

PRICE OF ESCAPE: DRUGS, VIETNAM AND THE
AMERICAN SOLDIER

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Introduction

The Vietnam War proves one of the most varied and deceptive historical terrains in American historiography. It seems as soon as one comes to conclusions pertaining to virtually any aspect of the war, some other resource gives a completely different account. This holds true for alcohol and drug abuse during the Vietnam War. Drugs and the counterculture of the 1960s pervade popular perceptions of the Vietnam War, a war in which domestic problems took a front row seat at the battle lines, something oral histories attest to lending direct observations of the topic at hand.

In particular, this inquiry reveals complexities within the stereotypical conceptions of drug and alcohol abuse during the Vietnam War. Typically in America at the time one who heavily abused alcohol had a higher propensity for drug abuse, but in Vietnam this trend became reversed. Statistics show that men who consumed large amounts of alcohol tended to avoid narcotics which oral histories demonstrate through the social demarcations associated with drug and alcohol abuse. This example of a sociological aberration demonstrates the power of perspective concerning substance abuse and the need for a detailed analysis of men's conceptions concerning drugs and alcohol provided by their own testimonies. Medical literature and interviews reveal that indeed a soldier's friends, rank and location heavily influenced their drug and alcohol abuse patterns.

The mass of oral histories recently provided by Vietnam veterans grant the historian a ground-level perspective of substance and alcohol abuse during Vietnam, or

any prior American war, previously unavailable. Typically the drug use of the enlisted men and draftees' occupied the limelight concerning drug and alcohol abuse and escapism during Vietnam but recent evidence demonstrates that this conclusion's scope is myopic, because interviews reveal that officers and "lifers," or career soldiers, used alcohol to escape much like their drug using comrades among the enlisted men and draftees. Oral histories demonstrate the distance between drinkers and drug users during the war due to the social stereotyping associated with substances and how these perceptions affected experiences. All of these themes are to be explored, something which has yet to be done in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, given that nearly forty years have passed since the Vietnam War, many more veterans have begun to talk about their experiences and interpretations.

Alessandro Portelli wrote that war provides a “space where the individual narrative of biography meets the collective narrative of history.” These words voice this enquiry’s direction concerning the incorporation of first-hand narrative within the broader historical landscape. Portelli’s remarks illuminate the need to reconcile popular conceptions and actual events pertaining to the Vietnam War and the men who fought it, many of whom are just now speaking about their experiences.¹ Employing oral interviews conducted and collected by the author, this study’s look at substance abuse during the Vietnam War elucidates the role of drugs and alcohol in the war, especially after the Tet Offensive in 1968.²

The current historiography’s fleeting exploration into substance abuse and its myriad effects during the Vietnam War cries out for a comprehensive ground-level

¹ Paul Badra and Michael Zeitlin, eds, *Soldier Talk: The Vietnam War in Oral Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 142.

² Badra and Zeitlin, *Soldier Talk*, 142

examination incorporating the full breadth of sources. Casual historians and readers rely on survey texts and a handful of compiled oral histories to elicit some kind of historical perspective, though such information is woefully limited in its scope. One of the few works concerning drug abuse in Vietnam is the *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* by Alfred W. McCoy, a preeminent scholar of Southeast Asian history, particularly concerning the “Golden Triangle” and drug trade there, and his colleagues.³

McCoy’s work sees the collusion of South Vietnamese officials playing a preeminent role in the boom of the heroin trade. Written in 1972, his work’s perspective vacillates to the apologist at times, paying little attention to the consumption side of the drug equation. He instead focuses on the sometimes tenuous connections concerning South Vietnamese officials and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and the flooding of American bases with heroin. Essentially, his work concludes that without the coordinated financing and aggressive sales campaign by leading South Vietnamese officials the drug epidemic would not have been nearly as severe.⁴ This top-down history of the heroin trade leaves little room for individual agency of American servicemen or day-to-day drug related encounters. *The Politics of Heroin* succeeds in establishing the enormity of the heroin trade pulsing through Southeast Asia, from the heart of the Golden Triangle through the veins of Cambodia, Thailand and Laos down into South Vietnam and on to Hong Kong.

³ Alfred W. McCoy, Cathleen B. Read, and Leonard P. Adams II, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

⁴ McCoy, Read and Adams, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 183.

Adalino Cabral's book titled *A Never Ending Story: War in Vietnam, On Drugs and At Home*⁵ lends a more contemporary look at drug abuse in Vietnam though falls short of an in-depth analysis. This overview of the "drug scene" traces the connections between the growing discontent, rising drug culture and other social factors in the United States, but sheds little new light on the matter, especially concerning ground level perspectives. Reading Cabral's work reiterates the importance of oral interviews in obtaining a full view of life in Vietnam, something that is nearly impossible using secondary sources relying solely on press and government sources.

Most revealing and perhaps the most detailed account of personal drug use during the Vietnam War is Jay Dee Ruybal's work *The Drug Hazed War in Southeast Asia*.⁶ Ruybal recounts his experiences in the Army while grappling with drug abuse and leading an "admirable" career in Vietnam. His detailed descriptions and polemical ruminations reveal not only what happened but how Ruybal wishes readers to remember the war and substance abuse by soldiers. His work voices themes explored within this study, namely substance abuse, drug culture in Vietnam and how drug use affected men's perspectives. According to Ruybal, blame rested squarely on the war, not on individual soldiers who were used as cannon fodder and succumbed to the ever present temptations of South Vietnam: sex, drugs, booze and profiteering. These evils thrust at young, unsuspecting youths robbed them of their youth, innocence and wellbeing. Apologist to the end, Ruybal's account seeks to impart upon readers the evils inherent to the Vietnam War and its corruption of American youth.⁷

⁵ Adalino Cabral, *A Never Ending Story: War in Vietnam, On Drugs and At Home* (Boston: Adalino Cabral, 1995).

⁶ Jay Dee Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War in Southeast Asia* (Albuquerque, N. M.: Creative Designs, 1998).

⁷ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 251.

Last, popular American survey texts undoubtedly provide the main source of information regarding drug abuse to the casual reader. George Donelson Moss and Ronald H. Spector both cover drug abuse in their contemporary works.⁸ Spector's book *After Tet* succinctly and skillfully conveys the growing drug culture within the military, the rise of heroin in 1970 and the social problems from the US appearing in Vietnam. These works rely primarily on government documents and media sources providing good general descriptions, but they understandably fall short in depth and sociological analysis.

The limited body of scholarship demonstrates the need to fill this void with voices of men and women in the field dealing with addiction, substance abuse, and the self medication arising on the battlefield. This study contextualizes the oral histories in regards to the latest medical literature concerning addiction and substance abuse. Senate hearings and government documentation concerning drug abuse in Vietnam lend insight into the government view of this issue and what information officials acted upon.

Not limited to historical significance, this enquiry addresses drug abuse in general as one of the most conspicuous social ills of contemporary America. The military's "closed social system" lends itself to "historical, empirical and comparative epidemiological scrutiny" in ways difficult or impossible in the heterogeneous civilian world.⁹ In essence, oral testimony and government documentation bolstered by current medical theories reflect poorly upon military culture in general and specifically the type of war conducted in Vietnam which exacerbated nascent sociological problems. Similar

⁸ George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam: An American Ordeal* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990) and Ronald H. Spector. *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

⁹ John G. Cull and Richard E. Hardy, *Types of Drug Abusers and Their Abuses* (Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1974), 33

to almost every historical inquiry, this study reveals a multi-causal explanation for substance abuse in Vietnam while linking key concepts rarely, if ever, explored.

The large number of oral histories providing the backbone of this endeavor deserve a mention here concerning their validity and usage. One must remember that the men who were able to provide their stories undoubtedly represent the more “well adjusted” and accessible veterans reflected in their perspectives. The author’s own experiences at a Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association reunion in Washington D.C. reflected this fact, that the veterans most able and willing to give testimonies often come from a stable background and have had relative success readjusting to civilian life. This consequently results in those men who most likely delved the deepest into substance abuse during the Vietnam War are still unheard as many have undoubtedly battled with their addictions upon their return to the United States. Having confronted the admitted deficiencies of a relatively small pool of interviews from a fairly homogenous population a second concern arises, namely the selection of interviews to be used in this study and how they were chosen. The length of the Vietnam War means that men serving from 1964 to 1967 often did not encounter the degree of substance abuse as men having served later due to the smaller supply of drugs flowing into the country. Many interviews reflect this fact with men serving before 1968 commenting on the lack of substantial drug and alcohol abuse and the reasons for this increase will be explored later. The men who served after 1968 and did not report having seen alcohol and substance abuse are few, but they deserve mention here to avoid accusations of “cherry picking” sources to support certain arguments. Interviews incorporated were chosen in respect to their support of overarching themes within the oral histories themselves but also in the government

documents and secondary sources, in other words the oral histories used most often represent the standard experience not the exception.

Chapter I

Setting the Stage

The men who fought after the Tet Offensive in Vietnam grew up during the most turbulent and drug-drenched years of the sixties. Lending further credence to the inquiry at hand and to gain a more complete understanding of the motivations behind these men's actions, a cursory glance at the culture and society producing them is practical. Drugs and the counter-culture played prominent roles in American society of the sixties and undoubtedly shaped these young men's view of drugs, sex and escapism, all of which were readily available for many men during their service in the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War generated the largest anti-war movement in United States history. The opposition resulted in "deep and emotional polarization" within American society spurring many young people to lose faith in American integrity. In addition to this polarization rose an increasing public distrust in authoritative government institutions like congress, the presidency and the military.¹⁰ Vietnam proved the last straw for many American youths frustrated with America's role abroad and involvement in a seemingly pointless war. Lack of adequate progress through legitimate channels pushed many protestors into more overt and destructive means of expression. Throughout the "antiwar decade of 1963-1973" the antiwar movement crossed many racial, religious, class and political lines. Undoubtedly the strong rhetoric espoused by pro and antiwar factions aroused feelings of alienation among men entering Vietnam during these tumultuous

¹⁰ Morgan, Edward P., *The 60's Experience: Hard Lessons About Modern America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 128.

times. Interviews reveal that indeed, many men felt strong nationalistic pride and disliked anti-war protestors. Segments of the movement sought varying degrees of change ranging from merely ending the war to totally transforming American society. Consequently, one could project virtually any attributes onto the anti-war movement such as drug users, hippies, radical groups or any other negative stereotypes due to its heterogeneous makeup.¹¹

The war itself, much like the antiwar movement, came to symbolize different things to different people. Some viewed it as an outward symbol of an alienating and unjust system operating in America. African-Americans within the antiwar movement viewed the war's high proportion of black casualties as an extension of American racism and inequality. Many students saw the war and its technocrats symbolizing the autocratic and rigid education system. Feminists viewed Vietnam as a manifestation of male machismo and the embodiment of negative masculine personality traits.¹²

The year 1968 proved a pivotal and bloody one for soldiers in Vietnam but also for Americans watching the war on their television sets. Seen by many as the watershed point in the war due to the Tet Offensive launched by the North Vietnamese the tenaciousness surprised many at home. Attacking a Marine combat base at Khe Sanh on January 21, Vietcong and North Vietnamese forces then undertook a South Vietnam-wide assault that shocked many Americans. The Tet Offensive represented to many Americans the tenacity and determination of the North Vietnamese, despite the administration's promises of victory. These attacks destroyed the administration's credibility for many because leading up to Tet US officials talked of "wearing down the

¹¹ Edward, *The 60's Experience*, 131.

¹² Edward, *The 60's Experience*, 132.

enemy” and the promise of a “light at the end of the tunnel.” Men entered Vietnam during this time under very controversial and polarized conditions manifested in interviews in which many stated feelings of alienation from mainstream society and hostility towards protestors.¹³

Word of the My Lai massacre further blemished the military’s image when Lieutenant William Calley’s unit slaughtered hundreds of civilians in the hamlet of My Lai. This gruesome news further fuelled antiwar protests undoubtedly exacerbating the declining morale among American servicemen. Sadly, as other interviews support¹⁴, Calley’s exploits were not an isolated incident.¹⁵

Adding to the social pressure cooker of the late 1960s, the rise of psychedelic drugs and the Haight-Ashbury scene spawned social forces and problems new to American society. Haight-Ashbury, an “attractive and inexpensive” section of San Francisco, symbolized drugs and the counter culture. LSD became a prominent part of this Haight scene and celebrities like Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, and Harvard professor Timothy Leary made such use public and widely known.¹⁶ Timothy Leary, an outspoken drug advocate of the 1960s, gained notoriety after first experimenting with LSD in the spring of 1962 at the age of forty-two. A PhD and professor of psychology, he has been described as a “promoter, apologist and high priest of psychedelic nonpareil.”¹⁷

¹³ Edward, *The 60’s Experience*, 154.

