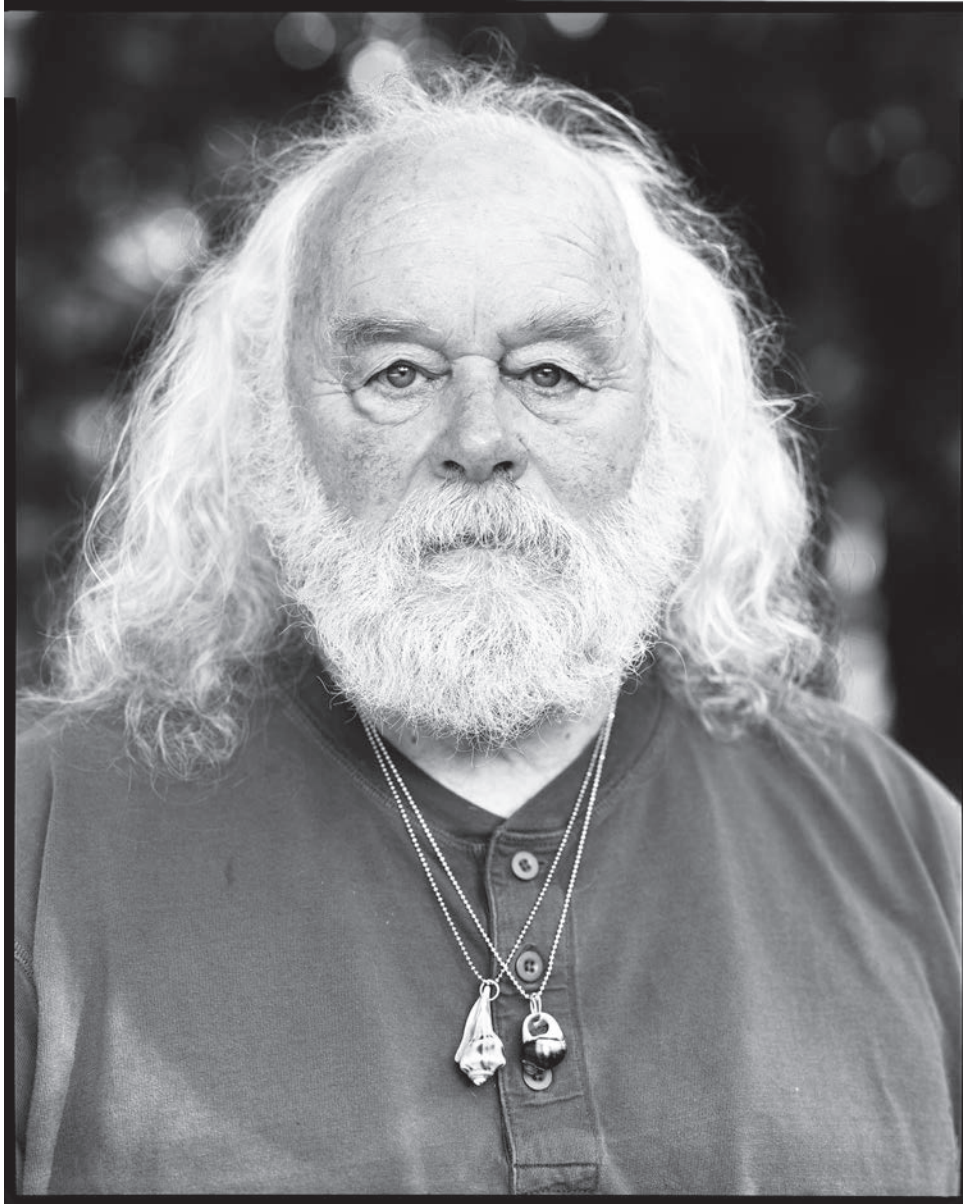


# BUT... SUCH IS WAR

VIETNAM REFLECTIONS ON VINEYARD WATERS



JANUARY 21 - FEBRUARY 28, 2020  
SEPTEMBER 15, 2020 - JANUARY 10, 2021  
**MARTHA'S VINEYARD MUSEUM**



STEVE MAXNER, 2019  
PHOTOGRAPH BY DAN WATERS

## BUT... SUCH IS WAR

### VIETNAM REFLECTIONS ON VINEYARD WATERS

A decapitated Vietcong soldier baking in the sun greeted me upon arriving at my first duty station. In the early hours of the next morning, I stuffed skull fragments and brain matter that had fallen on the deck of the chopper back into the head of an elderly civilian while his daughter pierced my soul with hatred tipped daggers. I went numb...I think everyone did. From that moment on, “fuck it, don’t mean nothin,” the unit’s mantra, became a guiding philosophy of survival.

