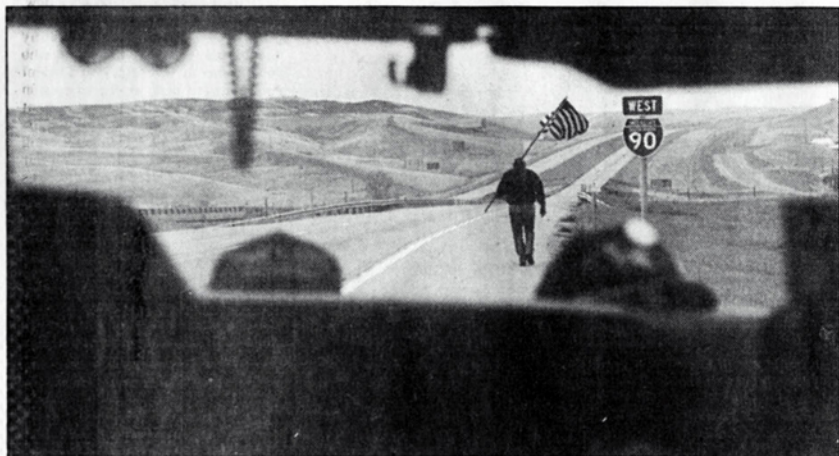


# Different Wars, the Same Sadness



Vietnam War veteran on a "healing walk" to raise awareness of veterans' issues, South Dakota, 1991.



Eritrean soldier in her former cell at what was an Ethiopian prison, Asmara, Eritrea, 1992.



Former Vietcong soldier and wife in a village for disabled veterans near Ho Chi Minh City, 1989.



Gulf war veteran suffering from multiple chemical sensitivity in an environmentally controlled room, Waco, Tex., 1993.

While I was researching a story in Israel and the occupied territories in 1986, I began photographing disabled veterans from Middle Eastern conflicts. Since then I have documented the stories of former soldiers in 11 countries around the world.

Among these veterans have been Americans who fought in Korea, Dogon tribesmen in Mali who were conscripted by the French in World Wars I and II, Eritrean women who fought against the Ethiopians, Vietnamese who fought against the French, Americans and Chinese.

When I heard men in remote villages in Africa or women in North Vietnam talk about war with the same sort of poetry and wisdom that I had heard in Europe and America, I became increasingly devoted to seeking out more of these ex-soldiers' tales.

For most of us, once the news stories are over and the yellow ribbons are packed away, the war is relegated to history. But for these veterans, the war never ends: it becomes a part of their daily lives. It is in their dreams, it affects their families, their jobs, the way they relate to the world. In some ways they seem forever stranded in that place and time. Their spirits as well as their bodies were wounded and defiled.

The lingering effects of combat and the conflicting emotions it instills in soldiers were illustrated by a veteran of the French-Algerian war, Arouna Adamou, who lives in Niger. "When we go to war it is because of an ideal: we want to defend and protect our land; legitimately that is why people go to war, that is why people risk their lives," he said. "After war, these people are proud. Not because they were happy to go to war — the human part of man should be ashamed that he went to war. Man was not created to fight. That part of him which feels pride is the vain part of man, the empty part of man. The human part has the shame."

Recently I heard the author Michael Herr quoted as having said: "Every soldier has the same story. Put yourself in their place . . . The repercussions of committing yourself to combat are horrific." With conflicts in Somalia, Bosnia and other places, new veterans are being created all the time. Who better represents the preciousness of life, the need for peace and the human cost of making war?

— LORI GRINKER, author of the forthcoming "When the War's Not Over."

Photographs by Lori Grinker, Contact Press Images