¹⁴ Wallace Terry, ed, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Random House, 1984). Several interviews mention wartime atrocities in addition to those found within the Texas Tech Archives.

¹⁵ Edward, *The 60’s Experience*, 161.

¹⁶ Edward, *The 60’s Experience*, 179.

¹⁷ Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 194.

Leary's academic background lent legitimacy to the proposed intellectual and spiritual enlightenment attainable by drug use, augmented by promiscuous sex and the rejection of mainstream culture. Undoubtedly, his contribution to the rising drug movement in America trickled down throughout mainstream society resulting in young soldiers with often lax attitudes towards drugs to some degree, especially compared to older soldiers who had little or no exposure to narcotics. Much like the war itself, drugs took on new meanings within American culture with many associating bell bottoms, rock music and long hair with drug abuse. The causal link between American culture and drug abuse is difficult to establish but considering the statistics and testimonies concerning drug use there exists clear indications that the rising drug culture precipitated use among younger men.

Thanks to the *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, a government study, the historian gains a fairly accurate statistical understanding of the men beginning their tours in Vietnam after 1967 and who departed Vietnam in September 1971. Roughly 13,760 Army enlisted men left Vietnam in September with about 1,400 testing positive for drugs upon their departure. This study conducted by the Special Action Office chose a random sample of 470 men from the 1,400 testing positive for drugs to represent the General Sample. Later conducting interviews and collecting urine samples, the study reveals trends of drug abuse during the Vietnam War and how they continued or dissipated upon soldiers' return home. Interviews and urine tests took place between May and September 1972 or approximately eight to twelve months after departure.¹⁸

¹⁸ Lee N. Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*. DC: Special Action Office For Drug Abuse Prevention Executive Office of the President, 1974, vii.

According to the study, a typical soldier entering Vietnam was a previously employed twenty-year-old caucasian high school graduate entering the service. Statistics reflect stability in the home life of most men demonstrated by both parents having reared him, neither parents having alcohol or drug abuse problems and both never having been arrested. Most soldiers were not married, had never been arrested, and many went to Vietnam often less than a year in the service. Typical soldiers lacked other overseas assignments previous to Vietnam as well as any disciplinary action on his military record, but most men had experience with alcohol before they entered the service at the average age of nineteen. According to the study, “all but twenty percent had been drunk at least once in the year before induction; a third had been drunk weekly that year. Four percent had done enough drinking and had enough problems before entering service to suggest they might be incipient alcoholics.”¹⁹ These statistics reveal relatively normal experimentation in alcohol for these young men entering Vietnam during the late sixties.

Alcohol played a prominent role in soldiers’ social environments at home, but not drugs. Very few used heroin or knew of users, while about half the men experimented with some drugs before entering the service. Among those who did abuse drugs, 17% of them only used marijuana “or its derivative,” while heroin accounted for only 2% of the respondents’ drug use before service. Men entering Vietnam with “significant” drug experience differed from their “drug naïve” brethren. Often these drug experienced men came from large cities, particularly those on the West coast. Their domestic situation before service typically consisted of an unsavory upbringing including a history of arrests. Statistics reveal that the “age at induction, education, and being a draftee or

¹⁹ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 19.

Regular Army soldier were all unrelated” to a soldier’s drug use before military service.²⁰

One very important finding, reiterating the importance of further study of substance abuse in the Vietnam War, is the unremarkable background of the men entering the service in 1968 and 1969 and their behavior as a whole closely resembling that of the general public. This fact allows one to extrapolate results out to represent a “random” population of Americans during the Vietnam War and how they would have reacted.

The minority of men entering Vietnam had been in service for more than two years prior to deployment. Most of these men were career soldiers on their “second or later enlistments.” These men for the most part experienced tours overseas or had been previously stationed in Vietnam. This experience and longer service meant these men resided in the upper echelons of military pay grades (E5 or higher) having much less contact with drugs or drugs users. Only 10% of these higher ranking men had previously used any illicit drugs and out of these only 4% had used anything other than marijuana resulting in less sympathy for those using drugs before military service²¹ These men would have a much lower risk of developing drug abuse problems due to their age and rank.

Results of the study revealed that first term enlisted men typically were younger and had less education than draftees. Of first term enlisted men, 39% failed to finish high school compared to 18% of draftees while draftees, numbered only 6% under the age of twenty compared to first term enlistees who numbered 29% under the age of twenty.²²

Results shows that drug and alcohol experiences closely corresponded between draftees and first time enlistees, though draftees reported slightly less heavy drinking before the

²⁰ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 19.

²¹ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 22.

²² Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 23.

service. Interestingly, during the war enlistees proved a much higher incidence of drug abuse than draftees. The researchers explain this phenomenon partly by attributing the draftees' more common combat assignments as opposed to support roles. They point out that in Vietnam there existed twice as many support roles as combat assignments, contributing to drug abuse due to the longer periods of boredom and inactivity.²³

The focus now shifts to Vietnam and information regarding addiction among service personnel. Statistics have varied from book to book so a cursory glance at the actual government documents themselves allows the most complete look at numbers concerning addiction and abuse. One study conducted in 1970 at the Cam Ranh Bay Replacement Center indicated a marked increase in drug abuse cases compared to past years. This study's subjects included those men leaving Vietnam in November 1969 and another group, consisting of 1,193 men, arriving during the same time. The increase in drug use occurred within both populations, incoming and outgoing. The incoming group showed a rise in the use of marijuana and hard drugs while the outgoing group revealed a similar increase. Results indicated that "increased educational level, single marital status, and frequency of exposure to hostile fire were positively correlated," with drug use while abuse among senior NCOs appeared "negligible." One of the most alarming changes concerned the rise in heroin/morphine use with over 22% reporting using them at least once during their tour. Of respondents, 10% reported using heroin within the last thirty days leading up to their departure. Interestingly, only 7% of men reported using heroin/morphine before entering Vietnam, illustrating the drug problems' ramifications. Despite the admitted weaknesses of the survey, the reluctance of men to discuss drug abuse and differing regions of military service, the authors believe that the results show

²³ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 25.

an increase in both marijuana and heroine/morphine use and addiction among the enlisted men while showing slight increases in the other drug categories.²⁴

Dr. Joel Kaplan's statements before a Senate Subcommittee deal with Nha Trang within a similar time frame as the previous study. Dr. Kaplan resided over one of two neuro-psychiatric facilities treating servicemen in Vietnam. The commanding officer of the 98th Medical Detachment Neuro-Psychiatric Team, he and his colleagues estimate that between 50-80% of all Army personnel serving in Vietnam had smoked marijuana at least once. From his clinic "70% or approximately 3,000 soldiers ...were drug abusers" meaning much more than occasional marijuana smokers, but rather using drugs on a daily basis. His estimates for marijuana use among his inpatient population are roughly 50-80% while mentioning that his earlier estimate of 50-80% of all Army personnel having tried marijuana arose from interviews with patients and soldiers he and his team came into contact with while in Vietnam. Other drugs he encountered included barbiturates, opium, amphetamines, LSD, sniffing glue and the pellets from a Darvon capsule.²⁵

The earlier mentioned study conducted by the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention found that narcotic use never reached the same proportions as marijuana use. Around 31% of men interviewed reported that half or more of the men in their unit used heroin or opium regularly. Virtually every man serving in Vietnam knew of someone who used some form of narcotics regularly while only 5% said that no one in his unit used drugs regularly, and 2% claimed to know no one at all abusing narcotics. Similar to other studies, this one found that those with acquaintances of narcotics users

²⁴ John G. Cull and Richard E. Hardy, *Types of Drug Abusers and Their Abuses* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1974), 45.

²⁵ Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Drug Use in Vietnam: Hearing Before The Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, 91st Congress, Second session, March 24, 1970, 2.

before the war numbered 5% whereas after leaving Vietnam numbered 95%. Practically all the men were offered narcotics during their tour and more than half of them within the first month. Additionally, three quarters of men reported that narcotics were readily available within their own unit and the other quarter reported they could get it outside their own unit inside an hour's time.²⁶

The Winter Soldier Investigation, a media event telling of war crimes committed or witnessed by soldiers and others while in Vietnam, painted a dire picture of drug abuse, reporting that nearly 12% of all armed enlisted men and roughly 20% of Army enlisted men used some opiate at least once between September 1970 and September 1971, citing a study conducted on behalf of the Defense Department. In 1971 Assistant Secretary of Defense Roger Kelley submitted that during the first quarter of that year over 3,600 Army personnel asked for amnesty to deal with their heroin problem and in 1970 over 174 drug-related deaths occurred.²⁷ During 1970 more Americans were evacuated from Vietnam due to drug related reasons than for injuries sustained from combat.²⁸

By 1971 the drug problem among American servicemen generated a grave concern among a committee to investigate opiate production in Southeast Asia. The subcommittee's report points out that the recommendations by the conference, namely the establishment of a drug task force under General Abrams, never reached the General himself by orders of the White House. This occurred during 1971 when drug abuse began to spiral out of control in Vietnam and no doubt the Nixon White House had little

²⁶ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 26.

²⁷ *Interim Summary of the Proceedings, Winter Soldier Investigation into Veteran Drug Abuse* (New York: Vietnam Veterans Against the War, August 2, 3, 1972), 3.

²⁸ Adalino Cabral, *A Never Ending Story: War in Vietnam, On Drugs and At Home* (Boston: Adalino Cabral, 1995), 6.

desire of leaking further negative publicity concerning the war out to the public in the form of public substance abuse initiatives. The committee members agreed that heroin usage ran well above the 5% often cited, running more along the lines of 10%-40% depending on the specific unit.²⁹

A Harvard Twin Study published in 2001 explores patterns of drug use and abuse through the Vietnam Era Twin Registry (VET), a large, national cohort of twins. The two types of twins are monozygotic (MZ) sharing 100% of their genetic information and dizygotic twins (DZ) sharing 50% of their genetic information. Through the use of twins researchers are able to more accurately examine the often convoluted area of nature versus nurture debate dealing with substance use. The VET consists of over eight thousand male-male twin pairs born between 1939 and 1957 and both of whom served in active duty within the military during the Vietnam Era, or between May 1965 and August 1975. Interviews were obtained from 8,169 of the remaining 10,253 men. The VET Registry sample revealed a 10% lifetime diagnosis of “abuse or dependence” on at least one illicit substance, virtually identical to the male twins of the National Comorbidity Survey. This finding further supports the extrapolation of results elicited from studies concerning men having served in Vietnam and their drug abuse patterns onto the larger American population.³⁰

Christian Appy’s *Working-Class War* states that during the first years of full-scale escalation, up to the Tet Offensive in 1968, the majority of American soldiers had not experimented with drugs in Vietnam, resigning their escapism to alcohol. By 1969

²⁹ Congress, Senate, Subcommittee Public Health and Environment, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Production and Abuse of Opiates in the Far East*, 92nd Congress, First session, October, 1971, 9-10 (1430).

³⁰ Ming T. Tsuang et al, “The Harvard Twin Study of Substance Abuse: What We Have Learned.” *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 9 (November 2001), 268.

studies estimated total marijuana users at 50% with 30% of these men residing in the “heavy use” category and by 1971 the total number of users reached around 60%. Marijuana’s presence accompanied most men on their tour of Vietnam with 70% classifying marijuana as “always” available and an additional 22% stating it as “usually” available. Indicative of the widespread use of marijuana in Vietnam, 21% of men indicated that they knew regular smokers before the military and 97% indicated they knew smokers in Vietnam.³¹ These figures represent widespread rise in marijuana usage, in the US and Vietnam, but among heavy users in Vietnam only half had been so before the war. In addition, the marijuana available in Vietnam possessed a much higher THC level than that available in the US at the time.³²

Having established through these statistics that indeed there existed a drug problem in Vietnam, with roughly one in ten men using heroin, the availability and source of the drugs themselves are now appropriate to explore. Marijuana and heroin were so prevalent within Vietnam that one could say they were part and parcel of the Vietnam experience. Two particular drugs will be discussed in length: heroin and marijuana. While only two bands of the narcotic spectrum in Vietnam, they were the most high profile and oft mentioned drugs in Vietnam. Amphetamines and barbiturates, seldom mentioned in texts concerning Vietnam drug abuse, were in fact used by about one third of the men in Vietnam. The reasons for the relatively low profile of these drugs may be the fact that the men who abused them often abused other narcotics too and there existed a strong correlation in government findings concerning the abuse of amphetamines and barbiturates and the abuse of other narcotics. Interviews and

³¹ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 25.

³² Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 283.

secondary sources lend contribute little towards a broader understanding of the abuse of these other substances.

Chapter II.

Drugs in Vietnam

Residing in the Mekong Delta, five of the largest marijuana farms in Vietnam produced a 3,200-kilogram crop annually, valued at over 2.2 million dollars, supplying American troops. Heroin's availability depended upon a region known as the "Golden Triangle," a 150,000 square mile area stretching across Northeastern Burma, Northern Thailand and Northern Laos from which all south Vietnamese heroin is manufactured and originated.³³ This heroin made its way through the Mekong Valley and through major cities including Luang Prabang, Vientiane and Bangkok serving as markets and trans-shipment points, mainly on to Hong Kong and South Vietnam.³⁴ Heroin's sudden descent into South Vietnam can be attributed to the Golden Triangle labs beginning to implement an ether precipitation process increasing purity from 5% typically to 80-99% pure, this new type of heroin became known as no. 4 heroin.³⁵ Several factors contributed to heroin's wide availability including the complicity of South Vietnamese officials. The head of the Vietnamese customs service, the director of the Saigon police, President Thieu's intelligence advisor and other high ranking South Vietnamese officials were all suspected by US Intelligence of involvement with the South Vietnamese drug trade.³⁶ Additional factors include the invasion of Cambodia during this time which

³³ Alfred W. McCoy, Cathleen B. Read, and Leonard P. Adams II, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 153.

³⁴ Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Public Health and Environment, *Source of Heroin Being Used in South Vietnam*, 92nd Congress, First session, June 30, 1971, 369.

³⁵ McCoy, Read and Adams, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 181.

³⁶ Spector, Ronald H., *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 274.

disrupted the South Vietnam/Cambodia border, thus allowing easier trafficking through to South Vietnam from the Golden Triangle.³⁷ Ironically the military itself contributed to the use of heroin cited in a government study claiming the increased heroin usage and availability resulted from a military crackdown on marijuana during 1969. Dogs trained in sniffing out marijuana were used in the sweeps possibly leading many men to use the odorless, cheap and easy to hide heroin readily available to them.³⁸ Within a few weeks of the Cambodian incursion, cheap heroin appeared everywhere in Vietnam packaged in small plastic vials. For only three dollars users could obtain 250 grams of heroin after the 1970 Cambodian insurgency. The high quality of heroin in South Vietnam meant one could merely sprinkle some powdered heroin in cigarettes and smoke it, achieving results equal to or greater than those experienced by people injecting the diluted heroin in America.³⁹

Though interviews mention ARVN officers acting as drug dealers, the authors of *The Politics of Heroin* believe they operated and controlled many of the civilian pushers throughout South Vietnam. The authors claim that ARVN distribution of drugs in the countryside became more pronounced as the war progressed.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the authors attribute the ARVN distribution to the “coordinated financing and aggressive sales campaign” choreographed by South Vietnamese officials from the top down, exacerbating the drug problem in South Vietnam.⁴¹ Due to the lack of primary sources the extent of ARVN supplying is very difficult to ascertain to any degree of certainty.

³⁷ McCoy, Read and Adams, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 185.

³⁸ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 31.

³⁹ McCoy, Read and Adams, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 278.

⁴⁰ McCoy, Read and Adams, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 201.

⁴¹ McCoy, Read and Adams, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, 183.

Within the areas of Nha Trang and Tuy Hoa Dr. Joel Kaplan, the commanding officer of the 98th Medical Detachment Neuro-Psychiatric team, uncovered serious drug problems among the helicopter units there including their own med-evac unit and “ground personnel, corpsmen, crewmen, gunners, and even pilots.” Marijuana’s ubiquitous presence arises in virtually all primary sources discussing soldiers’ drug usage, with commanders reporting they could walk around the unit’s area easily finding marijuana stashed in several places. Dr. Kaplan’s team found that the marijuana available in Vietnam sometimes produced “serious psychotic effects” much like LSD. The higher THC levels in marijuana available in South Vietnam resulted in many men who underwent “trips” like those using LSD and sometimes emerged from these trips in a “schizophrenic state” leading to their medical evacuation to Japan or back home. Dr. Kaplan reports marijuana’s side effects including paranoia and anger leading to a number of cases of “murder, rape and aggravated assault,” things never before associated with marijuana in America. Despite these side effects, many soldiers defended their usage stating that marijuana relaxed or sharpened one’s senses in combat or on the job.⁴²

Interviews conducted by Dr. Kaplan’s staff reveal that marijuana could heighten whatever feelings or surroundings the soldiers were experiencing. Soldiers in a club or at a party would smoke marijuana and experience a sense of “wellbeing and euphoria” whereas soldiers out in the field or recently returned from combat may exhibit negative symptoms including violence, paranoia and anger. One ongoing debate in the medical community, whether marijuana is in fact an addictive substance, is touched on by Dr. Kaplan who believes there existed “concrete evidence” that marijuana is addictive. In his

⁴² Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Drug Use in Vietnam*: Hearing Before The Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, 91st Congress, Second session, March 24, 1970, 3.

clinic men smoking marijuana often had to be detoxified to give it up successfully. Furthermore, he states that there existed no more marijuana smoking in non-combat units than in combat units.⁴³ This contradicts the conclusions of Call and Hardy's reported findings that drug use positively correlated with those men stationed in the rear.⁴⁴

Expounding upon Kaplan's testimony, the Harvard Twin Study found that the longer an individual experienced positive feelings from smoking marijuana the longer that individual would likely use it and often more frequently. This study seems to support the "gateway" thesis referred to so often in contemporary culture, that if an individual smokes marijuana they are much more likely to begin to abuse other substances.⁴⁵ Though marijuana may have been used frequently, the study revealed that most men exposed to marijuana tried it with a snowball effect occurring, in that these men usually went on to become regular users. Yet only one third of them would go on to be classified as abusers. This is relatively low compared to cocaine and heroin because most men who began regularly using these substances made the final transition to addicts, with heroin following cocaine in the prevalence of this occurrence.⁴⁶

Major Depression (MD) and drug dependence occurred often simultaneously in twin pairs with the rate of addiction higher among those twins with MD compared with those without it. This led researchers to conclude that MD and environmental factors did indeed increase the risk for drug abuse in men during Vietnam. Especially relevant here, due to the infancy of psychiatry during the war, is that undoubtedly many men battled

⁴³ Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Drug Use in Vietnam*, 5.

⁴⁴ John G. Cull and Richard E. Hardy, *Types of Drug Abusers and Their Abuses* (Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1974), 45.

⁴⁵ Ming T. Tsuang et al, "The Harvard Twin Study of Substance Abuse: What We Have Learned." *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 9 (November 2001), 272.

⁴⁶ Tsuang et al, "The Harvard Twin Study of Substance Abuse," 273.

depression away from their families while involved in an unpopular war, seeking solace from alcohol or drugs not knowing they were battling clinical depression.⁴⁷

Drug abuse reached epidemic proportions after 1968, but especially after 1970, when the large amounts of pure heroin started to flood southward from the Golden Triangle through the porous borders of Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War is unique in the widespread availability and use of narcotics casting a long shadow over the military campaigns waged in the war ravaged country. Drugs also entangled American servicemen with local culture and populations as interviews reveal. To many Vietnamese civilians narcotics occupied a place among groceries and dry goods as another item to sell to Americans at inflated prices to feed Americans' apparently insatiable need for an escape and way to deal with an often frustrating, dark and seemingly senseless war.

Russell Carver's post as a chaplain exposed him to men abusing drugs, even early on in the war before the Tet Offensive. He remembers there being a "fair amount of drug abuse" to help the men "deal with the bleakness of the assignment."⁴⁸ Richard Ford's testimony runs in a similar vein exposing the cathartic effects of marijuana were not only sought off the battlefield:

In the field most of the guys stayed high. Lots of them couldn't handle it. In a sense, if you [were] high, it seemed like a game you was in. You didn't take it serious. It stopped a lot of nervous breakdowns... We had a medic that give us a shot of morphine anytime you want one. I'm not talkin' about for wounded. I'm talkin' about when you want to just get high. So you can face it.⁴⁹

David Martin's interview voices the mainstream availability of marijuana, often packaged in commercial cigarette packages, and the majority of men he knew smoked

⁴⁷ Tsuang et al, "The Harvard Twin Study of Substance Abuse," 276.

⁴⁸ Russell Carver, Interview by Steve Maxner, 20 April 2001. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, The Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, 25.

⁴⁹ Wallace Terry, ed, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Random House, 1984), 40.

occasionally. He recalls that though some men smoked it intermittently to escape reality, for some it became a “way of life” because it “helps you forget where you are and what you’re doing.”⁵⁰

Anthony Goodrich remembers marijuana as an alternative to sometimes hard to get alcohol:

I remember marijuana was prevalent there. Only in the rear. We never smoked pot out in the bush. Never. We go into the rear. I never smoked pot until I got to ‘Nam. One of the reasons we smoked pot, the enlisted men is because we could not get alcohol. The staff NCOs and the officers had access to alcohol when we’d come into the rear. We didn’t. You had to be an E5 or above to get hard alcohol. Whiskey or whatever. Marijuana, as far as I was concerned, was a good way for me to forget things. It was a good way for me to relax...Out in the bush, there was kind of like an unspoken rule, that you didn’t take it out in the bush it was just too dangerous out there.⁵¹

Goodrich’s testimony illustrates the many paradoxes inherent to the study of Vietnam and the wide array of experiences undoubtedly a reflection of the importance concerning environmental factors expressed through the dominant personalities within groups of men. Some men like Goodrich reported no drug use in combat situations unlike others.

Oftentimes drug use began for the pragmatic reasons of availability as opposed to alcohol. Many men had constant access to alcohol, for others drugs had to fill alcohol’s place due to circumstances. Goodrich recalls the short supply of alcohol for the enlisted men at An Hoa often leading to drug use instead. The enlisted club at An Hoa only opened for a few hours a day and would usually run out of the “warm beer” within the

⁵⁰ David Martin, Interview by Steve Maxner, 9 March; 21 April 2001. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, TTVA, 40.

⁵¹ Anthony Goodrich, Interview by Steve Maxner, 11 April 2002. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 40.

first hour. Obtaining alcohol meant stealing it from the officers' quarters or from another location, so marijuana's ease of availability appealed to many men stationed at An Hoa.⁵²

Elmer Hall, another Army man, also attributes drug abuse in his area to the limited supply of alcohol and like Goodrich states that the men used drugs to escape reality.⁵³ Joe Powell supports Goodrich's statement concerning the lack of alcohol remembering that one had to be of the rank E6 or higher to receive any alcohol. This forced many men to turn to marijuana and downers like binoculars, something he tried but did not care for.⁵⁴

The frequent mention of men attempting to escape reality arose not from any inherent susceptibility compared to earlier generations of American soldiers but rather from conditions differing from previous American wars. In particular, the war of attrition or fighting for the same areas continuously coupled with the increased combat exposure for many men located in combat zones likely exacerbated tensions and stress already inherent in battle. During the war 14% of soldiers developed psychoneurotic disorders from 1965-71. This represents only those cases reported and considering these are only reported cases most likely the numbers ran higher than this.⁵⁵ When given a choice it does not seem unreasonable for soldiers to seek solace from a substance when in an environment conducive to such abuse.

In the *Drug Abuser Returns* study a third of the men answered that they had little to do in Vietnam and that their jobs were boring and for many this boredom continued off

⁵² Goodrich, 77.

⁵³ Elmer Hale, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 3 October 2002. Transcribed by Shannon Geach. Oral History Project, TTVA, 43.

⁵⁴ Powell, Joe, Interview by Steve Maxner, 27, December 2000. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, TTVA, 38.

⁵⁵ Dunnigan and Nofi, *Dirty Little Secrets of the Vietnam War*, 249.

the clock leading to drug use. This boredom likely facilitated the rise of heroin among GIs in that marijuana tended to make time slow down while heroin lent the illusion of time flying by. Dealing with boring tours that are long enough to be trying but short enough to count down, men turned to heroin as a way to pass their 365 day tour as quickly as possible. The widespread use of marijuana did not go unnoticed though and in 1969 Westmoreland handed down orders to crack down on marijuana leading many men to switch to heroin. Odorless and easily hidden, men could sprinkle it in their cigarettes and literally smoke heroin in front of commanders without being found out.⁵⁶

Stress and anxiety are known factors leading to increased drug taking behavior in humans. Environment combined with stress and genetic predisposition can send men, even those recovering from addiction, falling back into drug abuse.⁵⁷ This conspicuous connection between combat stresses and drug abuse did not hold true for the *Drug User Returns* which found no direct correlation between the assignment, death of friends or the amount of danger one experienced in regards to drug abuse as opposed to other studies. The fact that soldiers often tried drugs within their first few weeks in Vietnam means that sociological factors had much to do with drug abuse and anxiety associated with battle conditions only exacerbated the genetic and sociological enablers.⁵⁸ Again, one cannot make concrete conclusions regarding exact motivational factors for the wide breadth of soldiers serving in a myriad of situations.

