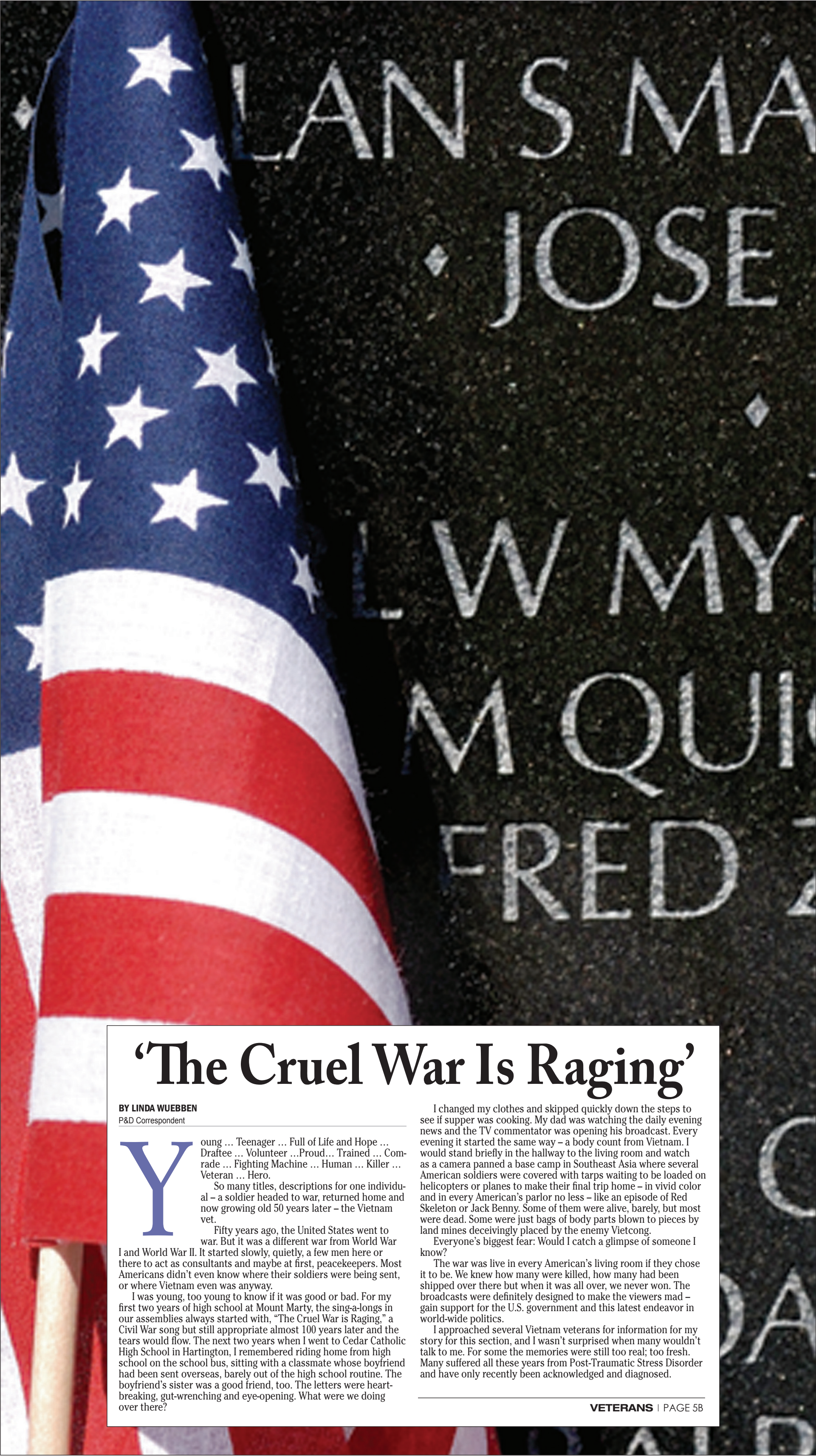


HERITAGE

70/40: WORLD WAR II (1945-2015) • VIETNAM WAR (1975-2015)



‘The Cruel War Is Raging’

BY LINDA WUEBBEN
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Young ... Teenager ... Full of Life and Hope ...
Draftee ... Volunteer ... Proud ... Trained ... Com-
rade ... Fighting Machine ... Human ... Killer ...
Veteran ... Hero.

So many titles, descriptions for one individual – a soldier headed to war, returned home and now growing old 50 years later – the Vietnam vet.

Fifty years ago, the United States went to war. But it was a different war from World War I and World War II. It started slowly, quietly, a few men here or there to act as consultants and maybe at first, peacekeepers. Most Americans didn't even know where their soldiers were being sent, or where Vietnam even was anyway.

I was young, too young to know if it was good or bad. For my first two years of high school at Mount Marty, the sing-a-longs in our assemblies always started with, “The Cruel War is Raging,” a Civil War song but still appropriate almost 100 years later and the tears would flow. The next two years when I went to Cedar Catholic High School in Hartington, I remembered riding home from high school on the school bus, sitting with a classmate whose boyfriend had been sent overseas, barely out of the high school routine. The boyfriend's sister was a good friend, too. The letters were heart-breaking, gut-wrenching and eye-opening. What were we doing over there?

I changed my clothes and skipped quickly down the steps to see if supper was cooking. My dad was watching the daily evening news and the TV commentator was opening his broadcast. Every evening it started the same way – a body count from Vietnam. I would stand briefly in the hallway to the living room and watch as a camera panned a base camp in Southeast Asia where several American soldiers were covered with tarps waiting to be loaded on helicopters or planes to make their final trip home – in vivid color and in every American's parlor no less – like an episode of Red Skeleton or Jack Benny. Some of them were alive, barely, but most were dead. Some were just bags of body parts blown to pieces by land mines deceptively placed by the enemy Vietcong.

Everyone's biggest fear: Would I catch a glimpse of someone I know?

The war was live in every American's living room if they chose it to be. We knew how many were killed, how many had been shipped over there but when it was all over, we never won. The broadcasts were definitely designed to make the viewers mad – gain support for the U.S. government and this latest endeavor in world-wide politics.

I approached several Vietnam veterans for information for my story for this section, and I wasn't surprised when many wouldn't talk to me. For some the memories were still too real; too fresh. Many suffered all these years from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and have only recently been acknowledged and diagnosed.