Back home, this effective wartime coping strategy eventually landed me in the Northampton, Massachusetts VA Hospital’s PTSD Unit for three months. In many ways, the past fifty years have been a reconnaissance mission to locate my feelings and uncover memories frozen in time. As I work this reparative process I am deeply saddened that the Vietnam War was, among other things, an indiscriminate war against innocents and children. It was, in my opinion, wrong and unnecessary.

Recently, I have been collecting “gifts washed in by the tide” during my daily beach walks with my dog, Ollie. Somehow, these gifts from the sea help me reconnect to lost memories as they become transformed into the tangible thoughts and feelings hanging on the walls of this exquisite room. I have no idea how this happens. It’s all a great mystery, but I think it has something to do with the healing nature of Vineyard waters.

STEVE MAXNER

2019



### **Where Are the Birds**

2019

67" x 9 1/2"

The only birds I saw on my entire tour in Vietnam were chickens and domesticated ducks. Fortunately, it seems, the indigenous bird population had the good sense to fly away. I painted this picture on part of a boat that washed ashore in Vineyard Haven because I need to be surrounded by my longtime feathered friends.



### **Death, the Greatest Teacher**

2019

22" x 26"

Death has taught me that all life is precious...and fleeting.



### **Lighting the Night Sky**

2019

31 1/2" x 16"

Luminescent flares, delivered by artillery batteries, would light the battlefield after the sun went down...





## **Rebirth**

2019

34" x 17"

I found this beautiful stern section of an old skiff at Burt's Cove behind the hospital. Repurposing it with some of my shoreline friends gives meaning to my day...



## **Amphibious Body Bag**

2019

18 1/2" x 17"

Amphibious attack vehicles were used on the many tributaries along the Mekong River. An exit point from river to land was mined by Viet Cong soldiers and resulted in the deaths of two Americans. Oh, how we love to hate...



### **Duck Pond**

2019

20" x 8"

Some thought it great fun to toss grenades into the duck ponds that were common on the outskirts of most villages in the delta...what would our reaction be to a 19-year-old "foreigner" throwing a grenade into our own beloved Mill Pond, killing the ducks, geese, and swans? Further, what state of mind would any of us have to be in to perpetrate such an act?



### **Grunts**

2019

30" x 5"

On both sides of the battlefield, foot soldiers are the true heroes. Although wearing different uniforms and carrying different colored flags, these warriors are to be honored and respected.



### **Ben's Pond**

2019

42" x 5 1/4"

Just outside the entrance to "C" Company aid station was a bomb crater filled with rainwater. We would throw body parts: arms, legs, fingers, toes, into the pond and joke that we were feeding "Ben." Over time, Ben morphed into a mystical beast who traveled the world seeking out war zones in which to feed...



### **Survival**

2019

12" x 9"

All life has an instinctual need to survive. We will do almost anything to fulfill this mandate. All of us!





### **Ambush at Bien Luc Bridge**

2019  
47" x 21"

Three American soldiers were killed in action in a brief firefight near the Bien Luc bridge, which was about 30 miles south of what was then called Saigon.



### **Molecules**

2019  
22 1/2" x 5"

On my daily walks on the beach with my dog, Ollie, to collect "ingredients" for my healing process work, I am always struck with the awesome beauty of the objects I find. They have become friends who help me remember that despite a darkened heart, I, just like these magnificent quahog shells, have a place and a purpose, however small, in our tiny world.

Vengeance bequeaths vengeance. Hatred bequeaths hatred. Retaliation bequeaths retaliation. War bequeaths war. Compassion bequeaths compassion. Love bequeaths love. Kindness bequeaths kindness.



**184 Canadians**

2019

35" x 8 1/2"

Our friends to the north are our  
friends to the north...



**5,000 South Koreans**

2019

35" x 4"

Highly disciplined soldiers who were formidable allies to  
the United States during the Vietnam War.



### **521 Australians K.I.A.**

2019

29" x 5"

Of the 60,000 Australians who served in the Vietnam War, 521 were killed and 3,000 were wounded.



### **20,000 Hmong**

2019

17" x 5 3/4"

Fierce and dedicated warriors...



**58,200 Americans**

The ultimate sacrifice...

2019

35" x 4"



**3,800,000 Vietnamese**

The purpose of war is to kill people...