⁵⁶ Appy, *Working-Class War*, 285.

⁵⁷ Barry Stimmel, *Alcoholism, Drug Addiction, and the Road to Recovery: Life on the Edge* (New York, London, Oxford: The Haworth Medical Press, Inc., 2002), 40.

⁵⁸ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 31.

Lathrop's belief that "shell shock, combat fatigue, combat neurosis and PTSD are all the same thing" reflects this perception of many men: that self-medication assisted in the day to day survival under stressful conditions which pushed men to their limits. In addition, Lathrop remembers the twelve month exhausting soldiers who had little time off while running straight combat missions eroding nerves and wearing down psyches.⁵⁹

Dr. Kaplan remembers very few men having been told about drugs and their side-effects upon entering Vietnam, especially marijuana. He found that the drug problem there reflected the domestic drug epidemic he had battled in New York City with undoubtedly similar reasons for using drugs and seeking them out, but due to the military culture having little or no explanation of the dangers of addiction or psychosis.⁶⁰ This leads to the conclusion that military leadership was out of touch and incapable or unwilling to address the growing drug problem among American servicemen.

When asked why they refrained from using narcotics in Vietnam, men responded primarily that they believed drugs would physically hurt them, reduce their efficiency or lead to addiction. Other concerns included their family and friends' opinion and their "satisfaction" with alcohol use.⁶¹

Two non-combat environments greatly contributed to narcotics use in Vietnam, the opium den and brothel. Dr. Kaplan's statements reveal that opium dens led many men down the destructive path of narcotic abuse starting in a relatively benign way. The papasans or mamasans, proprietors of opium dens, would offer marijuana to GIs sometimes lacing it with opium without the soldier knowing. Then heroin and

⁵⁹ Robert Lathrop, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 17, 18 May 2004. Transcribed by Laura Darden. Oral History Project, TTVA, 54.

⁶⁰ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 8.

⁶¹ Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*, 29.

methedrine would be offered to the soldiers often during their intoxication, thus leading “many” men into addiction. Men usually arrived while intoxicated by alcohol or other substances and were more susceptible to trying opium or heroin. Ruybal remembers how “mamas an,” the matron of the opium den, would pass around joints soaked in opium, a kind of stepping stone to heroin:

The following week my unit was sent back to Go Dau Ha for fire base support. Pulling guard duty during the day, some fellow comrade brothers and I would go to a small village for some needed R & R. We would visit mamasan’s opium den where mamasan would pass around opium joints. We spent a couple of hours smoking and shooting the bull and drinking a bottle of 45 rot gut Vietnamese whisky. The stuff was so bad it could choke a horse, but it got us good and loaded.⁶²

Ruybal goes on to describe the opium den in Pleiku:

Pleiku was famous for their opium dens and whorehouses. [The waitress directed them to an opium den where] seated at various benches along the wall were several soldiers smoking opium joints...She (mamasan) reached out and handed each one of us a marijuana cigarette soaked in pure opium. It was a real cigarette with a filter. The tobacco had been removed and replaced with fine marijuana. As I looked around the room at other GIs some looked as if they had gone to Disneyland for the day...This stuff really had a kick to it. It put my head in a tailspin...In retrospect I know why everyone in that room looked so serene. This [pot] was the most potent I had ever smoked.⁶³

Joe Powell remembers brothels serving the drug needs of men with many men smoking marijuana while others shot up heroin. These kinds of environments likely served to facilitate experimentation with drugs. By entering the establishment men consciously decided to “splurge” or indulge themselves and temptations rapidly led to others in such an intoxicating environment where drugs are being passed around amidst smoke, sex and spirits.⁶⁴ Richard J. Ford III remembers mamasan’s house:

⁶² Jay Dee Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War* (Albuquerque, N. M.: Creative Designs, 1998), 22.

⁶³ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 91.

⁶⁴ Powell, 39.

Davis would take American money into town. Somebody send him \$50, he get 3 to 1. Black market first chance we go to town, he got some cash. 'Cause he stayed high all the time. Smokin' marijuana, hashish. At mamasan's house. And some guys used to play this game [there]. They would smoke opium. They'd put a plastic bag over their head. Smoke all this smoke and see how long you could hold it. Lots of guys passed out.⁶⁵

Studies indicate that the propensity to abuse one drug increases the risk of the user abusing drugs of another class. The environments in which men used opium and heroin, often brothels and opium dens, lend immediacy to this finding in that men often entered under the influence of alcohol or marijuana but ended up smoking opium or heroin.⁶⁶ Joe Powell's testimony reiterates the military's mixture of personal and professional life sometimes encouraged drug use. Powell demonstrates this by his beginning to smoke marijuana when assigned to the junkyard for duty because the men there were crazier and used drugs often.⁶⁷

Ruybal's recollection of the "straight" unit demonstrates the power of environment upon drug use among men:

I spent a week at Bien Hoa pulling guard duty and recuperating from the month in Saigon. We finally caught up on some needed sleep. We drank lots of beer and played cards. We also caught up on some letter writing. During the last month I hardly smoked any dope. Everyone in this new unit was pretty straight. Whenever I pulled guard duty myself I would light up my pipe and take a few drags but I had to be careful because I didn't want anyone to know I was a pothead.⁶⁸

He goes on to state during his thirty-day leave the desire for drugs seemed to stay in Vietnam remembering "while I was home on leave I didn't use drugs. I didn't miss them. Lucy filled that void in my life." Lending credence to the importance of environments on abuse habits, undoubtedly Ruybal and others were able to stem their use

⁶⁵ Terry, *Bloods*, 39.

⁶⁶ Tsuang et al, "The Harvard Twin Study of Substance Abuse," 269.

⁶⁷ Powell, 38.

⁶⁸ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 44.

of drugs while on leave or after their tours, but many were not so fortunate to cut back their abuse habits once they returned to their homes.

Addiction among US servicemen could not have existed without the supply of drugs trickling down from the Golden Triangle constantly available through Vietnamese connections and hawkers. On arrival many men undoubtedly experienced some surprise at the open sale by Vietnamese children of downers, marijuana, heroin, opium and an assortment of other narcotics. This dealing of substances extended beyond seedy districts of town or other unsavory locales, taking place on roadsides and near base. One could procure one of a myriad of substances from the local barber, laundry girl or street child yelling at one's passing convoy.

William Moore's statements directly support the view that drugs were widely available and easily obtainable. He recalls the ubiquitousness of marijuana, particularly Cambodian marijuana men dubbed the "good stuff," but also the popularity of opium. A marijuana joint that men soaked in opium, as mentioned often in Jay Dee Ruybal's book, that men would smoke grew in popularity as Moore recalls and arises in some other interviews and sources.⁶⁹

One of many tragic facets of the drug trade in Vietnam included Vietnamese children selling drugs and prostitutes to GIs throughout the country. Moore continues describing the availability of drugs from children and teenagers:

Those downers, those pills, we'd buy those at the trash dump and they were out there and had a bunch of watches on their arms and these kids [or teenagers] we'd buy those pills [from]. They were like Alka-Seltzers. There were ten of them all together for like ten dollars. One of them you'd get pretty good, and two of them would just knock you out.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ William Charles Moore, Interview by Steve Maxner, 17, December 2001. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 31.

⁷⁰ Moore, 40.

Ruybal's work reveals small glimpses into the lives of Vietnamese children. Though miniscule, this fleeting mention shines some light upon the awful roles children undoubtedly had thrust upon them or used to ensure their survival. More so than anything else Ruybal's accounts show the interactions between American GIs and their "dealers," often children. Ruybal observed the following on the way to An Khe in Pleiku: "By the age of ten, the Vietnamese boys were already pimps hustling the streets and alleyways trying to lure a prospective customer for the brothel house. They were employed for a mere 5% for every customer they brought to mama sans."⁷¹ Giving a lengthy account of how easily soldiers bought drugs from children Ruybal pulls back the dark shroud hanging over Vietnamese-American relations regarding the hedonistic origin of most transactions:

We spent about twelve hours a day on the road...we occasionally stopped at a village and communicated with the children of the village. For instance, there was a boy named Tu whom I had met when I first came to Vietnam...Almost anything you wanted, this kid could get for you. He had his own gang of kids he hung around with. On a regular basis we started buying [pot] from him because he always had the best...The transactions were always quick because if he got caught selling illicit drugs the South Vietnamese police would severely punish him; so, we were as discretionary as possible and, of course, we had to be careful.⁷²

Strangely, his accounts do not mention children displaying rough or unsavory characteristics one would associate with dealing drugs. In the "typical" village of Kontum containing a brothel house and opium dens, Ruybal remembers the children were "very sincere and honest; most of them spoke good English." He and his comrades bought opium and marijuana from them.⁷³ Within the first three weeks of his arrival

⁷¹ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 74.

⁷² Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 58.

⁷³ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 191.

Ruybal encountered children at his base at Cu Chi selling beer and drugs right outside with nothing being “taboo.”⁷⁴ These accounts buttress the probable view by many Vietnamese that drugs merely served as a commodity not unlike other goods for sale to Americans.

Mike Davidson also remembers young Vietnamese boys selling drugs, “really cheap, pure heroin” that he believed the North Vietnamese boys would import. He believes it became “quite a problem.”⁷⁵

Vietnamese villages and civilians provided virtually all the drugs soldiers used in Vietnam, often close to the base and easily available to the soldiers as Jim Calbreath recalls:

Yes, you could go into [town], on base there wasn't a lot but Qui Nhon was a medium size town. There was a huge bar district. The hospital itself was hunkered down in the middle of this neighborhood for lack of a better term. The village surrounded us. The hooch I was living in was a standard Army barracks, two stories. You go out to the back deck to the outside stairwell and ten yards in front of you there [are] people living there and these were their huts. We were in the village so what we would do is if you wanted to smoke dope of any of that stuff, you'd just go to the village and you could get anything you wanted, at Alice's Restaurant. If you wanted grass, you get grass, if you wanted heroin you could get heroin.⁷⁶

Dwyte Brown, like many men, did not smoke marijuana before his tour in Vietnam but the ease of obtaining it and the common usage facilitated his use. Brown states it was practically given to them: “We didn't spend money in the village for it. It

⁷⁴ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 10.

⁷⁵ Mike Davidson, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 11 & 16 August 2004. Transcribed by Jessica Harrell. Oral History Project, TTVA, 44.

⁷⁶ Jim Calbreath, Interview by Steve Maxner, 28 November; 19 December 2001. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 25.

was a barter system. We'd bring them some steaks from the base or a mattress. They would just give us the stuff."⁷⁷

Brown's interview reveals a couple points of interest, digressing from the mere availability of marijuana. First, men's willingness to barter military items for drugs, as Ruybal's testimony will later substantiate, and second, the Vietnamese population's desire for food and goods available from the American servicemen. Black market trade in Vietnam existed no doubt largely due to the popularity of alcohol and drugs among American GIs and the immense profit available to those soldiers willing to take the risk. By selling military goods to Vietnamese civilians often these same items were sold back to soldiers at inflated prices. Ruybal covers his own black marketeering in his book and reveals he and others saw the profit potential warranting the risks inherent to such activity.

Ruybal's first encounter with the world of black marketeering occurred in the village while purchasing opium from a small boy:

Two GIs were busy unloading cases of beer off the back of a truck. When they were done, I saw mama-san pull out a wad of money. I could see that it was a lot of American mpc dollars as she started counting the money to one of the soldiers. I figured she have him about fifteen hundred dollars. If I was an agent for the Central Intelligence Department I would have busted them for black marketing.⁷⁸

This appealed to Ruybal and mamasan propositioned him to collude in this black marketeering scheme. Her plan involved him buying beer, Coke and C rations, which would cost twenty Military Payment Certificates (MPC dollars) per case and then mamasan selling these through her small store she owned in town. When he asked how

⁷⁷ Terry, *Bloods*, 267.

