



Rogue Valley Chapter 156 News



Newsletter of Rogue Valley Veterans for Peace Chapter 156

Visit our website at: <http://rv-vfp156.org>

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Join us for our next chapter meeting Wednesday at Emmet's

We'll convene at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 2nd, in the home of President Emmet Band, 1100 NW Bellevue Pl., Grants Pass. From Sixth Street in downtown, take A Street west to Dimmick, turn right on Dimmick, go two blocks and turn left on Bellevue.

Rogue Valley Veterans For Peace Chapter 156 is honored to co-sponsor the PEACE RALLY on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. Please join in and bring your friends!

\$ave America: Stop the War\$

Saturday, March 19th @ 11 a.m.

Vogel Plaza, Medford

Check the website for ongoing updates.

Profile of our VFP 156 Member of the Month: J.D. Dixon

Our VFP Chapter 156 has a lot of veterans and associates who are dedicated peace workers, but probably none of them work harder at it than our chapter treasurer, J.D. Dixon.

Nearly every week day (when it's not raining, snowing or sub-freezing), you'll find J.D. and Linda in their black & white VFP bibs standing on the corner of 6th and C streets across from the Josephine County Courthouse each with a peace and/or justice sign in hand and a Veterans for Peace banner draped across the back of their car.

It's a wonder that J.D. is still with us today given the brickbats life has thrown at him including a very dangerous year in Vietnam circa 1967-68. He'll tell you that he suffered severe PTSD symptoms for 37 years after leaving Vietnam before the VA finally diagnosed it. And he'll give a lot of credit to wife Linda and to Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-AZ, and her staff for getting the VA to provide adequate treatment and a 100-percent disability rating that allows him and Linda a modest living in a home they purchased a little more than a year ago near Grants Pass after moving up from Arizona.



JD Dixon, Helen Jaccard, Linda Smith and Gerry Condon stand for peace in GP

Life before joining the military

JD grew up in Southern California, the only one of eight siblings who was born in Illinois. "My parents tell me that they put me in a cardboard box and drove to Oxnard (Calif.) when I was six months old. My great-grandmother was living there and she was the matriarch of our family," he recalls.

JD's family was "dirt poor" but his parents managed to feed and clothe the eight kids. Being a small kid, JD endured a lot of bullying in school. As a result, he says, "I still hate jocks and tyrants." JD also hated most of the courses in high school, but he loved to read and that was enough to earn him a diploma.

Out of high school and only 17 with a big desire to own a Corvette and few, if any marketable skills, JD decided he wanted to join the Marines. His grandmother talked him into joining the Air Force instead figuring that he wouldn't become cannon fodder that way and might learn something that would lead to a job when he got out, but it didn't work out quite the way she planned.

"She said that the only thing the Marines would teach me was how to kill people," JD says. "So I went into the Air Force. My parents had to sign off on it because I was under age, and my recruiter told me I was going to be a dental technician. But instead I ended up at the Air Police Technical School where they taught me how to kill people. Go figure."

JD enlists for four years in the Air Force

JD signed up for four years, reporting for duty in July 1965. After basic training, the Air Force sent him to Holloman AFB near Alamogordo, New Mexico, where he served as the Air Force's equivalent of a military police officer, AKA: Air Cop.

Many of us during the Vietnam era suffered under the authoritarian rule of officers and noncoms who were often incompetent, ignorant, sadistic or a combination of all three. JD says Holloman had more than its fair share of these.

"We had an idiot squadron commander and an (bleeping) first sergeant, JD says. "For example, the captain made us do stand-by inspections in full-dress uniforms, every week like we were still in basic, so we had a serious morale problem."

The first sergeant made all the men in his unit do training on their days off, but promised that anyone who passed his very tough exam would get a three-day pass. JD says, "My roommate and I were the only ones that passed and when we asked for our three-day passes, the first sergeant literally told us to go (bleep) ourselves."

JD says that one of his best friends was court-marshaled two weeks before his discharge for allegedly being disrespectful to an NCO and was busted him down from E-4 to E-1. Angry at the way he and his buddies were being treated, JD filed for a transfer, listing Europe, Alaska or Viet Nam on his "dream sheet."

JD gets his orders for Vietnam, arrives in Pleiku

"I wanted out of Holloman in the worst way," JD says. Naturally, the Air Force immediately cut travel orders for him to report to his next duty station in Vietnam.

"I arrived 'in country,' at Pleiku Air Base in the Central Highlands, in October, 1967. I was 20 years old and was assigned to C Flight, 633rd Air Police Squadron," JD says, adding that C Flight was the largest flight in the unit, with about 150 guys. "Our job was to secure the base from 10 p.m. until 6 a.m." The reason being that "Charlie" usually attacked the base at night when their chances of moving their mortar or rocket tubes in close was a lot better.

