



## Are We Losing Another War?

by Gene McCoy

"Did God Go A.W.O.L. in Viet Nam?" is a tri-fold pamphlet containing six reasons why Viet Nam was a different kind of war. Joe Harrell gave us a copy upon his return from a reunion of veterans in Kokomo, IN. Several points parallel our experience in the church's daily warfare, causing us to ponder the possibility, if not stark reality that we are losing yet another war.

The pamphlet first states that "the Army made the 'enemy' less than human to them." The Evil One has done a number on soldiers of the cross, too. He has persuaded many to think of him as less than real and formidable.

Oh, we talk about him and casually acknowledge his presence and power. But we don't take him too seriously, as evidenced by the facts that we dabble in his weaponry (e.g., certain forms of entertainment, etc.) and "vacation" in his territory (the kingdom of this world) without dressing appropriately. You know, we leave our armor in the closet throughout the week and drag it out to wear to church (e.g., the sword of the Spirit, etc. as in Eph. 6:10-20).

At times we *enjoy* and at other times we *endure* the weekly briefing sessions (a.k.a. sermon) as we watch and hear the professional soldier perform his obligatory diatribe against the enemy. We are there

to Vietnam was 500,000. Fewer than 50,000 were engaged in fighting in the field; 450,000 men and women were in the security defense of these big bases. We lost the war because so few actually got out there to do what they were trained to do."

Does this not resemble the picture in many congregations? The percentage is about the same, we are told. About 10% of any congregation is actively involved in the work. But many of them are not actually involved in combat on the front line. They are safely and securely hunkered down out of enemy range. Or so they have been deluded into thinking, according to the enemy's covert strategy.

The writer of the pamphlet also contrasts the objective of the Viet Cong to that of the liberators. "The Viet Cong," he wrote, "couldn't have cared less about occupying a certain location. They were fighting for the liberation of their brothers from capitalist domination. We were fighting to occupy a certain hill or rice paddy. They were fighting for minds; we for ground."

Here we draw another dramatic parallel. Most church members, we dare say, have as their primary objective the gathering of large numbers of people on Sunday mornings. They are aiding and abetting the enemy when

reminded that someone is waging the battle. This is the parallel drawn from another paragraph in the pamphlet.

"At the peak of America's involvement, the total number of troops committed

*convocation* as opposed to *conversion* is their primary purpose.

The writer of the pamphlet alleges that the military mismanaged the war. We allege that professional proponents of the modern Church Growth Movement have mismanaged the spiritual war in which we are supposed to be engaged. They have effectively high-jacked the divine commission to make disciples and substituted the mission of growing large churches through slick niche marketing that does not require the conversion of sinners to the way of righteousness, but caters to the perceived or felt needs of fallen men by appealing to their carnal nature.

Herein they create *church members*, but few *gospel ministers* thereby allowing the unconverted to infiltrate the ranks.

One other parallel struck me. The author noted that the rotation of soldiers in and out of the war zone created a set of problems never before encountered. He says the soldier's entire war experience took place in emotional isolation.

"Arriving in Saigon, he got jostled along to pick up jungle gear, loaded onto a helicopter and airlifted out to a jungle base camp where he was dumped off. There, he became a 'new guy.' None of the seasoned troops even wanted to know his name. New guys had a bad habit of stepping on mines and booby traps and getting maimed or killed, along with everyone around them. Keeping a good distance from them was accepted policy."

How is it in your congregation? Are the "new guys" assimilated into the fellowship (e.g., social life) and ministry? Do the "old guys" embrace them, hold their hand, shelter them, teach them the ropes, point out the mine fields and rescue them when they "step in it?" Or is the "new guy" left to fend for himself in emotional and spiritual isolation? Which of these scenarios is conducive to winning the war?