⁷⁸ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 194.

he could obtain a ration card she replied that he only need to apply for one, something easily done considering his rank or he could buy one off the black market.⁷⁹

Ruybal then purchased one pallet of cokes for four hundred MPC dollars and then sold it to mamasan for eighteen dollars a case for a total profit of three thousand dollars. This equaled close to what a Private First Class would make in a year in Vietnam which Ruybal made in a couple of hours.⁸⁰ He continued his black market activities whenever he returned to Kontum, selling Army goods intended to be sold back to his own men at inflated prices. Ruybal believes, like drugs and alcohol, the war brought out the worst in him, forcing him to steal: “We were being consumed by either alcohol or drugs and the very essence of our being was being sucked out of us. Most of us were so burned out that we had forgotten what this was all about. As a result of this war, once decent Americans were becoming liars, cheats, thieves and murderers.”⁸¹

Ruybal’s lament echoes undoubtedly thousands of men who committed unsavory acts, feeling that the ubiquitous nature of alcohol and drugs causes their deeds. Unfortunately, where the soldier ends and the addict begins presents a difficult question for scientists and historians alike. Perspectives of veterans and their own opinions of the war prove as varied as the experiences, demonstrating that difficulty in obtaining a consensus lies not only in academia.

⁷⁹ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 198.

⁸⁰ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 202.

⁸¹ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 251.

Chapter III.

Alcohol Abuse and Demarcations in Vietnam

Alcohol provides a logical starting point in the ground level study of substance abuse in Vietnam due to its ubiquitous nature, availability and sociological meanings to many men. Several themes arise within the testimony of Vietnam veterans concerning alcohol use in Vietnam: widespread alcoholism, seductively easy access to alcohol (often at military facilities), social clubs facilitating alcohol abuse and what many men perceived as the military encouraging drinking. These factors allowed many men to turn to alcohol for solace, social acceptance or out of boredom. Demonstrative of the engrained machismo within the military, drinking seemed to be expected of the military experience – completely different from drug abuse which represented dissenting and rebellious factions of the military.

Gonzalo Baltazar remembers that “us infantry guys, we were a bunch of alcoholics,” and that “alcoholism was the big thing ... everybody drank heavily, to forget their problems, to forget the war.”⁸² Emmanuel Holloman, an interpreter for the Army, agrees stating that “I didn’t realize it, but I was drinking two quarts of Old Grand-Dad 100 proof everyday in Vietnam. I was buying liquor by the gallon. You drank it and you just sweat it out. You needed it to keep going, I guess. You got tired, real tired. You saw so much happening.”⁸³

⁸² Gonzalo Baltazar, Interview by Steve Maxner, 23 March 2001. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, The Texas Tech Vietnam Archives, 31.

⁸³ Wallace Terry, ed, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Random House, 1984), 91.

Alcohol abuse by no means pervaded only infantry or enlisted men, but also affected many officers, pilots, and doctors. Robert Lathrop, a Marine airplane pilot describes his battle against the stresses of combat using alcohol:

And I was exhausted. I just ate. There were times when I'd lay down and I'd say, "I'm going to try to stay awake", and I couldn't. But I started getting [hyper]...I'd go through periods of being really keyed up. That was the battle fatigue kicking in. And other people did too and we fought it with alcohol. And the troops fought it with drugs, but I got pretty bad for a while.⁸⁴

Lathrop's tale undoubtedly mirrors many men's struggles with battlefield stresses and the horrors it wrought upon the nervous system. This illuminates one telling aspect of the Vietnam experience to be covered shortly; there existed in most places in Vietnam a clear dichotomy between alcohol and substance abuse often beginning in the metaphorical separation but often bleeding into the physical.

During his last few years in the Air Force, Dr. Timothy Lockley served as a Drug and Alcohol Abuse Control Officer and remembers most of the men serving in Vietnam exhibiting signs of alcoholism. Martin Montemore, an Air Force crewman, echoes Lockley's concerns of widespread alcoholism in the Air Force, remembering "everybody drank to excess."⁸⁵ Lockley and his men used alcohol primarily in lieu of drugs, but some augmented it with drugs, stating that by no means did alcohol's legal status imply responsibility in its consumption.⁸⁶ Harold Vorhies, having served two tours in Vietnam, remembers the widespread alcohol problem coupled with the fact that its prevalence

⁸⁴ Robert Lathrop, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 17, 18 May 2004. Transcribed by Laura Darden. Oral History Project, TTVA, 54.

⁸⁵ Martin Montemore, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 14 August 2003. Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin. Oral History Project, TTVA, 08.

⁸⁶ Dr. Timothy Lockley, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 11, 17 February 2003. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 21.

increased during his second tour stating that “boredom and drink go together.”⁸⁷ John Arrick, a helicopter pilot who served two tours, corroborates Vorhies story concerning increased drinking during his second tour. Arrick gives a vivid description of his settling in during his second tour:

But each of the choices of huts for me to live in had people in it that would be up all hours of the night screaming and yelling, partying, doing stupid things and I never really developed a knack for that. It was much wilder the second time around and I attribute that to the reputation for drinking that developed out of the earlier days in Vietnam.⁸⁸

Though drinking heavily, pilots exuded control to some, including Randall Kunkelman, who remembered that the “pilots [drank] heavily, some I’m sure were on drugs ... I’m not saying everyone was like that but there were a lot of people that drunk a lot and they surprisingly really operated very well under those conditions.”⁸⁹ In an interesting response to Kunkelman’s observation, Jimmy Coffman, a pilot, remembers:

That one learned to gauge how much you could drink and still work the next day. What you wanted to do is you wanted to reach the point of intoxication to where you could stagger to a bed, you could collapse on the bed, pass out instantly without having any trouble going to sleep, and you could still get up at 4 o’clock in the morning to fly. So, we flew a lot of times when we shouldn’t. We shouldn’t have flown. That was a coping mechanism day to day. That’s how we got by many days.⁹⁰

This testimony provides a stark reminder of the dangers of alcohol, not just during the actual consumption, but afterwards, when the effects have not worn off or the alcohol completely left the bloodstream. In fact, many believe now and during the Vietnam War, that alcohol before bed “will not only have a calming effect but will

⁸⁷ Harold Vorhies, Interview by Steve Maxner, 13 April 2002. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 33.

⁸⁸ John Arrick, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 22 January; 19 February; 19 March; 16 April. 2003. Transcribed by Reccia Jobe. Oral History Project, TTVA, 112.

⁸⁹ Randall Kunkelman, Interview by Steve Maxner, 1 October 1999. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel. Oral History Project, TTVA, 22.

⁹⁰ Jimmy Coffman, Interview by Steve Maxner, 11 April; 16 June 2000. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel. Oral History Project, TTVA, 18-19.

facilitate sleep.” This is in fact false because heavy drinking before bed leading to difficulty falling asleep, degradation the quality of sleep and resulting in frequent awakenings.⁹¹ Alarming, considering the widespread abuse of alcohol even among pilots, this undoubtedly led to compromised performance on occasion, despite the appearance of sobriety, as many men could have in fact had some alcohol pervading their faculties.

Alcohol for many officers serving as pilots equated to the drug of choice, other officers also shared this preference according to Arrick:

I don't know of anybody that didn't drink in my circle – my circle being pilots and actually ground officers that were living with us too; the flight surgeon, the logistics supply officers. So everybody drank that I'm aware of and most of us drank in what today's terms would be excessively. That would be more than 3, 4, or 5 drinks a night.⁹²

Alcohol abuse pervaded every rank of military personnel including medical staff and doctors. Susan O'Neill, who served as a nurse in Vietnam, remembers that smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol were “just done” and states that “we actually had people operating on folks, doctors who had had a few before they went in. I never saw a competent doctor operate incompetently.”⁹³

Undoubtedly, many men and women serving in Vietnam did not operate under the impression that their behavior exhibited the effects of alcohol, but believed if any symptoms did occur they would be minimal or positive like calmed nerves or a steady hand. One other facet of alcoholism is the rapid tolerance one gains physiologically,

⁹¹ Barry Stimmel, *Alcoholism, Drug Addiction, and the Road to Recovery: Life on the Edge* (New York, London, Oxford: The Haworth Medical Press, Inc., 2002), 101.

⁹² Arrick, 112.

⁹³ Susan O'Neill, Interview by Laura M. Caulkin, 16 March 2004. Transcribed by Laura Darden. Oral History Project, TTVA, 28.

which undoubtedly leads to feelings of confidence in one's own abilities under the influence, and Susan again gives voice to this dilemma:

So, yes, we drank quite a bit in general. I drank when I was at Phu Bai, I'd find myself when I came back from a full day, I'd be sitting there and I'd have four doubles of Chivas Regal that [at] that time, it was the priciest Scotch...but it really wasn't affecting me and that's what really drew me up and "oh my God look what I'm drinking"...its just not me and here I am downing this stuff, pounding it down and its not making any difference in how I feel.⁹⁴

Availability of alcohol in Vietnam to some men seemed too great, beckoning for abuse, combined with its cheap price, the poor water supply and high price for soda meant for many men drinking alcohol not only provided an escape but made financial sense. Interviews support this hypothesis revealing military and civilian run clubs providing alcohol at all hours at cheap prices, on base and off. According to Jim Calbreath, a surgeon in Vietnam, heavy alcohol abuse depended upon the availability:

There was an enlisted men's club that was open 24 hours a day...so you could get off work at eight in the morning, go to the Enlisted Club and all of the people that you had been working with that night were sitting there drinking a lot of booze, a lot of booze and not let's just have two beers and call it a night. There was a lot of escape going on.⁹⁵

Michael Mittelman agrees remembering alcohol being "very seductive, very available" going on to lament that to drink "four, or five, bottles a month was a hell of a lot of availability of something that probably shouldn't have been around to the extent it was."⁹⁶

⁹⁴ O'Neill, 27.

⁹⁵ Jim Calbreath, Interview by Steve Maxner, 28 November; 19 December 2001. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 24.

⁹⁶ Michael Mittelman, Interview by Steve Maxner, 7 May 2001. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 43.

This availability, seemingly constant, “aggravated” James Holt’s nascent alcoholism, who believes “because we had access to liquor more readily than other guys did and could carry it with us,” that this accelerated his descent into addiction.⁹⁷

Monetary cost went hand in hand with alcohol’s constant presence as explained by Jack Alberston: “I’ll tell you one thing, I had considerably less abuse of marijuana on a percentage basis than alcohol. I had some guys who found out they could buy Cutty Sark Scotch for like a buck and a half a bottle and would drink vastly too much, at least in my opinion.”⁹⁸

This theme continues in Susan O’Neill’s testimony:

[Alcohol] was the one kind of official outlet, that you have to drink yourself out of your mind and booze was extremely cheap. I mean, ridiculously cheap, like twenty cents for a Chivas Regal or something like that. I mean, I’m just quoting that off the top of my head, but it was absurdly cheap and absurdly available, any kind. You might not be able to find the stitches you need in the operating room, but you could certainly find a drink.⁹⁹

Don Hasley agrees with O’Neill’s assertion concerning availability and widespread abuse, but he points to the oppressive heat consistently in the triple digits pushing beer consumption among soldiers. He remembers alcohol causing more problems among GIs than drugs due to the low prices and wide availability of alcohol.¹⁰⁰

In many cases beer actually cost less than Cokes because often Vietnamese civilians would sell Cokes on the black market at inflated prices. For instance, Miller

⁹⁷ James Holt, Interview by Jonathan Berenstein, 12 November 2001. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, TTVA, 138.

⁹⁸ Jack Albertson, Interview by Steve Maxner, 22 May 2000. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel. Oral History Project, TTVA, 33.

⁹⁹ O’Neill, 27.

¹⁰⁰ Don Halsey, Interview by Edwin Whiting, 9 April 1990. Transcribed by Edwin Whiting. Oral History Project, TTVA, 06.

cost \$1.80 a case and Coke or Pepsi cost \$2.26¹⁰¹, but some men did not even have that choice according to Halsey:

One of the peculiar things over there was you couldn't get any cokes or soft drinks because the Vietnamese would steal them off the docks and put them on the black market so we never got them. You couldn't drink the water because you get immediate dysentery so like a fool I had been there two weeks and brushed with the water and got dysentery.¹⁰²

Men sometimes having literally to pick which "poison" to drink, Halsey's experience rings true for countless men stationed in the bush or unsanitary locations in which water did not seem like a viable option. Gerald Brazzle, a helicopter pilot, remembers similar conditions in which men used cheese cloth to filter out what they could of the orange sediments polluting the local water supply. He remembers not drinking the water his entire tour.¹⁰³

The military could be responsible for the degree alcohol surrounded men, something worthy of close scrutiny with Harold Bryant's testimony revealing that indeed military sponsored "down time" meant quantities of cheap alcohol.

