

Vietnam Remembered: Reflections on a War An Interactive Learning Resource

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Abstract

This presentation documents the creation of an interactive multimedia CD about the Vietnam War. Material used in the CD was selected from a website devoted to collecting reminiscences about the War from people who were affected by it. The website was designed so that visitors could view a portfolio of photographs taken in Vietnam by the author and leave comments about the war or respond to the comments left by others. Messages were organized into an inverted pyramid structure using the *HyperNews* messaging software. A database of messages from the site can be found on the CD.

The website was interactive from 1996 to 2004. This photographic gallery collected remembrances and commentaries left by over 5000 individuals from among hundreds of thousands that visited the site.

The CD features a dramatic narrative of over 100 photographs taken during the Vietnam War era combined with commentaries from veterans and others which are dramatically read by professional actors. The resulting presentation is a creative compilation of personal commentaries forming an oral history reflecting the effect of the Vietnam War on soldiers and civilians.

Today's multimedia technologies open up new venues of expression which better enable communication which can inform, influence and change opinions and public policies, expanding the public forum through technology. Photographs and excerpts from the website contained on the CD permit the viewer to access and hear the various stories told within a dramatic narrative with self-guided selections from the remembrances from the website's collection. One visitor wrote: *For many people in Vietnam and in the United States the war continues every day of their lives. It is fought with their minds and with their hearts. Let us end it. Now. Until this can happen our whole country is a Prisoner of War, a victim. It is time for us to stop being the victims and become the victors.* (Dinh Thi Phuc) The commentaries and accompanying photographs demonstrate how individuals are making personal journeys from war-time memories to the present.

One of the most important yet difficult transitions in life is that from war to peace. War leaves many people profoundly affected and healing requires an opportunity to tell one's story, to

express anger or sorrow and to acknowledge and learn from mistakes of the past. The Vietnam website was a catalyst to facilitate this transition for many people.

The multimedia CD is approximately 30 minutes in length and is Windows compatible. The intended audience for the CD is current and former members of the military, students studying the Vietnam War, members of the Vietnamese community and those people intending to visit Vietnam. ***Vietnam Remembered: Reflections on a War*** can be obtained for classroom and educational use by contacting the author at hoffmake@shu.edu.

Source material for the CD can be found at the websites listed below. These sites contain photographs taken in Vietnam and the United States between 1969 and 1972. Subjects include American and Vietnamese soldiers, street children, Vietnamese civilians, Vietnamese religious shrines, and American protesters. Twenty photographs from the portfolio are currently being used as scenic backdrop for the national road tour production of *Miss Saigon*. An additional fifteen photographs taken by North Vietnamese photographers including Vo Anh Khanh and Le Minh Truong as well as AP photographer Henri Huet have been added to the CD to illustrate specific remembrances.

The website and CD depict the events of an historical era. Their significance can be summed up by one Vietnamese visitor to the website who said, *The atmosphere, the settings, and the life of the time, (we) are losing fast...Whatever portrait of humanity we may be able to capture...may be a great education to the children that follow.* (Ky-Anh D. Phan)

After screening excerpts from the CD, the discussion centers on the process of creating an interactive photo gallery and presenting the results in order to preserve an historical or cultural picture of an era.

Web links

http://knossos.shu.edu/gallery/V_Portfolio/
http://pirate.shu.edu/~hoffmake/v_port.pdf
www.hypernews.org