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# Two Wanderers

By Lewis Parker

I was born 25 years ago in the Middle West. I haven't seen my family in three years, as I'm a fugitive living underground—a "deserter" from the U.S. Army.

I joined the Army soon after I reached eighteen. Like thousands of other "deserters" I enlisted out of a real, but distorted sense of patriotism.

My naive faith that the Government wouldn't deceive me slowly crumbled. After a year in Vietnam, I was shipped home to a unit composed mainly of Vietnam veterans. Most of them, like myself, were confused, guilty and bitter about their Vietnam duty and experience. Some months later, with the help of other G.I.'s and friends, I began to understand the futility of my self-destructiveness.

I decided to re-enlist. I wasn't sure exactly what I could accomplish, but I wanted to return to Vietnam—this time, to truly help the Vietnamese people. The Army sent me to Thailand instead. I was struck by two things there: first, the beauty and friendliness of the Thai people, and second, by the repressiveness of the Thai Government. The parallels were evident: Thailand could easily become another Vietnam.

Again I requested transfer to Vietnam. Given the high casualty rates at the time, my request was promptly granted. My thoughts had now crystallized: I wanted to start a news service that would present the truth about U.S. activities in Vietnam to the American people, and at the same time bring accurate news on anti-war work to the G.I.'s there. I felt someone had to counteract the lies and distortions that had been used to get me and thousands of other G.I.'s to Vietnam in the first place.

Before returning to Vietnam, I rapped about this news service with antiwar groups and friends. Few of them, however, shared my optimism about the potential impact of accurate news on the American people. I was discouraged by this reaction, as I didn't want to return to Vietnam unless I could contribute to ending the war. After three sleepless, thought-filled days, I made my decision: I would not remain in uniform, but I could no longer accept being used as a pawn against the Vietnamese.

Any visit with my family or friends would invite arrest, even though most of them support my decision to leave the Army. I can't reveal my true identity to anyone I work with. Police infiltrators and informers are a constant threat—should they learn of my status, it would mean years in prison for me.

To survive, I've worked at odd jobs,

staying on just a few weeks at a time until tax and Social Security reporting becomes a threat. Dreams of being discovered and apprehended are frequent, as is waking in the middle of the night feeling uneasy or trapped. At times, an unexpected knock on the door sends my heart racing madly, apprehensive about who's on the other side. It has been a nightmarish experience, and one that appears far from over.

Looking back, I feel no regrets for my decision to leave the Army, only for believing so many lies for so long a time.

The educational system has played a direct role in keeping us poor and funneling me into the military. I started high school hoping to go to college. Although my grades were fine, I was channeled into vocational school despite my pleadings. This had a totally negative effect on me: I soon lost all interest in school and fell behind. Teachers had no comprehension of the real reasons for my failure.

Thus ended ten years of the myth: that all American kids have access to schools of law, medicine, and so on. Only later did I realize that their insistence on what I studied was directly related to the military's manpower needs.

Now, as overt U.S. involvement in the war seems to be ending, my situation, and those of tens of thousands like me, becomes evermore intolerable. We are not criminals to be locked up by the same military and civilian leaders who conceived and directed the geno-

FEBRUARY 28, 1973

## in No-Man's Land

cidal Vietnam war. I reject their assertions that they can judge me.

I feel my case, along with those of my fellow resisters, should be judged by the same people who overwhelmingly rejected the U.S. role in Indochina—the American people. For us to be judged by the leaders of the Vietnam war would be as the Christians were judged by lions in the arenas of Rome.

Lewis Parker is a *nom de plume*.

By Tom Needham

TORONTO—I am one of the million Americans who put their opposition to the Indochinese massacre into action. Faced with an aggressive adventure against people with whom I had no quarrel, I refused to provide my body for the Army's use when ordered to do so. Although I was in perfect health, it would have been fairly easy to fake some kind of illness, or to bribe a psychiatrist to state that I was crazy (many of my friends did these things). I rejected the idea of crawling for the Army, begging mercy; so I left.

That was over four years ago; every passing day has strengthened my convictions. I've spent those years in Canada—first as a foreigner, now almost

Canadianized. Arriving without any thought of being able to go back, I plunged into life here, and found that it suits me well. Not only is nearly everyone here sympathetic to American war exiles, but the quality of life is high by any standard. As an ordinary working person, making less money than I did in the old country, I enjoy the kind of humane, civilized existence which is unattainable to even the wealthy and powerful there.

In Toronto, I come and go as I please (long hair and all), day or night, in any part of the city; policemen call me "sir" (and I them); my medical bills are covered by Government insurance; the subways are efficient and sparkling clean; the city council is riddled with admitted Socialists; even the beer is better. Most important, I have made many good friends—Canadians, Americans and other immigrants—in one of the most cosmopolitan of all North American cities.

In fact, I've been so softened up while here that I don't honestly know if I could stand the U.S. urban jungle again. I'd have to brush up my vocabulary, remembering terms like "tear gas," "mugger," "abandoned buildings," "press restrictions," "hardhat," and the like. I might need a crash course in paranoia or karate or firearms.