Outside An Khe, the 1st Cavalry (1st Cav) built an area for soldiers to go relieve themselves. Bars, whorehouses. It would be open at nine in the morning. We called it Sin City...we would go to a Class 6 store and get two half gallons of Gilby's gin for a \$1.65 each. We take a bottle to papa san. Buy a girl for \$5 or \$10. Whatever come by, or whatever I liked. And still have a half a gallon of gin.¹⁰⁴

In regards to the military's reaction to drugs and alcohol, Lockley describes an established military ethos impervious to excesses regarding alcohol:

¹⁰¹ Michael Horton, Interview by Monty Alan Hostetler, 26 February; 7 March 1990. Transcribed by Monty Alan Hostetler, Oral History Project, TTVA, 16.

¹⁰² Halsey, 6.

¹⁰³ Gerald Brazzle, Interview by Author, 11 October 2006, Arlington TX, digital recording, Gerald Brazzle's work office.

¹⁰⁴ Terry, 28.

[The military] turned a blind eye because everybody I guess from the commanding generals on down consumed alcohol and they didn't want to bother with that. They didn't consider it a problem at all, but as far as drugs go, if they caught you that was the end of you, but they had to catch you first. As a matter of fact we had a unit there, the 773rd and everyday for those of us who didn't do drugs, alcohol was the only thing to do and even those who did drugs did a lot of alcohol because at least it was legal. Of course, the Air Force, military in general didn't help matters, sometimes we had free beer nights...¹⁰⁵

Montemore's testimony corroborates this, but remembers cigarettes falling under "encouraged" substances by the military:

So, alcohol was huge, I mean you couldn't drink a dollar. I mean drinks were a dime and doubles were happy hour four for a dime... So basically it's free, and so they encouraged, I think they encouraged alcohol drinking and I think they encouraged smoking. They gave you cigarettes with your meals. You open up what you call your MRE, and there would be your meal, and your napkin, and plastic fork, and a pack of cigarettes.¹⁰⁶

Anthony Borra, an Air Force pilot, tells of operating an officer's club and its cheap prices at a government site promoting alcohol stating that "[t]he military did a lot to promote alcoholism. I used to give away drinks at the club sometimes because it was so cheap and I used to pay I think, \$3.16. I don't know why that sticks out, for a bottle of Jim Beam. And you could sell that at 25¢ a shot and still make money, you know."¹⁰⁷

This theme seems to run through many Air Force testimonies that alcohol use and military culture became closely intertwined. Alan Osur's testimony demonstrates how sometimes the military procedure became synonymous with alcohol. After Air Force pilots landed they were offered "some mission whiskey. Wide open, there were two types of mission whiskey, the Air Force actually provided the cheapest 'rock gut,' brandy and whiskey you'd ever [seen], I don't know where they got this stuff from... I mean this

¹⁰⁵ Lockley, 21

¹⁰⁶ Montemore, 8

¹⁰⁷ Anthony Borra, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 25 March 2003. Transcribed by Reccia Jobe. Oral History Project, TTVA, 62.

is the '60s, you know, booze was the number one drug in the Air Force, and the military.”¹⁰⁸

Pilots were not the only ones observing abuse. James Evans, a physician, observed alcohol abuse and also remembered “a lot of drinking.” Evans states that alcohol equated to “the drug of choice” amongst most men and “the most obviously abused.” He claims the military “ignored” alcohol abuse so evident to him and other men, but also believes there were many other drugs possibly used in conjunction with alcohol he may not have observed.¹⁰⁹

Interviews indicate that indeed many men, especially officers, viewed the military establishment at the very least turning a blind eye to alcohol abuse, but more often encouraging it by offering alcohol at cheap prices and widespread availability. Next, the Officers and Enlisted Clubs will be explored. Within them abuse coupled with camaraderie and friendship allowed men to temporarily escape the war and its stresses leaving many battling the demons of alcoholism and nursing hangovers another day in the Vietnamese sun.¹¹⁰

Medical literature emphasizes the importance of the environment in regards to the consumption of alcohol. Studies reveal that the setting in which people consume drinks and the expectations regarding the feelings and sensations to arise are important factors regarding alcohol and alcoholism. Those consuming alcohol without realizing it become intoxicated at a slower rate than if they know they are consuming alcohol, while people consuming drinks believed to contain alcohol but actually do not, exhibit “remarkable

¹⁰⁸ Alan Osur, Interview by Steve Maxner, 18 February 2002. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 40.

¹⁰⁹ James Evans, Interview by Laura M. Calkins, 12, 13, 26 April; 1 June 2004. Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin. Oral History Project, TTVA, 47.

¹¹⁰ Spector, Ronald H., *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 273.

mood changes.” In other words, the expectation of consuming alcohol and its effects cannot be extricated from the actual consumption. As a result, those who expect positive results from drinking more often become alcoholics and begin using alcohol when confronted with stress.¹¹¹ This positive correlation between alcohol and the surroundings in which one consumes it sometimes presents more of an obstacle to overcoming alcoholism than the actual pharmacological addiction.¹¹² Both twin studies conducted in Australia and the United States reveal that genetic factors play a prominent role in the frequency of alcohol consumption, but the environmental factors determine how easily an individual can overcome alcoholism.¹¹³ The Harvard Twin Study revealed that environmental factors accounted for 45% of the motivations behind alcohol abuse and alcoholism with genetics accounting for the remaining 55%.¹¹⁴ These studies reveal the power of drinking environments upon moods and behavior with expectations and desires forming a significant part of the drinking experience and development of alcoholism.

Many interviews expound upon the importance of drinking environments and “hang outs” for soldiers concerning drinking, but special mention of the escapism of alcohol and its association with a club or area is pertinent. Many men expressed within their testimony, whether admitted alcoholics, abusers of alcohol or recreational drinkers, the role drinking with “the boys” after a hard day played in their Vietnam experience. In fact, the majority of interviews express some solace found in drinking a few beers with comrades after a day to wind down and settle war ravaged nerves or to simply kill time.

¹¹¹ Barry Stimmel, *Alcoholism, Drug Addiction, and the Road to Recovery: Life on the Edge* (New York, London, Oxford: The Haworth Medical Press, Inc., 2002), 95-96.

¹¹² Stimmel, *Alcoholism, Drug Addiction, and the Road to Recovery*, 40.

¹¹³ Frederick G. Hofmann, Gail Winger, and James H. Woods, *A Handbook on Drug and Alcohol Abuse: The Biomedical Aspects*, 4th edition (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 59.

¹¹⁴ Ming T. Tsuang et al, “The Harvard Twin Study of Substance Abuse: What We Have Learned.” *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 9 (November 2001), 273.

Regardless, one thing strings these experiences together, the expectation of relief or escapism through alcohol abuse, which studies show to be a leading cause of alcohol dependency. Undoubtedly thousands of men looked to alcohol for solace, a means of forgetting disturbing incidents witnessed or a way to cope regarding the Vietnam War. Officers clubs, bars, hooches or anywhere men hung out frequently became a refuge or safe haven where alcohol and comrades helped momentarily suppress the anxiety, fear, hatred and uncertainty attrition warfare breeds.

The Officers' Club holds a special place in many men's memories as the social meeting place during their tour and a place where officers most often consumed alcohol and socialized. Once again, this points to the environment in which these men consumed alcohol past "responsible" limits. Alan Osur remembers alcohol's low prices but also that the store, or "class six" where men could purchase it often resided in the social club itself. He remembers the club as a "great social life," his and other interviews make clear the close ties between fraternizing and alcohol use for many men.¹¹⁵

Calvin Chaplan also remembers the club as a social atmosphere where heavy drinking occurred with some "[hitting] it pretty hard." Chaplan recalls that the enlisted club, NCO club, and officers' club had "everything you wanted," but "most" men drank responsibly, though one of his "best NCOs" developed alcoholism.¹¹⁶

Chapman's remarks illuminate a common theme within veterans' perspectives regarding alcohol consumption, believing, for the most part, that drinking behaviors fell within reasonable limits. Most men failed to realize that according to current medical literature this environment exacerbated alcoholic tendencies latent in some men's genetic

¹¹⁵ Osur, 41.

¹¹⁶ Calvin Chaplan, Interview by Steve Maxner, 23 May 2000. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel. Oral History Project, TTVA, 80.

makeup while encouraging addictive behavior in others. Within this superficially positive atmosphere, those falling prey to alcoholism turn to this scene as a crutch. In the civilian world such a setting usually does not correlate with one's occupation, but in the Vietnam War men's social and professional lives often met in the officers' club, consequently, to forgo the experience may have meant missing what many men perceived as integral social and professional development.

Arick's memories portray the improved "sophistication" of these military clubs even further during his second tour as they became "larger, more plush" and now contained "furniture and bars and a stage for the dancing girls that came periodically. So it was [a] much more sophisticated drinking environment that you had the second time around."¹¹⁷

Social congregations sometimes included seclusion from the military culture in general. For Dwyte Brown and his African-American comrades, a meeting place grew to symbolize paradise and a physical escape:

I wish I could show you a picture of the cave we had, the brothers. You could only get to it by boat. About a mile down the river. We would go there on weekends. It was like an oasis. We had our own generator power set up. So we got our own music boxes hooked up. Brothers ran the commissary, okay? So everything was there. Steaks, beer, liquor. All the women. All the marijuana. Picnic tables. You could go swimming right down there from this little grotto. It was like Paradise Island.¹¹⁸

The simple desire of men to have a friendly atmosphere with their comrades, took on a larger meaning in Vietnam. The experiences of these men reveal that *how* men unwound after combat defined them in a way not unlike the civilian world, but took on larger meanings due to the military environment in which these men operated.

¹¹⁷ John Arrick, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 22 January; 19 February; 19 March; 16 April. 2003. Transcribed by Reccia Jobe. Oral History Project, TTVA, 113.

¹¹⁸ Terry, *Bloods*, 271.

Consuming alcohol in a club, in a cave, responsibly, irresponsibly, with white people or African-Americans all affected how men experienced the war and their perceptions of it. The importance of this again arises due to the wartime environment in which alcohol consumption occurred; men make clear in their interviews that some alcohol abuse, usually more than would be “normal” in the civilian world, is tolerated in the military. Linking this mentality again to the current knowledge regarding alcoholism and dependence forces one to conclude that indeed men serving in Vietnam often had a greater chance of becoming an alcoholic than those in the civilian world. Military responsibility cannot be ignored concerning alcohol abuse during the Vietnam War.

The military’s role is not necessarily malicious or always cognizant, but rather illustrates the archaic and often short-sighted thinking among the military leaders at the time. Engrained military culture during The Vietnam War expected soldiers to partake in alcohol excessively at times but then when sober to return to combat and duty in fighting form. Vietnam sets itself apart from other American wars in this aspect; men’s consumption of alcohol, juxtaposed with other drugs available at the time, defined who they were and their place within the war itself. Suddenly, drinking associated one with the military “establishment” and what many viewed as the antiquated standards and ideologies inherent to it. Testimony reveals that men who solely abused alcohol often perceived their excesses as acceptable and in line with what a soldier should be, while drug use represented a subversive and dark aspect of Vietnam to them. Conversely, men who smoked marijuana often regarded alcohol and heavy drinking as something to look down upon viewing their marijuana smoking as victimless, convenient and less destructive than alcohol consumption.

Drugs and alcohol often provided metaphorical representations of men and their social affiliations during the war. Alcohol became synonymous with the established military ethos and the “good old boy” mentality that appeared distasteful to many new recruits in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The rising popularity of drugs in America coupled with the social break from societal norms encouraged many of the new enlistees to navigate outside the system by smoking marijuana and trying other drugs while avoiding the traditional alcohol-fuelled military entertainment. Interviews reveal that men attached social stereotypes to drug and alcohol abusers often resulting in a physical divide between those abusing alcohol and those using drugs.

Younger soldiers constituted the majority of drug abusers with many pointing out to Dr. Joel Kaplan, the head of a psychiatric facility in Nha Trang, the dichotomy between the “potheads” and the “juicers.” This refers to those who smoked marijuana or were thought to have smoked marijuana and those men who only drank alcohol. Most men point out this separation representing a hard and fast rule morphing into a symbol of what a man stood for or represented. This dichotomy, usually “drinkers” included officers and career military men and “smokers” included mostly enlisted men and draftees, began to blur over time, as Dr. Kaplan observed more and more marijuana use by helicopter pilots and young officers. He eventually refused to ride in any helicopter in which he knew the pilot had a drug problem.¹¹⁹

Vietnam’s unique sociological aspects regarding alcohol and drug use manifest themselves by reversing normal patterns of abuse in America during the time and today. Normally, heavy drinking associated with alcoholism correlates positively with drug use

¹¹⁹ Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Drug Use in Vietnam: Hearing Before The Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, 91st Congress, Second session, March 24, 1970, 2.

providing a “gateway” into heavier substances than alcohol, but in Vietnam this did not occur for the most part. In fact, only 15% of heavy drinkers used drugs compared to 35% of light drinkers.¹²⁰ Undoubtedly, a connection existed between the strong social mores surrounding drinking and drug use within Vietnam. The following interviews voice the often clear separation between the worlds occupied by the juicers and the smokers.

