

Every month since February 1987 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence. The Olympia FOR's program airs several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at www.tctv.net.

You can also watch the program described below (**and many more than 125 of our previous monthly interview programs and also many special programs**) at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org. Simply click the **TV programs** link, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch. Many of our website's TV program listings also include links to documents describing the program in Word and/or .pdf format.

May 2016

“Vietnam War: What REALLY Happened”

by Glen Anderson, this TV series' producer and host

Fifty years ago the U.S. was massively escalating the war in Vietnam. Recently the Pentagon launched an expensive propaganda campaign to whitewash what really happened and to glorify the Vietnam War as a noble effort. The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's May 2016 TV program counters that with truthful information that the Pentagon does not want you to know.

Two guests – Larry Kerschner and Mark Fleming – will help us explore this topic.

Both guests served in the U.S. army in Vietnam.

Both went back to Vietnam recently for peace-related purposes.

Both are active with Veterans for Peace and with the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Mark and Larry discussed the Pentagon's propaganda campaign to whitewash the war in Vietnam and SE Asia and Veterans For Peace's response, which is VFP's “Full Disclosure” campaign. VFP's national website is www.veteransforpeace.org and Olympia's chapter is at www.vfp109rcc.org VFP's “Full Disclosure” campaign has the website www.vietnamfulldisclosure.org

U.S. militarism in Asia and the Pacific Rim from the mid-1800s have included Hawaii, the Philippines, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and now President Obama's “pivot to Asia.” The U.S. government and mainstream news media have ignored all of this context and looked upon the Vietnam War as merely an aberration in U.S. history.

Very few Americans know anything about Vietnam's history before the big U.S. war there. After the U.S.'s westward expansion reached the Pacific Ocean in the mid-1800s, our government pushed toward business and military adventures in China and elsewhere in Asia in the later 1800s, including overthrowing Hawaii's indigenous government and seizing Guam and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War. Filipinos were already fighting Spain's colonial occupation, so when the U.S. defeated Spain they continued fighting the U.S. military occupation.

France had been occupying “French Indochina” (Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos) as a French colony for a long time. Vietnamese people – under their nationalist leader Ho Chi Minh (their George Washington figure) – were fighting France to become independent. When World War I ended Ho Chi Minh went to Versailles, France, to seek independence as part of the post-World War I settlement. President Woodrow Wilson had spoken highly of democracy and freedom, so Ho Chi Minh sought and expected U.S. support for Vietnam’s independence, but Wilson rebuffed him.

During World War II Japan occupied French Indochina, so Ho Chi Minh’s nationalist Viet Minh fought to expel the Japanese invaders and become independent. Actually, some US “special forces” troops were allies with the Viet Minh in fighting against the Japanese. That’s why Ho Chi Minh thought the US might support Vietnamese independence after World War II. But the US wanted to build up NATO in Europe and wanted France to be a strong part of NATO, so our government decided not to oppose France’s colonies in Asia. After World War II the U.S. again rebuffed the Vietnamese people’s yearning for independence and returned that nation to France to become a colony again. Since the U.S. opposed Vietnamese independence again, Ho Chi Minh felt frustrated by the U.S.’s repeated rebuffs and sought help from Moscow instead.

The U.S. helped France maintain its colony until France finally lost at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. By that time the U.S. was paying 80% of France’s war costs there.

The Geneva Accords settled matters with a temporary line, so the Vietnamese troops from the north (largely communist) would retreat north of that line, and the Vietnamese troops from the south of that line (largely anti-communist) would retreat to the south. The Geneva Accords explicitly said that the line must not be construed as a national boundary. But the U.S. treated it as such. The Geneva Accords said that a nationwide election must occur in 1956 to decide who would lead Vietnam. But President Eisenhower knew that Ho Chi Minh was so popular as their independence movement’s leader that Eisenhower prevented that election from happening.

Vietnam was an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, but there were some Catholics in the South who had collaborated with the French colonialists. The southern leaders were largely corrupt elitists who did not represent the large majority. But the U.S. supported them, even though most Vietnamese people did not.

Hardly any Americans paid any attention to Vietnam until the war was well underway in the mid-1960s. But much of what the American people thought they knew was not accurate.

There was never a chance that the US would ever be able to “win.” South Vietnamese leaders were corrupt and seeking their own self-interest. Their soldiers did not want to fight.

