

Saigon and the end of the Vietnam conflict, the Washington Post carried on its Op-Ed page a thoughtful, healing reflection on those events by Senator KERREY entitled, "Was It Worth It?" A hero—and casualty—of that conflict, the only Member of Congress ever to have received the Congressional Medal of Honor, he might understandably have turned his attention to those who did not think so and did not serve. Instead he allowed that for a period he had shared the same doubts, but had overcome them. As he contemplates the human destruction done by the dictatorship that followed, he concludes: "I believe the cause was just and the sacrifice not in vain." He is now, as he was then, a person of limitless courage.

I ask that his article be included in the RECORD.

[From the Washington Post, Apr. 30, 2000]

WAS IT WORTH IT?

(By Bob Kerrey)

The most difficult war of the last century was not Vietnam; it was World War I. In 1943, the year I was born, veterans of the Great War were remembering the 25th anniversary of their armistice while their sons were fighting in Italy and the Pacific against enemies whose military strength was ignored on account of the bitter memories of the failures of the First World War.

So, as I remember April 30, 1975, I will also remember Nov. 11, 1918, and what happened when America isolated itself from the world. But I will also remember the pride I felt when I sat in joint sessions of Congress listening to Vaclav Havel, Kim Dae Jung, Lech Walesa and Nelson Mandela thank Americans for the sacrifices they made on behalf of their freedom.

The famous photo of South Vietnamese ascending a stairway to a helicopter on the roof of our Saigon embassy represents both our shame and our honor. The shame is that we, in the end, turned our back on Vietnam and on the sacrifice of more than 58,000 Americans. We succumbed to fatigue and self-doubt, we went back on the promise we had made to support the South Vietnamese, and the Communists were able to defeat our allies. The honor is that during the fall of Saigon, we rescued tens of thousands of our South Vietnamese friends, and in the years that followed we welcomed more than a million additional Vietnamese to our shores.

For a young, college-educated son of the optimistic American heartland, the war taught some valuable lessons. My trip to Vietnam gave me a sense of the immense size and variety of our world. I was also awed by something that still moves me: that Americans would risk their lives for the freedom of another people. At the Philadelphia Naval Hospital I learned that everyone needs America's generosity—even me.

During the war, I knew the fight for freedom was the core reason for our being in Vietnam. But after the war, as I learned more about our government's decision-making in the war years, I became angry. I was angry at the failure of our leaders to tell the truth about what was happening in Vietnam. I was angry at their ignorance about the motives of our North Vietnamese adversaries and the history of Vietnam.

Our leaders didn't seem to understand the depth of commitment of our adversaries to creating their version of an independent Vietnam. I particularly detested President

Nixon for his duplicity in campaigning on a promise to end the war and then, once in office, broadening the war to Cambodia. But time has taught me the sterility of anger. So, as I recently told former secretary of defense Robert S. McNamara, I forgive our leaders of the Vietnam period.

I am able to forgive, not out of any great generosity of mine but because the passage of time and the actions of the Communist government of Vietnam proven to me we were fighting on the right side. In their harsh treatment of the Vietnamese people, in denying them medicine and essential consumer goods, and in persecuting religious practice, the Vietnamese Communists in the postwar years proved themselves to be—Communists.

The most eloquent comment on life under Ho Chi Minh's heirs was the flight of millions of Vietnamese who risked death on the high seas rather than live under that regime. If there was to be a trial to determine whether the Vietnam War was worth fighting, I would call the Boat People as my only witness.

Was the war worth the effort and sacrifice, or was it a mistake? Everyone touched by it must answer that question for himself. When I came home in 1969 and for many years afterward, I did not believe it was worth it. Today, with the passage of time and the experience of seeing both the benefits of freedom won by our sacrifice and the human destruction done by dictatorships, I believe the cause was just and the sacrifice not in vain.●

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message from the President of the United States was communicated to the Senate by Ms. Evans, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate a message from the President of the United States submitting a nomination which was referred to the Committee on Governmental Affairs.

(The nomination received today is printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bill was read the first and second times, and placed on the calendar:

H.R. 3767. An act to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to make improvements to, and permanently authorize, the visa waiver pilot program under section 217 of such Act.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, which were referred as indicated:

EC-8706. A communication from the Under Secretary of Defense, Acquisition and Technology, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the DoD missions and functions review report; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-8707. A communication from the Under Secretary of Defense, Comptroller, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the current Future Years Defense Program funding of the support costs associated with the F/A-18E/F multiyear procurement program; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-8708. A communication from the Under Secretary of Defense, Acquisition and Technology, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the percentage of funds that are projected to be expended during each of the next five fiscal years for performance of depot-level maintenance and repair workloads by the public and private sectors; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-8709. A communication from the Under Secretary of Defense, Policy, transmitting, pursuant to the 1999 Defense Authorization Act, a report that includes a descriptive summary of appropriations requested for each project category under each Cooperative Threat Reduction program element; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-8710. A communication from the President of the United States of America, transmitting, pursuant to the 1998 Supplemental Appropriations and Rescissions Act and the Strom Thurmond National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1999, the report on progress made toward achieving benchmarks in Bosnia, as adopted by the Peace Implementation Council and the North Atlantic Council for evaluating implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords, for a sustainable peace progress; to the Committee on Armed Services.

PETITIONS AND MEMORIALS

The following petitions and memorials were laid before the Senate and were referred or ordered to lie on the table as indicated:

POM-468. A concurrent resolution adopted by the Legislature of the State of Louisiana relative to obtaining an apology from the government of Japan for crimes against prisoners of war during World War II; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 4

Whereas, 33,587 men and women in the United States military and 13,966 United States civilians were captured by the forces of the Empire of Japan in the Pacific Theater during World War II, confined in brutal prison camps, and subjected to severe shortages of food, medicine, and other basic necessities; and

Whereas, many of the United States military and civilian prisoners of the Imperial Japanese Government during World War II were forced to work in coal, copper, lead, and zinc mines, steel plants, shipbuilding yards, and other private Imperial Japanese industries; and

Whereas, many of the United States military and civilian prisoners of the Imperial Japanese Government were starved and beaten to death or executed by beheading, firing squads, or immolation, while working for Japanese business entities that have become some of the largest multinational companies in the world today; and

Whereas, the Federal Republic of Germany has formally apologized to the victims of the Holocaust and provided financial compensation to its victims; and

Whereas, the United States government, in 1988, acknowledged the unfairness of its policy of detaining and interring Japanese-Americans during World War II; and

Whereas, while Japanese government officials have expressed personal apologies and