Sometimes this need to align with one of the two factions occurred immediately upon arrival in country according to Horton:

One of the things I observed during my tour [during] Vietnam was that when a new troop came into the unit, one of the first things he was called to do was to make his choice between being a “juicer” or a “head.” Now these were the buzzwords. And basically he had to align himself between one of the two groups of drug users or alcohol users.¹²¹

This dichotomy primarily existed between officers and enlisted men, demonstrated by Jimmy Coffman’s testimony:

The enlisted men used drugs and [pot] to numb themselves and to medicate themselves. The pilots used alcohol because the pilots had a little more money, alcohol was more expensive than [pot] so you developed a routine. When you could get to a club, if you were stationed in a place that had a club like Nha Trang had five nice clubs, and most posts had places that they called a club which was usually a bunker...¹²²

In fact, William Moore believed that one’s choice lay between abuse and abstinence with little room between:

My experience at Camp McDermott most of the NCOs were more into the beer and the whiskey, not drugs, and that was pretty rampant too. It was a war zone, it was an escape, whether it be the drugs or the booze, when you were off duty [one had would use substances to] escape just to get through . . . We had 550,000 troops in country and [alcohol and drugs were] so easy to get. It was all

¹²⁰ Lee N. Robins, *The Vietnam Drug User Returns*. DC: Special Action Office For Drug Abuse Prevention Executive Office of the President, 1974, 29.

¹²¹ Horton, 15.

¹²² Jimmy Coffman, Interview by Steve Maxner, 11 April; 16 June 2000. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel. Oral History Project, TTVA, 20.

over the place, amazing. It's amazing, you either abstained completely or you were a druggie or a drunk, or maybe not a drunk but you abused alcohol.¹²³

In Jay Dee Ruybal's dramatic memoir he states that there existed real barriers between "potheads" and the "red neck alcoholics." He states that they fought "admirably" together but after battle the two groups avoided each other and "despised" the other. Ruybal's work is scathing of the alcoholics claiming they were "loud and obnoxious" while the potheads became "low key, mellow and groovy." This favorable opinion of drug users most likely arises from Ruybal's own drug use and association throughout the war with men who smoked marijuana liberally.¹²⁴

Continuing this theme of mutual distrust between smokers and juicers, Philip Watson recounts his own reaction to the dichotomy, but unlike Ruybal, he does not have a high opinion of drug users:

If you wanted drugs and you wanted to hang in that area, it was always there. Now, I did not particularly want to do that. I was a guy that went across the road and drank beer at the club and that's the kind of guys I hung around with . . . [the druggies] I thought they were seedy, I thought they were underachievers, they didn't like me either.¹²⁵

According to many men Vietnam catered to virtually any hedonistic desire of soldiers, as Jim Calbreath attests:

This bar over here happens to be a bar for white guys who like to drink and the bar over here is for black guys who like to smoke dope or this bar over here is for black guys who like to drink and this bar over here is actually a whorehouse and whatever you wanted, there was someplace where you could find it.¹²⁶

¹²³ William Charles Moore, Interview by Steve Maxner, 17 December 2001. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 32.

¹²⁴ Jay Dee Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War* (Albuquerque, N. M.: Creative Designs, 1998), 14.

¹²⁵ Phillip Watson, Interview by Steve Maxner, 23 April 2001. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 54.

¹²⁶ Calbreath, 25.

Jennifer Young, a Red Cross worker, observed more amicable relations between the two groups in the forward areas. The smokers would hold off on getting high when a helicopter brought in beer for the drinkers and to reciprocate if the smokers scored some “good grass” then the drinkers would return the favor, abstaining from drinking to keep watch while the smokers got high.¹²⁷

The physical and metaphorical space between juicers and smokers could be equated to drawing a line in the sand according to Horton’s anecdote concerning a barbeque:

The troops were divided roughly between the drug abusers and alcohol abusers. The abuser part came later, and this was such a clear line that was drawn. We would occasionally [or] the cooks would occasionally swap or come up with some boxes of steaks and we’d have a company party. And in doing so we’d get two jeep trailers and we’d bring down beer in one and soft drinks in the other. And when the guys would come to the company party, you could almost line them up behind the trailers and call roll. Of course, the juicers went to the beer trailer, they wouldn’t be caught dead with a coke in their hands and vice versa, and the drug users wouldn’t be seen by their peers with a beer in their hand. Never the twain shall meet so to speak.¹²⁸

This clear demarcation permeated living conditions in Vietnam, even filtering down to living quarters in the form of men choosing to bunk with those similar to themselves. The juicers often set up elaborate bars and hootches gaining a more club like feel. The smokers outfitted their hooches sometimes with stereos, incense, psychedelic posters and ornate smoking paraphernalia, outward symbols of the hippie movement.¹²⁹ American combat soldiers began to define their very identity at times by what drugs they did or did not take, from here the sociological ramifications travel outward in the form of

¹²⁷ Jennifer Young, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 7 December 2002. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 25.

¹²⁸ Horton, 15.

¹²⁹ Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 286.

who the person socialized with, the treatment the person would receive by their superiors and fellow men, in other words, their Vietnam experience. Not to over-state the case, some men, though it is difficult to determine how many, did not observe the demarcation described by other men and would argue that their tour included camaraderie and greater homogeneity among men stationed in Vietnam. This again brings up one of the most challenging facets of Vietnam in regards to empirical study, the seclusion and autonomy of units stationed around the country in widely varying conditions resulting in a wide array of experiences by over half a million American soldiers.

Gary Cummings and Jack Keith, both pilots in the Air Force, fit the well populated profile of officers who did not observe any drug or alcohol abuse, remembering it as a problem plaguing the enlisted corps primarily. John Ballweg, another pilot, remembers drinking a beer while writing letters home but did not observe any alcoholism or drug abuse¹³⁰ Michael Sweeney, a Marine, never saw any drug use in the rear around the logistical areas in Da Nang and attributes the Army's drug problems to the lack of discipline compared to the Marines.¹³¹ Other men from the Marines expressed similar sentiments regarding the "lax" discipline within the Army compared to the Marines. This observation of the Army having laxer discipline regarding drug and alcohol abuse most likely carries some weight, but one must remember the larger cross section of the population the Army incorporated compared to the other branches of the military and that men volunteered to join the Marines.

¹³⁰ John Ballweg, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 19 March 2003. Transcribed by Shannon Geach. Oral History Project, TTVA, 35.

¹³¹ Michael Sweeney, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 19 November 2002. Transcribed by Shannon Geach. Oral History Project, TTVA, 30.

Chapter IV.

Ramifications and Military Knowledge of Substance Abuse in Vietnam

Soldiers' testimony lends more immediacy to the drug problem in Vietnam voicing the growing epidemic rising after 1968 and men delving deeper into drugs.

Lockley voices this growing dilemma:

It amazed me. I was, in '66 there wasn't much [drug abuse] but by '68 there was quite a bit of it, quite prevalent. I'd have flight crews come out who were stoned. Yes, I remember one time I refused to fly with a flight crew because they were stoned out of their gills and they're all, their eyes were, amazing. If course, [there was] a lot of marijuana but heroin was starting to get really prevalent. There was something called an OJ, an opium joint which I saw a lot of people with. Actually it was so professional that the guys who created it, they actually had them in cigarette cases.¹³²

Robert Holcomb's testimony sheds a chilling light on the growing drug problem:

Some guys were choked to death in their sleep, because they drank too much alcohol or were taking drugs. Some ODeD. They were [not really] smoking grass so much anymore, but taking "number tens" which are something like Quaaludes, and speed. It was devastating taken together. Of course, there was the [heroin]. And whether you smoked it or snorted it, you got really fucked up.¹³³

Joe Powell's experiences in An Khe illustrate the dizzying descent of many American troops into addiction and the violence that occurs when drug problems surface in a military environment:

[It was] pretty bad as hard drugs go. We smoked pot there too, in the afternoons and evenings and stuff when we'd get off work. I remember one of the guys I was in Germany with that was ahead of me, a guy named Judge...told on some of the guys [using heavy drugs] and they caught him out there with a

¹³² Dr. Timothy Lockley, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 11, 17 February 2003. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, Texas Tech Vietnam Archive, 20.

¹³³ Wallace Terry, ed, *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (New York: Random House, 1984), 218.

baseball bat and beat his brains out...They crushed his head...these guys had the blue glasses and they were into [drugs]. They just went around and took the first bag of the sandbag wall and there was like...they had it all, needles it seems like it was \$16,000 worth of stuff and that was the price of living over there, and that stuff is probably pretty cheap. They had a big drug problem in that barracks actually.¹³⁴

Holcomb also remembers drug problems and general hostilities rising with the passing of time in Vietnam:

Towards the end of my tour, people started getting very hostile towards each other, because it was getting late in the war. And there was a lot of drugs around. And a lot of people were taking them. The communists were making sure the American soldiers got them. And others were making sure drugs were available, because they were making a lot of money. Drugs took a great toll on all soldiers.¹³⁵

Violence, hostility and drug abuse seem to arise together no doubt reflecting the tendency for a frustrated and unhappy population to seek out drugs in an attempt to escape the apparently degrading military situation. A few other men mention the violence and misconduct occurring often alongside drug abuse. David Martin describes one incident:

We had a rear detachment of people, a couple of those were...how do I want to put this...They had to burn shit in barrels with diesel fuel. These guys liked to do their pot and whatever else they did and be left alone and not too many people stood around them too much with the smell. But apparently they got high and they were going to take out the XO and chucked a hand grenade in his hooch. Luckily, he wasn't there but we had our first sergeant, when we were in camp he used to go to the shower carrying his .45, he was afraid those guys were going to do something to him.¹³⁶

Robert Holcomb remembers a couple stories that highlight the dangers of drugs and weapons when combined:

¹³⁴ Joe Powell, Interview by Steve Maxner, 27, December 2000. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, TTVA, 48.

¹³⁵ Terry, *Bloods*, 218.

¹³⁶ David Martin, Interview by Steve Maxner, 9 March; 21 April 2001. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, TTVA, 39.

One night, two white guys were playing this game in a bunker along the perimeter checkpoint as you leave the base camp at An Khe on the way to Qui Nhon. They had been taking speed and number tens. So they began to play with this grenade. Taking the pin out and putting it back in. They did it for a time, until one of 'em made a mistake and dropped the pin. When he found it he was so nervous he couldn't quite get it in, and the grenade exploded. It killed him. And his partner was critically injured. Another night, we had come in for a stand-down I was lying in bed, just about to go to sleep. We hear this burst and the bullets went through the tent. Everybody jumped off on the floor. We didn't have any weapons, 'cause they'd always disarm us when we'd come in. What happened was this black soldier had taken some drugs, and he just sort of went crazy. A lot of his anxieties and hostilities came out. He got an M-16 and sprayed a sergeant, killed him and two others.¹³⁷

Michael Horton's experience with fraggings, or the killing of one's comrade, concerned black soldiers shedding an interesting light on the friction sometimes arising between the older soldiers and the younger ones arriving in Vietnam:

During this time in summer of 1970 I was in An Son one of the instances we had a field troop commander, a West Point graduate, who was shot by two of his own men. They were black soldiers, they were drug abusers. They were part of what had kind of become in his outfit, a drug cult. And they were literally dared by their peers to shoot the old man. They shot him down with M-16s. Another occurrence that took place that summer. We had a black E-6 a very dedicated career soldier who walked in on two of his black soldiers who were drug pushers making a dope deal. He determined that they were conducting themselves in a way unbecoming to his race so he whipped out his .45 and shot them both.¹³⁸

Ruybal's experience returning to his unit lends a dramatic light on the growing heroin problem:

I talked to Davis. It was as if he didn't even want to acknowledge my presence. He was totally out of it. It thought, "What the hell happened to this unit?" there were soldiers from another unit that looked as if they were floating. I pulled Valeno aside and asked him who these men were. He said they were with the Fourth Infantry Division and had just come in from the field a few days ago. I said "Valeno, what are these guys up to?" Valeno said, "They've been shooting heroin."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Terry, *Bloods*, 218.