The airbase at Pleiku was at the center of a large, sprawling, complex of U.S. and ARVN (Army Republic of Viet Nam) bases and other installations. "We had Green Berets to our west, a bomb dump to our east, the Corps of Engineers to our north and Camp Holloway to our south," JD recalls. Interspersed were other smaller units such as an Army hospital and Artillery Hill. The Air Force operated with "Spooky Birds," which were old C-47 airplanes equipped with high-powered machine guns; H1E prop fighter planes and other smaller planes mostly of World War II vintage. The Army flew it's HU1A gunships (choppers) from there as well.

Walking the "fence" with Penny

JD's job as an "air cop" was to guard the "fence" around the Pleiku Air Base. "Barbed and concertina wire with trip flares were our first line of defense, then came the guard dogs and handlers walking the fence in front of our bunkers," he says.

One night JD asked one of the dog handlers if he could take a turn walking his dog Penny for a change of pace. Penny was the least aggressive dog of the bunch – the others would charge anyone other than their handler. As JD and Penny walked between bunkers, JD heard the big "thunk" of a mortar shell exploding nearby. He and Penny hit the dirt and stayed as low as they could as the mortars "walked" up to them. JD says he knew he was about to die when a shell exploded 15 feet from them and he prepared to be blown apart by the next one. But then the barrage ended and he and Penny beat a hasty retreat.

That was one of several occasions when JD figured he was sure to die while in Vietnam.

JD spent most of his time on duty on top of a large concrete bunker inside a tiny little structure made out of sandbags. He describes what happened one night: "So about 3 a.m. here they come. Very large white flashes, no noise, just giant flash cubes going off a little to my east, then comes the noise, CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! It is raining rockets --122 mm bad boys! According to

the intelligence report next night at guard mount, they were short and hit the hospital and the only people that were killed were Vietnamese patients. I'm still thinking about that one."

The Tet Offensive hits Pleiku hard

The Tet Offensive of late January 1968 demonstrated to the American public that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong had the will to stay the course and that the war was far from over. Many U.S. and ARVN units were unprepared for the Communist offensive during the Asian New Year, but the Pleiku Air Base was very prepared, JD says.

"The Army's Fourth Division sent us nine tanks and crews, a duce & a half quad 50" (a four-barreled 50 caliber machine gun mounted on a 2-1/2-ton truck), JD recalls. "Don't ever believe any of this crap about how we were not prepared for the Tet Offensive."

On January 29th the Tet Offensive began with a huge rocket attack on Pleiku Air Base. JD was on top of his bunker and rockets were screaming all around.

"I was certain where the next one was going to hit," JD says. "I got down in the bottom of my little sand bag gizmo and I started praying, Hail Mary's, and then I started making up new prayers. Then it hit 10 feet from me. My spotlight on the fence went out, nothing but smoke and darkness."

JD recalls that at that point he started hearing a lot of movement out in front of his bunker and his unit's dogs alerting on a threat there.

"We got our orders," JD recalls. "Hand grenades, rifle grenades and M-60 machinegun fire. I opened up with short bursts on my M-60, they started tossing hand grenades and firing rifle grenades. Who knows for sure what happened? Tet was on us and we did not go out at daylight and do a sweep. Before Tet we did morning sweeps and would find blood trails and on one occasion body parts."

"The war was on and we were all scared and determined," he says.

JD sees death and destruction

Watching from his bunker during his year in Nam, JD witnessed horrible scenes of death and destruction, such as the night when two of the C-47 Spooky Birds crashed and burned after take-off from enemy rocket and small arms fire. He also saw "friendly fire" from Artillery Hill take out an Army helicopter gunship while it was firing on an enemy rocket launch site.

"I guess somebody screwed up," JD says. "Fire fights out in the bush were a dime a dozen; tracers everywhere. I watched barracks, latrines, our power plant and hangers and flight line take rockets and mortars. We had no water for a week. On three other occasions I had rockets and/or mortars right smack dab on top of me. Thought I was a dead man but it just did not happen."

JD recalls one night when the base was under rocket attack and one of his fellow Air Cops got out of his bunker in the middle of the attack, leaving his gear behind him – a major no-no -- and started walking back to the barracks. A team member ran into him and asked him what he was doing. "He told them he was going home," JD says, "and I never saw him again. I hope he is OK."

Like other Vietnam vets, JD was awed and terrified by the incredible power of the huge bombs dropped by B-52 bombers from high altitude on NVA targets. When these bombs exploded within 10 miles of your position, it felt like an earthquake was happening.

Life after Vietnam and PTSD

All of these experiences left JD numb at first, but also with the sure knowledge that the Vietnam War was wrong. In October 1968 after serving his one year in Nam, the Air Force flew JD to McCord Air Force Base in Washington state where he soon received an early discharge, lopping eight months off his enlistment. He returned to So. Cal. as a civilian with his hearing and his psyche impaired far worse than he knew.

“When I got back to ‘the world’ I started marching in Los Angeles with VVAW” (Viet Nam Veterans Against the WAR), JD says. “I’m still marching and that’s the short version of how I found Veterans for Peace.

