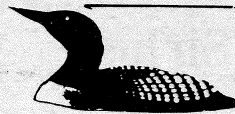


North Country Notebook



George Vukelich

Veterans Of Peace And War

by George Vukelich

On the eve of Veterans Day, a young Wisconsin marine is buried in his home soil as flights of Canada geese fill the November sky.

On the television, the somber list of the dead scrolls across the screen after glimpses of American jets streaking out of the Lebanon sky.

There is the smell of war in the air, and the people seem numb. There was this same trauma 20 years ago on another November day when an American President was blown away and a lot of his contemporaries realized, for the very first time, what Ernest Hemingway meant when he wrote that war is a game after all, only the first time they catch you off base they kill you.

"During the war in Vietnam," the gentlewoman known as Peace Pilgrim has written, "there was intense peace activity. When the war was finished, there was a letdown and a period of apathy resulted. I suppose this was inevitable. It happens after every war."

Peace Pilgrim was the persona of that remarkable woman who crisscrossed this country seven times between 1953 and 1981 carrying the message: *When enough of us find inner peace, our institutions will become more peaceful and there will be no more occasion for war.* After her death in 1981, her writings were gathered together in the Peace Pilgrim Collection at the Swarthmore College Peace Library.

In one of those writings, Peace Pilgrim observed that "the basic cause of all our difficulties is immaturity.

"That's why I talk so much about peace within ourselves as a step toward peace in our world. If we were mature, war would not be possible and peace would be assured. In our immaturity, we do not know the laws of the universe, and we think evil can be overcome by more evil. One symptom of our immaturity is greed, making it difficult for us to learn the simple lesson of sharing.

"Now, I realize," she emphasized, "that sometimes the symptoms become so acute that if we don't work on them, we might not survive to work on the cause, so during the war in Vietnam I did participate in some peaceable peace demonstrations. That was an amazing time. The people of this country stopped the war in Vietnam, in spite of the government. It just shows the power of the people of this country.

"You don't have to be very good at arithmetic," Peace Pilgrim said, "to figure out that if the nations of the world would stop manufacturing implements of destruction, the conditions for a very good life could be provided for all people."

It would be easy to put her down as some religious freak, but in the pockets of her blue tunic she carried quotations from some of the most pragmatic folks around.

General Omar Bradley: "Wars can be prevented just as surely as they can be provoked, and we who fail to prevent them must share in the guilt for the dead."

General Douglas MacArthur: "I have known war as few men now living know it. Its very destructiveness on both friend and foe has rendered it useless as a means of settling international disputes."

Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final sense a theft from those who are hungry and not fed, those who are cold and not clothed."

John F. Kennedy: "Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind... War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today."

Lyndon B. Johnson: "The guns and the bombs, the rockets and the warships, all are symbols of human failure."

Herman Goering, at the Nuremberg Trials: "Why, of course people don't want war. Why should some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece? Naturally the common people don't want war: neither in Russia, nor in England, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But after all, it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it's a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy."

...

A bunch of us are going up to the Capitol rotunda this Friday evening to remember the young men who have to die for the terrible mistakes the old men made. If Peace Pilgrim could be there, she would ask the old men for an accounting. We will ask for the accounting in her name.

I want to know the books you read.

How many hungry do you feed?

How many have you forced to bleed?

How many sent down to the grave?

I care not for your battalion flags.

How many children are left in rags?

How many soldiers in body bags?

Why are you called Home of the Brave?

Do you speak peace and yet wage war?

Do you lock the poor outside your door?

You are not to mock them anymore.

Now, show me the things you expect to save.