¹³⁸ Michael Horton, Interview by Monty Alan Hostetler, 26 February; 7 March 1990. Transcribed by Monty Alan Hostetler, Oral History Project, TTVA, 16.

¹³⁹ Jay Dee Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War* (Albuquerque, N. M.: Creative Designs, 1998), 239.

Within another of Ruybal's ruminations he laments the loss of Americans' innocence in the war and the rise of heroin: "There were rumors going around that Americans were starting to shoot up heroin. It had become an epidemic among many young and innocent American boys. I was getting stoned every day and taking liquid methamphetamine to stay awake by pouring it in a can of coke then drinking it. I had become one of America's drug hazed soldiers."¹⁴⁰

Dan Halsey could see visible first hand evidence of the rising heroin problem among men with many having "heroin tracks all over there arms" walking around the military base.¹⁴¹ Incompetence bred from drug use and alcoholism led to frustration felt by commanders, justifiably, illustrated here by Michael Horton:

I'll go on to an area and discuss, during this time, even though I was a unit commander with my hands full babysitting those fifty-four dopers and alcoholics, occasionally [I got] an assignment to be an investigation officer. Primarily infantry, ninety percent of the time, [reporting] the loss of a military weapon. What the soldiers would do is hitchhike down to some village if they were out to party, and they'd take their weapons. And then if they got high on dope or drunk or whatever, and lost that weapon then there had to be an investigation. Some of the stoners were unbelievable...¹⁴²

Horton's story conveniently leads into the theme of the next chapter, that is, what official attitudes towards drug and alcohol the military put forth. Interviews lend a patchwork perspective, sadly inadequate, but show that there existed much leeway for individual commanders to confront the drug and alcohol abuses as they saw fit. Social mores, and the military view that alcohol abuse went hand in hand with combat, appear integral in the response of men and their leaders. Drugs were viewed by many as an ill

¹⁴⁰ Ruybal, *The Drug Hazed War*, 259.

¹⁴¹ Don Halsey, Interview by Edwin Whiting, 9 April 1990. Transcribed by Edwin Whiting. Oral History Project, TTVA, 5.

¹⁴² Horton, 19.

too overwhelming to confront or acceptable to a degree, like alcohol, as long as one's job performance did not suffer.

There exists frustratingly little direct evidence of mid-level commanders' reaction to the drug problem spiraling out of control after the Tet Offensive, but evidence does exist that higher echelons of leadership knew of the rising drug problems. Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer, turning over his command of the US Army in Vietnam during 1968, warned Creighton William Abrams Jr., then commander of United States Military Assistance Command, that the "number of incidents of possession and use of marijuana by US Army personnel in Vietnam has steadily risen since 1965 and there is nothing to indicate [a reversal]." Palmer also warned of the growing economic importance of the South Vietnamese drug industry posing a threat to US servicemen.¹⁴³ Facts the Joint Chiefs of Staff relied upon to measure drug abuse among their soldiers consisted of two types of indirect evidence. The first measure included statistics relating to drug possession and use produced by the provost marshal and law enforcement agencies within the military. Military physicians and psychologists supplied the second means of determining the extent of drug use for higher ups, often in the form of anonymous questionnaires and other data collected. Law enforcement statistics revealed a more than two-hundred percent increase in the use of marijuana during 1968 compared to the previous year.¹⁴⁴ Jack Albertson remembers that General William Westmoreland, then Army Chief of Staff hated marijuana and "leaned" heavily on commanders to crack down

¹⁴³ Spector, Ronald H., *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 275.

¹⁴⁴ Spector, *After Tet*, 275.

on marijuana use. He agrees with literature espousing the importance of this crackdown in facilitating the rise of heroin.¹⁴⁵

The number of oral histories now available assists the historian in gaining some perspective on how local commanders confronted drug and alcohol abuse. According to Dr. Kaplan some differences did exist between the different branches of the armed services, specifically the Army and Air Force, the former acting more lenient than the latter towards drug abuse. Within the Army men could admit to abusing drugs and request help and not expect any disciplinary action, whereas men in the Air Force were reported to the Air Police risking some form of disciplinary action taken against them. Dr. Kaplan reported that when men did request for help commanders often obliged, sending them to his treatment center in Cam Ranh Bay.¹⁴⁶

Dr. Kaplan's testimony reports the sluggishness of the Army in admitting a problem existed and harassment by Army personnel in regards to interviews with civilian reporters. He points out a report from the Defense Department in 1969 stating that only about 3,500 cases of marijuana usage existed in the army when Kaplan insists there existed at least that many cases within his area of Nha Trang.¹⁴⁷ Scant evidence exists concerning a formulated plan calling for the obstruction of reporters by military leadership. Dr. Kaplan's testimony raises important questions regarding the military's policy towards disclosure of drug problems and an avenue for further scholarship ripe for inquiry.

¹⁴⁵ Jack Albertson, Interview by Steve Maxner, 22 May 2000. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel. Oral History Project, TTVA, 31.

¹⁴⁶ Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Drug Use in Vietnam: Hearing Before The Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency*, 91st Congress, Second session, March 24, 1970, 70.

¹⁴⁷ Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Drug Use in Vietnam*, 6.

Commanders in Vietnam did not have the immediate luxury of graphs and figures to demonstrate the rising drug problem. Reactions of commanders, again, varied widely and the small amount of direct evidence leaves the historian unable to make many concrete conclusions. Predominantly it seems that commanders approached drugs and alcohol with detached interest. Often choosing to view abuse in terms of how job performance continued unfettered or began to erode, in which case they would approach the soldier and deal with the situation. Russell Carver's testimony reflects the ignorance of many commanders concerning heroin abuse, as many undoubtedly had little or no contact with the drug in the States: "I'll tell you one thing that I was aware of that really was distressing to me; an E3 or an E4 out of his salary could afford a heroin habit and we had a tremendous amount of drug abuse among our soldiers. I didn't quite know what to do with that. This was early stages and so people weren't finding it a problem to them."¹⁴⁸

Anthony Goodrich reveals the military view that abuse usually became an issue only when one's job performance became compromised stating that "a lot of officers knew that we were smoking marijuana, but as long as it didn't interfere with our abilities to do the job" they did not step in choosing to "let it slide." He states that a lot of commanders drank heavily, something that undoubtedly aroused some sense of empathy in regards to escapism and the need for a release.¹⁴⁹

James Holt's testimony supports Goodrich's concerning the laissez-faire attitude taken towards marijuana: "We smoked [pot] over there when we knew that we weren't

¹⁴⁸ Russell Carver, Interview by Steve Maxner, 20 April 2001. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, TTVA, 60

¹⁴⁹ Anthony Goodrich, Interview by Steve Maxner, 11 April 2002. Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre. Oral History Project, TTVA, 81.

going anywhere. We would have probably beat the snot out of somebody that was stoned on a patrol or anything like that. Now I have to honestly admit, we had a couple of guys that seemed to function on [pot], and there again it goes back to that if you do your job, nobody gives a shit.”¹⁵⁰

Gary Smith recalls doing rubbish sweeps along the beach and encountering evidence of heroin abuse to be officially ignored:

[We] policed everything, and we’d pick up everything. If its not vegetation it needs to be picked up and thrown in the litter. The vials that were used to hold heroin were lying all over the sand. I mean you couldn’t walk two feet without stepping on a capsule of what contained drugs. They were clear plastic vials, probably about the size of a quarter in diameter...we were told not to pick them up.¹⁵¹

The use of amphetamines, or “speed,” by troops to stay awake or active reinforces the feelings of many men that drugs were indeed everywhere. Not only were drugs easily available through informal channels but sometimes through official military sources as well. Medics would commonly give out amphetamines to soldiers for increased energy and endurance. Some soldiers recall the common aggressive and hostile symptoms exhibited by men when on the drug or when coming down off them. Nick D’Allerandro, a Green Beret squad leader, recalls that he had “participated in the killings of at least one hundred civilians in the Iadrang Valley in 1964.”¹⁵² D’ Allerandro states that he was “usually under the influence of dextrine diamphetamine sulphate, fifteen-milligram-pills” and felt “incredible aggravation” upon coming down from the

¹⁵⁰ James Holt, Interview by Jonathan Berenstein, 12 November 2001. Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon. Oral History Project, TTVA, 39.

¹⁵¹ Gary Smith, Interview by Richard B. Verrone, 4 December 2003. Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin. Oral History Project, TTVA, 44.

¹⁵² Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 234.

amphetamines. He attributes this partly to the mass killings him and his units wrought upon the countryside.¹⁵³

Jack Alberston's testimony corroborates the view that military leaders pushed the envelope with drug use:

The use of amphetamines was advocated prior to the beginning of the drug abuse program, especially for long range patrols and some of those other Psy Ops [psychological operations] and some other things where people had to work very long hours; sometimes 22-24 hours in a clip and then take a break. We found out that a lot of these people were also taking barbs (barbiturates) and this was not necessarily endorsed and strongly recommended by their unit commanders, but it was happening because of popping a speed pill and being wide awake.¹⁵⁴

The use of drugs in combat provided by American military leadership raises important questions regarding culpability and the degree of responsibility individual men possessed regarding crimes against humanity, demonstrated by men like D' Allerandro, killing civilians under the influence of amphetamines. In many ways Vietnam represents the breakdown of military conceptions and discipline regarding behavior and performance. Leaders providing their men with performance enhancing drugs to increase normal physical capabilities represents a short sightedness and irresponsibility concerning soldiers and Vietnamese civilians' well being. The evidence represents a relatively small cross section of the Vietnam experience and due to the scant primary sources one can only guess the extent of amphetamine abuse at the hands of military leadership, but the moral and psychological ramifications are troubling nonetheless.

¹⁵³ Appy, *Working-Class War*, 284.

¹⁵⁴ Albertson, 34.

Vietnam's Legacy and Conclusions

Vietnam's legacy continues in the methods and policies the American military uses to confront drug and alcohol abuse within its ranks today. The policy formed by the Department of Defense in 1970, during the Vietnam War, shaped military efforts for close to a decade. Early detection and prevention lay at the heart of the new policy, set forth specifically in a number of directives during the early nineteen-seventies. A new policy developed in 1980 superseding those of the early seventies focusing more on prevention rather than rehabilitation in the earlier policy. This change arose partly due to the recognition that not all users are dependent upon drugs. Results of a 1980 Worldwide Survey of military personnel revealed little drug dependence among its ranks. Most users were young males under twenty-one, which in military leaders' minds exposed a lack of discipline, not an addiction problem.¹⁵⁵ Policy evolved again in 1986 when drug prevention policies fell within a larger wellness program. By fostering healthy decisions as a military mainstay officials hoped to further curb drug and alcohol abuse.

Drug testing provides the modern military with its foremost defense against drug abuse. Since 1985 all military applicants have been screened for marijuana and/or cocaine. Concerted efforts have also been made to control alcohol and drug availability on base. Military police now maintain tight control over alcohol availability while enforcing Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) laws.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Bray, Robert M.; Marsden, Mary Ellen; Herbold, John R.; Peterson, Michael R., "Progress Toward Eliminating Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among U.S. Military Personnel," *Armed Forces and Society* 18 (Summer 1992): 477.

¹⁵⁶ Bray, "Progress Toward Eliminating Drug and Alcohol Abuse Among U.S. Military Personnel," 479.

When assembled the oral histories used in this study portray a Vietnam War complex and divided providing reflecting the domestic turmoil of the times. Men's testimonies demonstrate the power of perception during the war and how the widespread availability of drugs and alcohol fused with the nascent social fissures developing within the American military exacerbated substance abuse. The importance of the environment and peer pressure arise in many of the interviews discussed and buttress the medical community's findings concerning their importance in substance abuse habits. Examples of this reside in the demarcations between enlisted men and officers often manifested in the distance between drinkers and smokers. This examination's conclusions concerning substance abuse not only reflect those trends of American troops and their social conceptions embodied therein, but also domestic substance abuse habits of the time, manifested in military environment providing a convenient framework for historical study.

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

PRICE OF ESCAPE: DRUGS, VIETNAM AND THE AMERICAN SOLDIER

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This thesis sets out to confront drug and alcohol abuse by American Servicemen during the Vietnam War, previously defying in depth historical analysis. New oral histories available within the last few years have shed new light on a previously elusive subject. Harnessing medical literature, government documents, oral histories and secondary sources this work seeks to explain the widespread alcohol and drug abuse the Vietnam War became infamous for. Factors contributing to abuse and elaborated upon include widespread availability of drugs and alcohol, military machismo, the inability of military leadership to cope with the burgeoning substance abuse problems and the rise of the domestic drug scene domestically.