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50th Anniversary of Anti-Napalm Shipment Protest in Alviso, CA

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Memorial Day 2016

(Originally written to my friends from Santa Clara High School, class of 1966)

Gentlemen,

Please see the announcement attached of the commemorative peaceful action in Alviso on Weds, May 25 at 6 pm, from where the U.S. Army shipped Napalm fifty years ago to be used in Vietnam.

Most of us from Santa Clara High School (where Alviso students were bussed to school during the 1960s) who went onto college after graduation, advantaged by student deferments, were able to “dodge the draft” into military service. Three of my childhood friends: Bob Ornellas, Bob Rizzo, and Steve Woodcock did not go to or stay in college long enough to obtain a draft deferment, so they were drafted, and after three months of basic training were deployed to Vietnam. Thankfully, Orne, survived, Rizzo and Woodcock were tragically killed, along with more than 58,000 other young American boys in that war that was called by our government “a police action,” though during that era, police all over our nation were deployed on the home front to beat up thousands of anti-war protestors and kill at least four at Kent State University and paralyze another protestor of that war.

Tragically, Bob Rizzo was shot by a sniper while on a search and destroy mission just months after arriving in country. I do not know how Woody was killed, but as Joan Baez sings, “...it doesn't matter anymore...” Some of us attended Rizzo's funeral service. I still feel the anger at our government's “March of Folly” --as most wars are characterized by historian Barbara Tuchman in her history of WWI, by that title.

So, our nation marched into Vietnam with teenagers and very young men doing the marching into the rice paddies, while the so-called “best and the brightest”—the presidential advisors, Congressmen, and Pentagon officers planned the order of battle, and gave the orders. But let's not forget, as in all wars, there is much profit to be made by the corporate-arms manufacturing ruling class, who eagerly engaged itself with the profits of that trillion-dollar 30-year war.

U.S. intervention and funding started in 1945, immediately at the final end of WWII, when we immediately supplied & supported the French, eager to regain their hundred-year-old colony of Vietnam--but it was not to be. They fought until their final ignoble defeat at the ill-executed Battle of Diem-Bien-Fu in 1946. Our nation then stupidly marched in as the captured French soldiers were marched out-- defeated by their former “colonial slave labor coolies.”

It took another 30 years and 58,000 Americans killed for our Harvard, Yale and West Point educated armchair warrior leaders to finally realize it was a war we could never win because ***Vietnam was not our country to win!*** But we did win the “kill ratio” in every battle—the war planner's formula that theorized that if we kill more of the enemy than they kill of our soldiers, then we are winning the war.

The final score: as we helicoptered off the American Embassy in Saigon in 1975—30 years after WWII--how many enemy did we kill? As Bob Dylan sang: "...you don't count the dead, when God's on our side." For our final White House-CIA-Pentagon exit story line: **Vietnamization**--a duplicitous turning over the war to the corrupt Vietnamese generals—who used the interval to amass ever-greater gold bullion and dollars for their luxury retirements in the U.S. As Saigon fell, many Vietnamese generals, collaborators, and CIA operatives were already ensconced in their mansions in Paris, Monaco, London, Miami or Langley, Virginia (home of the CIA).

So we draft-dodgers, draft lottery winners, and in my case—as a conscientious objector, survived that ignoble war based on lies, deception, stupidity and total misunderstanding of the cold war, containment strategy and the domino theory, owe so much to those of our generation who were drafted and suffered horrendous trauma, loss and death.

We who stayed home must at least reflect on that war and its connection to the present wars, so many now that who can keep track of the morphing of the terrorists, their ever-greater brutality, and the front lines, now everywhere?

Certainly, none of us who did not go to what war, did not get burned to death with napalm as did as many as one million Vietnamese, and probably a number of our GIs caught in the fog of war, as so-called "friendly fire" and "collateral damage," should reflect upon this harsh reality and **never forget our national shame**.

So, today we commemorate, fifty years later, four empathetic women who courageously chose to stand up to the overwhelming war-machine to block the loading of napalm bombs to be sent to Vietnam. The four women were arrested, jailed briefly, and the jellied gasoline bombs made it across our planet's largest ocean to burn our nation's "communist enemies" to what must be the most grotesque human-created hell on earth where human bodies burned at the same degree of heat as the World Trade Center towers melted into the ground in 2001, 26 years later! I declare that such inhuman created hells on earth exceed even the imagination of Dante's "Inferno."

But the women's act of defiance against the U.S. war machine joins with every other courageous act by countless humans throughout history who say, "not on my watch, not by my nation, not in my name—I will not stand by, say nothing, as others are abused, tortured, or killed for profit, for hatred and always out of ignorance that we are all one human family, with the very same basic human needs, biology, and psychology.

What can we learn from this history of our nation, of our generation, of those we left in far-off rice paddies, in Napalmed villages?

How many civilians, non-combatants, must an invading army kill to reach a level to qualify its death total as genocide? This is a question that all honest and empathetic Americans must ask ourselves if we are to learn from our grotesque history in Vietnam.

As Harvard educated Spanish historian George Santayana declared in 1905: "Those who fail to learn from their history, are doomed to repeat it."

And so we are repeating our ill-fated history today on countless battlefronts, but the grotesque tragedy is that now--the whole world is a battlefront.

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