; and the Department of History, New York University. Preliminary program and registration can be found [here](#). (*Registration is separate for the academic conference and for the commemoration.*)

## Related Links

[Text](#) of the letter to General Kicklighter

Annotated [list](#) of signers

New York Times page one [story](#) on the letter

The official Pentagon Commemoration [site](#)

Link for new signers <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/vpcc>

**Full Disclosure Veterans for Peace** (alternative chronology, related issues) [website](#)

**War Legacy Project** (Agent Orange, land mines, UXO) [website](#)

### **Notable Articles**

"The Lethal Legacy of the Vietnam War"

*Fifty years after the first US troops came ashore at Da Nang, the Vietnamese are still coping with unexploded bombs and Agent Orange.*

--by George Black in [The Nation](#)

"The Endless Tragedy of Vietnam"

by Myra MacPherson in [Consortium News](#)

"Burying Vietnam, Launching Perpetual War

How thanking the veteran meant ignoring what happened."

by Christian Appy / TomDispatch reposted in [Alternet](#)

"An Enfant Terrible Stumbles Upon the Vietnam War: A Review of Nick Turse's Kill Anything That Moves"

by Michael Uhl ([inthemindfield.com](http://inthemindfield.com) available [here](#))