But there are serious reasons for me to return. My family is in need of

my presence—my father is 74, a semi-invalid living on Social Security. I know that he misses me and wants to see me at least once again in his life. Should an emergency arise, I would want to go and help.

Even if I had no personal use at all for amnesty, I couldn't deny my support to all the others, both in the U.S. and outside, who desperately need amnesty. Men who couldn't get immigrant status in Canada (through lack of formal education, or money, or contacts) and remain as visitors subject to deportation; men sent to military and civilian prisons for their acts of resistance; men hiding underground in the U.S.; and the many soldiers whose futures are bleak because their discharges are other than "honorable."

The only way to come to the aid of all these is universal, unconditional amnesty. It is a mockery for the perpetrators of inhuman crimes against innocent civilians (such as the Christmas destruction of Bach Mai hospital) to brand resisters as criminals and to demand that they pay a price of alternate service doing humanitarian work.

Just as absurd is the suggestion that all draft resisters should get amnesty, but that deserters should only be considered on a case-by-case basis. I have personally met hundreds of exiles of both kinds, and fail to see any qualitative difference between them. The only distinction is that some, mostly college students, found out before they were called up that the war was wrong, and that they should and could resist. It would be grossly unfair to penalize the less-educated, less-affluent deserters for having to discover the horrors of the American war machine at first hand.

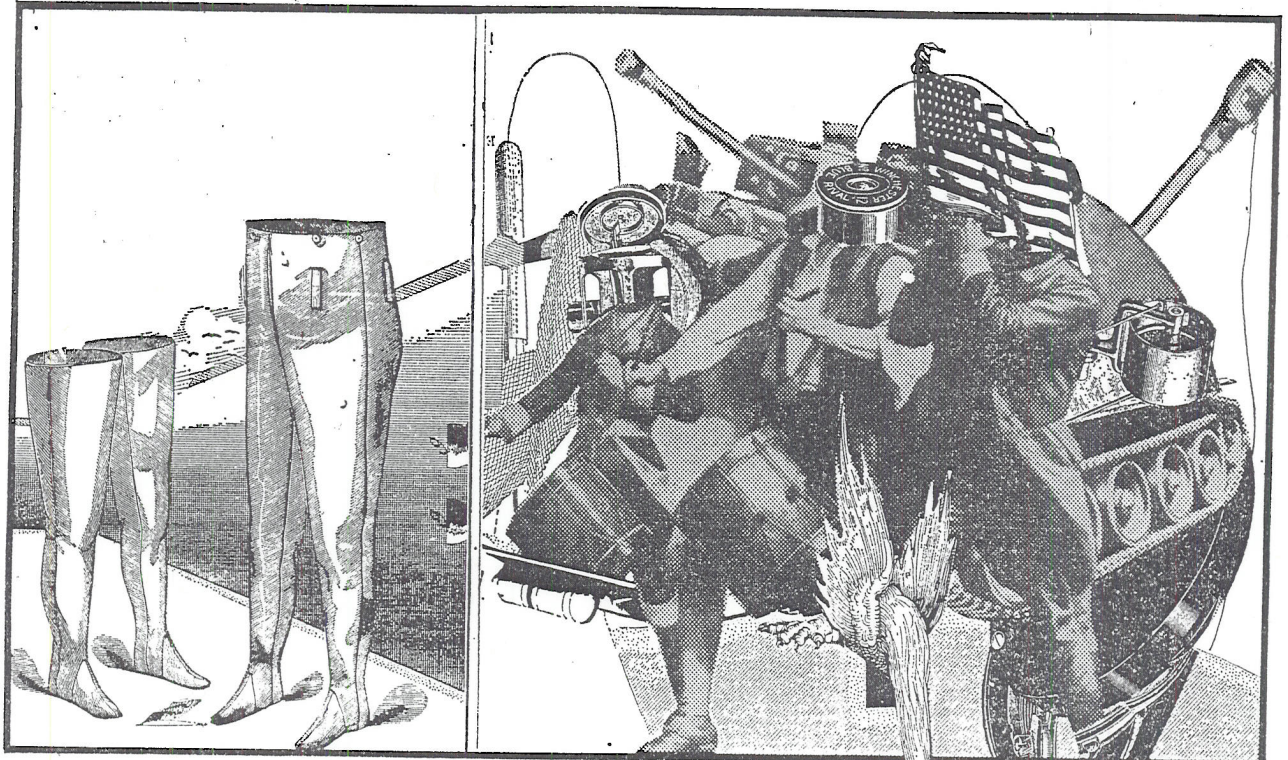
All war resistance was right, before or after induction. It was the only response to aggression and genocide. The American people turned in greater and greater numbers against the slaughter as it went on—but they have yet to face the final step required by their realization that the U.S. execution of the war was immoral and criminal.

The American men and the Vietnamese men, women, and children who died for Saigon's dictators cannot be brought back; the soldiers who were captured are returning. It still remains for America to make peace with those who first nudged its conscience. It cannot be both ways—either the war was glorious, praiseworthy and just, or those who resisted it have done no wrong. Only universal, unconditional amnesty will free America's other prisoners of war.

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Anita Siegel