2019

35" x 6"



**Tens of Thousands of Children**

2020

42 1/2" x 11"

During the duration of the Vietnam War, tens of thousands of innocent Asian children were killed...why?





### **Beware, I'm Contaminated**

2019

11 1/2" x 5"

Since Vietnam, I have felt that I am a contaminated soul. Someone to be avoided because of my complicity in the deaths of millions of people...



### **Dragon**

2019

50" x 18"

The first time I met the dragon I tried to shoot him but he vanished into the jungle night. The second time, he laughed at me when I ignored his warning of imminent danger. The last time, he froze time and latered reality to save the life of a young Vietnamese girl.



### **Wonder**

2019

40 1/2" x 7"

As I collect these gifts washed in overnight, I wonder about their lives and life cycles. How were they born? What and how do they eat, and why the multiplicity of colors? I wonder...



### **Hello**

2019

13" 12"

On your next beach walk, pick me up and say hello. In the big picture, we are all sisters and brothers.



## **Where is God**

2019

11 1/2" x 7"

While under attack I prayed for God to keep me safe. During B-52 strikes along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, I prayed for the deaths of the soldiers coming to kill me. I am sure that these same "enemy" soldiers prayed to God that their artillery shells would find their American targets and that American bombs would miss theirs...where is God?



## **My Amygdala After a Flashback**

2019

38" x 7 1/2"

Part of my PTSD is disrupted sleep, ugly dreams, and flashbacks. I think they lay in wait until I am most vulnerable in the middle of the night...



**Stack 'Um in the Corner**

2019

39 1/2" x 9 1/2"

During a mass casualty situation, my friend Charlie Burns remarked that we should "stack the dead ones in the corner."



**The Abyss**

2019

16 1/2" x 11"

There are numerous doors leading into the void...and many exits...there is but one way into the abyss and no way out...



**Thuy's Hair**  
2019  
16" 14 1/2"

In his understandable anguish, after his co-pilot was shot through the neck, Jamersen, in an uncontrolled state of rage, cut Thuy's hair off with a hunting knife...





## **Life and Death**

2019

28" x 6"

Seven months into my tour, my first daughter Jennifer was born. My wife Joyce audio taped the birth and sent me a copy. One night in September 1970, I sat on top of a bunker with some buddies and listened to the tape while watching a nighttime fire fight about a half mile away...





**Phu Quoc Island P.O.W. Camp**

2019

36" x 18"

Thousands of captured Viet Cong, North Vietnamese regulars (NVA), and political prisoners were transported to Phu Quoc Island P.O.W. camp. But...such is war.



### **Fustercluck**

2019  
17" x 12"

Seldom did operations go as planned...



### **Boat People**

2019  
29" x 6"

One of the few things I felt good about after the war was helping resettle a family of Vietnamese boat people in America. This remarkably brave and resilient family has made our country a better place to live for all of us...





### **Forgive Me Johnny**

2019

6 1/2" x 4"

My poor judgement led to the death of a 19-year-old American soldier. I will never forgive myself, nor should I...



### **One Step Behind**

2019

15 1/2" x 4"

Three weeks from the end of his tour, Bill Streeter stepped on a booby trap and lost a foot...





**Smitty**

2019  
28" x 15"

Smitty was an outstanding Med-Evac helicopter pilot who was killed along with his co-pilot, medic, and crew chief when he hit the trees at 120 knots.



### **Hannah's Heart**

2019

37" x 8"

Hannah is a very kind soul. When she was a kid she told us that when she grew up she wanted to be a farm...



### **8 Friends**

2019

3 1/2" each

Finding these friends on the beach is like discovering lost treasure.



**Let**

2019

12 1/2" x 4"



**Us**

2019

10 1/2" x 4"



**Have**

2019

5 3/4" x 3 1/2"



**Peace**

2019

36" x 18"



**Lamp of Hope**

2019

36" x 25"

Things change when you  
turn the next corner...



**Incoming**

2020

19 1/2" x 21 1/2"



**Heavy Hours Till Dawn**

2020

18" x 19"





**We Have to Kill Them to Save Them**

2020

21" x 24 1/2"



**US Foreign Policy in Vietnam, 1959 - 1975**

2020

17" x 25"



**Truth Slips Through Our Fingers...Till It's  
Gone...And We Are Damned...**

2020

9 1/2" x 10"



**Where Have All the Flowers  
Gone...Agent Orange...Everyone...**

2020

41 1/2" x 13 1/2"



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ALL CATALOG PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY DAN WATERS, 2020