

## Dick Bernard

May 23, 2020

Dear all:

Your request, and the follow-ups of Frank, Flo and John in particular generate this letter. I hope Mary Ann weighs in also.). Three hours after your initial request, came the attachment from my friend, Larry Johnson. He was conscientious objector in Vietnam era, and served as a medic, I think in Germany, during his time in service. He didn't request Germany, that is what he was assigned.). He's also past president of Veterans for Peace here, a good friend, and his wife is founder of a group called the Veteran Resilience Project, for victims of "hidden wounds of war", these days most of whom are Vietnam and Iraq veterans: <https://www.resiliencemn.org>.

We each have our own story. There is also a mythology about the near sacredness of war. We see statues and monuments and paintings to war everywhere; rare is the recognition of the folly of war, or the benefits of peace.

Lauri, a good place to take the kids sometime is to the rock garden across Cedar from the Armory. It is on the capitol grounds, and there is a single boulder for every Minnesota county, on each of which is found one quotation from one letter from one serviceman in one of our many wars. I don't know whose idea it was, but it is a very powerful testimony.

On May 8 I published a blog under the title "Another War President", which speaks for itself. Every President from Harry Truman through Richard Nixon was in one way or another ensnared in Vietnam, because to not do so would cost them votes in the next election. The evidence is 58,220 names on the Vietnam Memorial Wall near the Lincoln Memorial in DC. And these are just the dead, not the walking wounded, or those who died under some bridge somewhere, carrying their own demons of what they experienced.

No one who knows me in any personal way would accuse me of being anti-military or being totally against war. There is evil around and among us, unrestricted. At the same time, we're too accustomed to conjuring up an enemy to defeat. It is harder to war on a disease, than to label the disease as being someone's fault (i.e. "China"). We have to go to war, blaming someone.

Personally, I wasn't exhibiting any courage when I went in the Army in Jan. 1962. I graduated from college in Dec. 1961, not a particularly good time to be looking for a teaching job. I had a draft card (which I had lost), and I knew would be subject to the Draft, so I volunteered simply to get it over with. There were no visible winds of war when I went in, at least to ordinary people. Some wanted to go to Saigon.

I knew veterans – lots of GI Bill folks at the college – but they were just other kids, albeit a bit older than most of us, quite a few married and thus different status.

Cuba and Castro was exciting some people then, but not me (though I was in the Army during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and heard and saw President Kennedy speak to the

nation about it in a barracks at Ft. Carson CO.) The Mess Sergeant had a small TV; the next day we were mustered out really early, and later read about it in the Rocky Mountain News. Our base was only a few miles from a major target, Cheyenne Mountain. The consequence of war with Cuba was not abstract where we were.

It is doubtless true, what Frank says I said: “never join the Army”. There may be veterans who liked Basic Training, but I haven’t met any! I had a college degree, and high test scores and was asked, but I had absolutely no interest in becoming, an officer, and I ultimately became Company Clerk staying in the same company for the rest of what turned out to be 21 months of service in an infantry company and an Honorable Discharge. I got out of the Army about two months before President Kennedy was assassinated.

The other communications cause me to re-visit what I know about our family service history. As best I know, here it is. Additions, corrections? Let me know.

Of course, there’s Frank, John and myself, Vietnam era vets. Mary Ann and Flo spent extended time periods in voluntary federal service (Peace Corps) and Mary Ann, I think, also in public health work early in her career.

Of the 28 cousins (including we siblings), I know of only two others in military service, Jim Pinkney and Paul Busch.

Then there’s my parents generation. Mom’s brothers served: George (officer on a Destroyer for three years in the Pacific) and Art (U.S. Army). Art graduated from HS in 1945 as the war ended, and he was thus in the service for only a year. Vincent was not called – needed on the farm. Mary and Edith were in the civilian female volunteer corps – they even had uniforms. Their photos are in the Busch collection at the state archives in Bismarck ND (collection 11082).

Of course, there was Dad’s brother, Frank Bernard, USS Arizona. And Dad had cousins in Winnipeg, where 7 of the boys from one Collette family were in either Canadian or American armed forces at the same time. One was killed, another injured. Another one of Dad’s cousins, Marvin Campbell, Frank’s buddy, joined the Army before WWII, ended the war as a Colonel briefly in charge of a Japanese region.

Next door to the Busch farm were the Bernings, who genetically were siblings to our Busch’s (which makes their kids our first cousins, though we never knew these families. By the time we were old enough to know them, they no longer lived in the area.)

August Berning, who was similar in age to George and Frank, was a Marine Captain in the Pacific most of WWII; Melvin Berning, Art’s age, first went in the Army Air Force, washed out, later served in Korean War, though I don’t think he had any combat assignment. Several of their siblings, all women, served as Mary and Edith. In those days, of course, “women’s work” was to get married, be a secretary, or nurse or teacher or similar. That was about it. I don’t recall any talk of “Rosie, the riveter” in our family – there may have been, but I don’t know of any.

One of our genetic cousins, William L\_\_\_ of Rockford IL, died the end of the first day of his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, March 14, 1954. His mother, Irene, was born a few months before Mom at the farm across the pasture from Busch’s. William was single, and years later I

asked a member of that family what was his cause of death. She wrote back immediately: he had been in the Korean War and come home a psychological mess, and the night of his death he'd been at a bar with friends, once again lamenting his time in the war. One of them, she said, told him "if it's all so bad, why don't you just go home and kill yourself". And he did. I often wonder about the 'friend' who told him to kill himself. Heavy baggage.

Somewhere around that time, our family made the first of two trips to Chicago to visit the Art Busch's, who married in Jan. 1955 and had just moved to the West Chicago suburb of Broadview. I remember that we stopped to visit the L's who lived in Rockford. As my siblings will remember, long trips were not routine in our family. (One of the pictures in Vincents drawer at the farm was of Mr. L with three of his kids outside the barn at the farm. William would have been about eight years old then....)

One of the Busch's hired men was killed in WWI. Grandpa wanted to enlist, but was probably too old, but the real impediment was his being 1<sup>st</sup> generation German-American ancestry, which was a big deal, then.

Grandpa Bernard served a year in the Spanish-American War in the Philippines (1898-99). Four in his Company were killed in a skirmish on Luzon.

The first Collette to come to the states (Samuel, to MN in 1857) was in Henry Hastings Sibleys regiment in what was then called the Indian War in 1862-63.

My first wife (Tom's Mom), Barbara's brother, Mike, was in the Army in the early 1970s. His assignment was in Germany. He ended up on disability from 1977 on, and I think it was service related. His uniform is part of the ND Historical Society archives – I gave it to them after he died in 2007. He had planned to make the military a career, but was drummed out by someone in ND who complained about his earlier allowing high school students to protest against the war when he was a teacher in the town. I've seen the transcript, and I can see how it would help drive him over the edge. He was honorably discharged. He used to muse about being homeless somewhere warmer than ND. He was never homeless, and ultimately died of cancer at the age of 60.

There are other stories. Let this be just a beginning of this most important conversation.

For the record, I've been a member of the American Legion since 1994; and of the Veterans for Peace since about 2002. There is a local Legion chapter here, but no Club, and if there was a club I likely wouldn't go anyway. But I know the local commander, and the local leadership of Vets for Peace.

These groups are like any other. Certain people take the lead, and may or may not reflect their members. So, the national leadership (and thus the microphone) of the American Legion seemed far to the right wing; the national leadership of Vets for Peace seems far to the left. It isn't quite so easy to indict individuals or groups. Thanks for reading.