24 Former weakling and mail-order strongman Charles Atlas dies.

The Godfather outgrosses *Gone With the Wind* to become the most popular movie to date.

26 The 33rd president of the United States, Harry S. Truman, dies.

31 Most popular music, books and film – 1972: Roberta Flack's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" (pop single); Chicago's *Chicago V* (pop album); Al Green's "Let's Stay Together" (R&B single); Freddie Hart's "My Hang-Up Is You" (C&W single); Herman Wouk's *The Winds of War* (fiction); Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (nonfiction); *The Godfather* (film).

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3 Cleveland shipping tycoon George M. Steinbrenner III, heading a business association that purchases the New York Yankees for $10 million, promises that he will "not be active in the day-to-day operations" of the team.

4 ROLLING STONE reports the top vote-getters in a *New Musical Express* poll of 900 rock artists: John Lennon, Free lead singer Paul Rodgers, Bob Dylan, Stone the Crows frontwoman Maggie Bell, Mick Jagger and Ray Charles.

6 *Science News* reports a team of Belgian scientists has discovered genetic sequencing on a molecular level.

11 Baseball's American League owners announce they will experiment over the next three seasons with a pinch hitter who will not force the pitcher out of the game; the "designated hitter" will become a defining fixture of AL games.

The Justice Department charges the finance arm of the Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP) with eight counts of election-financing-law violations for not recording over $30,000 that it gave to White House aide G. Gordon Liddy. E. Howard Hunt pleads guilty to all six counts of conspiring to spy on Democrats during the 1972 presidential campaign. Liddy and James McCord Jr. will be found guilty of similar charges on Jan. 30.

13 Pete Townshend hosts an all-star bash at London's Rainbow Theatre to welcome back Eric Clapton after years

the war comes home
by david harris

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, the Seventies didn't really begin until 1973, when the Paris peace agreement was signed and the last American military forces were withdrawn from Vietnam. The war there amounted to a decade unto itself, and no new decade could truly begin until the war ended. Even in 1973, more than two years of carnage was still to come, a period in which the United States would arm and finance its Vietnamese surrogates. But henceforth, Americans would stay behind the scenes in Saigon and do no more of the dying out in the tall grass – an arrangement that passed for "peace at hand" back in the United States. I was in California and heard the news from Paris on the radio. My response was a state of numb anticlimax. The longest decade in American history was finally over, and there wasn't much left to feel about it. It had been that kind of war.

Most of the war's survivors fled into the Seventies and didn't look back, hoping to forget the previous decade. Avoidance was not, however, a universal option. I began the Seventies by giving up political organizing after ten years of doing nothing else and looked for a job in journalism. By the time the last prisoners of war were passed back into American hands, I was on my first assignment for ROLLING STONE, interviewing former Marine Sergeant Ron Kovic, who'd returned home five years earlier, bound to a wheelchair for the rest of his life, his spinal cord having been severed by an AK-47 round. I'd sold the story to ROLLING STONE as my chance for a last word on the vets' homecoming. Kovic said, "A war ain't over until you don't have to live with it anymore," providing not only a last word but, perhaps, the first mantra of the new decade.