After Nam, JD bounced around from California to Texas to Arizona and from job to job and from marriage to marriage, losing them all to fits of anger and depression. While he did get some help for his hearing loss, which he attributes to his military service, the 30 percent disability didn’t pay for very good hearing aids nor did it pay much of his rent. And the VA didn’t inform him that he might have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

JD says it was not until the late 1990s that he was told he might have PTSD and it was his father – not the VA – who urged him to seek treatment. Even though he says he was still in denial, he did seek help. After several trips to the VA’s Medical Center in Tucson, AZ, the VA designated him 60 percent disabled due to hearing loss and PTSD.

Linda Smith and Gabrielle Giffords

But it wasn’t until JD met Linda Smith in 2002 that he really began to see how severely he was impaired by PTSD. Not long after they began seeing each other, Linda told him, “JD, you are not 60 percent disabled, you are 100 percent.” She insisted that he go back to the VA hospital and fight for a rating of 100 percent disability because she knew that JD just was no longer capable of holding down a job.

Still, the VA bureaucrats resisted, so JD and Linda sought help from Arizona’s two senators John McCain and Jon Kyl. McCain didn’t even bother to respond to their letters and Kyl’s response seemed belittling and of no help whatsoever. But when they sought help from the office of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-AZ, they were received with open arms and with the congresswoman on JD’s side, the VA soon granted him the 100 percent rating.

Finally, finally, JD and Linda felt they could move out of the little travel trailer that had been their home in Arizona. They decided they wanted to move somewhere that had trees and mountains and rivers, and most importantly, a Veterans for Peace chapter. Linda soon found that the Rogue Valley of Oregon was the ideal place for them and it had the Rogue Valley Veterans for Peace Chapter 156.

So, about two years ago, they came up and lived in the Rod & Reel Motel near the Rogue River for eight months until they found the perfect little house in their price range to buy. They went back to Arizona to get their stuff and now they are permanent residents of our valley. And we are lucky to have them!

When your editor asked JD to write up his story, his email in answer began with the following words, which pretty much sum up the kind of man JD really is:

"I've been sitting in my bedroom for the past 15 minutes crying," JD writes. "Why? Because I despise colonialism and imperialism and I just read an article about three young men in Egypt that had to watch a police car run over four people, one being a woman. I hate American imperialism and war. That's why I do what I do."

Gerry Condon urges "Free Bradley Manning!"



If you were to ask the average person on the streets of Medford who Bradley Manning is, you'd probably get a blank stare and a, "I don't know. Who is he?"

That's why **VFP 156**, brought Gerry Condon to Medford on Feb. 19th to tell the story of Pfc. Bradley Manning to the public and get peace activists working to demand his release.

Gerry Condon is one of the strongest peace workers on the West Coast. He's the immediate past president of the Great Seattle chapter of VFP, a stalwart member of Courage to Resist and a member of the Bradley Manning Support Network. Maybe you heard Gerry talk about Bradley's case on JPR's Jefferson Exchange on Feb. 18th.

Bradley Manning is the 23-year-old Army private accused of leaking through WikiLeaks a videotape shot from a helicopter showing U.S. soldiers shooting innocent civilians and reporters in Iraq. He is charged with later leaking thousands of classified documents about problems the U.S. has encountered after invading Iraq and Afghanistan to WikiLeaks, some of which were published in newspapers around the world.

Gerry told us that Bradley was arrested 8 months ago and is kept in solitary confinement in a Marine Corps brig in Quantico, VA, sometimes in what Gerry considers to be conditions tantamount to torture and facing 52 years in prison if convicted at court martial with more charges likely.

I'll let Gerry Condon take it from here. Below (with some editing) is what Gerry wrote about Bradley in response to comments that Bradley's leaks are a crime and have put our soldiers in harm's way:

Blowing the whistle on war crimes, as Bradley Manning is accused of doing is NOT a crime. (It must be remembered that he has not be convicted of anything yet). Covering up evidence of war crimes IS a crime under international law, U.S. law and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The Army is covering up evidence of war crimes. Bradley Manning tried to take his concerns up the chain of command, but was told to "shut up."

There has not been a single documented instance of harm that has come to anyone as a result of WikiLeaks' publication of documents, which probably never should have been classified in the first place.

If the U.S. government and military were so concerned about protecting the identities of their Iraqi and Afghani collaborators, they would have redacted their names from these documents before they allowed them to be accessible to over 500,000 people around the globe, including many private security contractors, some of whom are also working for other governments.

By sending our sons and daughters into harm's way in wars and occupations based on lies and profiteering, the U.S. government is the one that is guilty of putting their lives at risk.

Bradley Manning is a patriot who put his own life at risk in order to shed light on the reality of these wars, as opposed to the myths (created by our government and "imbedded" news reporters). If the American people will now step up to demand an end to these perpetual wars, many lives will be saved. This is why I support Bradley Manning.

If you want to find out more about Bradley, please check out the Bradley Manning Support Network at www.bradleymanning.org. You can also sign a petition at www.StandWithBrad.org.