Several things the U.S. military decision-makers did undermined the mission. When U.S. soldiers arrived in large numbers they saw the realities and felt alienated. Many of the U.S. troops did not “buy in” to the war’s mission and felt alienated from it. Many “opted out” by using alcohol or drugs. A great many active duty U.S. troops opposed the war and worked against it in

a variety of subtle and overt ways. GI resistance was significant, along with the civilian peace movement, which started small and grew rapidly in size, diversity and range of activities.

The American politicians, military leaders, and news media never understood Vietnam realistically – as Vietnamese people saw it – but only from the U.S. government’s perspective. The true information did exist, but it was ignored. Propaganda dominated. The Pentagon Papers – a compilation of government documents – revealed the massive lies and deliberate deceptions that were occurring all along the way.

Larry Kerschner and Mark Fleming each read powerful poems they had written about their experiences as U.S. Army soldiers during the Vietnam War.

The U.S. kept refusing to admit that the war was inherently unwinnable. The Paris Peace Accords of 1973 laid out a deal to end the war, and the U.S. finally left in 1975.

The more the American people learned about the realities of the U.S. war in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia – and the massive violence against the people and their environment – the more public opinion turned against the U.S. war in SE Asia – and more generally against U.S. military actions in other countries. This aversion to war was referred to as the “Vietnam Syndrome.”

But the U.S. military hawks wanted to overcome the “Vietnam Syndrome” and get back to “business as usual” with the U.S. Empire. Powerful pro-war people in the U.S. launched various kinds of propaganda to demonize the peace movement and rebuild the military’s public image. They blamed the peace movement and blamed the limits on how much violence the U.S. military could unleash on Vietnam. They could never admit that the war was inherently unwinnable.

Both Larry and Mark are active with Veterans For Peace (www.veteransforpeace.org) and our local chapter in Olympia, the Rachel Corrie Chapter #109 (www.vfp109rcc.org). They spoke briefly about Veterans For Peace.

The also discussed VFP’s “Full Disclosure” campaign to tell the truth about Vietnam in contrast to the Pentagon’s propaganda campaign (www.vietnamfulldisclosure.org) marking the 50th anniversary of the major U.S. escalation.

Sadly, the U.S. has not learned the lessons from Vietnam. Our government is repeating the same mistakes in other countries, including Afghanistan and Iraq. The errors of judgment that led to the Vietnam War and kept us there are still powerful and trapping us in our current foreign policy. So this is not just history; it is still current. We are having these current foreign policy debacles because we have not learned lessons from Vietnam.

Indeed, the U.S. culture and economy are trapped in militarism. Despite all of the evidence, our nation and our people still think military violence can solve international problems. The TV program host, Glen Anderson, invites people to read an article he wrote recently debunking militarism. It is on the “**Issues**” part of www.olympiafor.org. Visit www.olympiafor.org, click

“Issues,” and click the link to read **“The U.S.’s Violent Foreign Policy Makes Problems Worse! We Must Debunk the Whole Fraudulent Notion of Militarism!”**

There is a famous saying that **those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.** This is certainly the case with the U.S.’s arrogant and ignorant war in Vietnam – and the similar damage our government has done to other nations – and to ourselves.

The U.S. keeps recruiting, killing and disabling our young people for stupid reasons. The U.S. keeps wasting our tax dollars for stupid reasons – and then keeps saying we can’t afford to meet people’s basic human needs for jobs, health, housing or education.

Our nation needs to see reality, which includes seeing things from other people’s points of view. Our nation needs to see that violence does not solve problems, but only makes problems worse and causes more problems. Our government has trapped our nation in a death spiral. The only remedy is for ordinary people to reject war and work for peace.

We recommend these resources:

- Veterans For Peace: www.veteransforpeace.org
- VFP’s Olympia chapter #109: www.vfp109rcc.org
- VFP’s Vietnam “Full Disclosure” campaign: www.vietnamfulldisclosure.org
- **A link to a page of resources about Vietnam** will be posted next to May 2016 TV link at www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm
- **“The U.S.’s Violent Foreign Policy Makes Problems Worse! We Must Debunk the Whole Fraudulent Notion of Militarism!”** is posted on **“Issues”** part of www.olympiafor.org

You can get information about a wide variety of issues related to peace, social justice and non-violence by contacting the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation at (360) 491-9093 or www.olympiafor.org