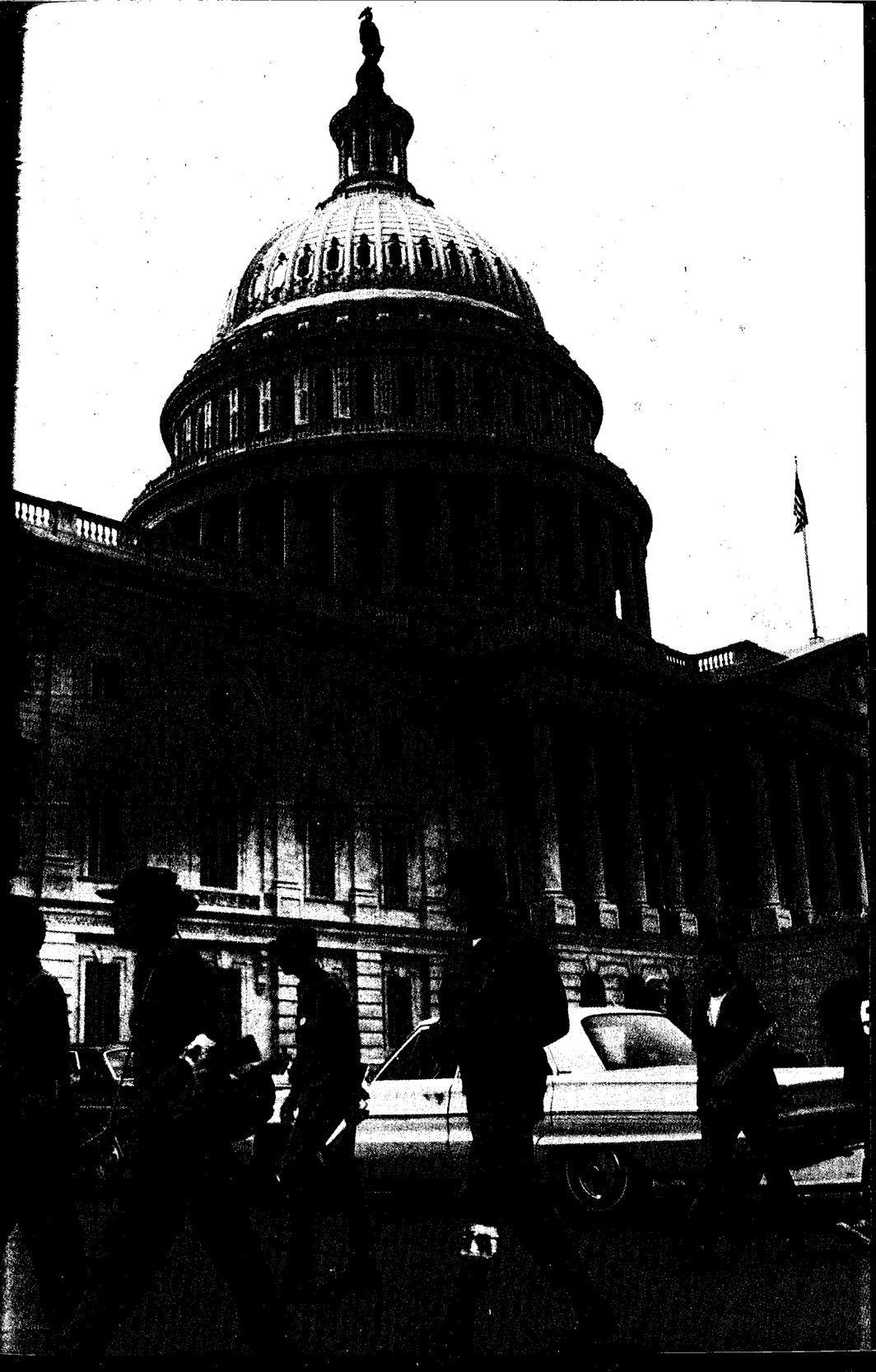
More than two thousand Vietnam veterans participate in nonviolent demonstrations at the U.S. Capitol, April 21, 1971: At right: VVAW members carry toy guns; following page: Vets gather on the Mall while Congressmen address their efforts to bring all the soldiers home

These warriors, whose final return jump-started the Seventies, went on to spend the new decade as the ongoing symbols of the nightmare in our immediate past, though it took a while for that stereotype to stick. At first, they were simply ignored. Soldiers were coming home from 1964 on, but no one threw them any parades, and few paid them much regard. They just dribbled in, one by one, full of stories no one wanted to hear, fresh from a conflict that fewer and fewer of their peers wanted anything to do with.

Initially their dissent was personal and largely isolated, often linked to a sense of obligation to their buddies who had never made it home. But as more and more disgruntled veterans found each other, many now scruffy-looking and hirsute, together they became a public voice under the banner of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

In April 1971, members of VVAW seized the leading edge of the antiwar movement when they returned their medals, marching through Washington and flinging their combat ribbons on the steps of Congress in an act of collective disgust. I listened to live coverage of the event on the radio, driving along the old Nimitz Freeway by the San Francisco Bay. I had been released from prison two weeks earlier, after twenty months of incarceration for refusing to obey orders to report for the war. When the medals flew, I started crying and had to pull onto the shoulder for a while.

The VVAW march finally broke the government's exclusive claim that its administration represented and spoke for soldiers. For the rest of the war, VVAW carried on its case against the government. Sergeant Ron Kovic gained brief national attention when he invaded the 1972 Republican convention in Miami Beach, but by then Richard Nixon had long since concluded that veterans posed a political threat he had to counteract. One of the White House's numerous covert "dirty tricks" teams (a practice that would help bring about Nixon's resignation) was first used to spy on and disrupt the VVAW. A number of the veterans who had organized the demonstrations around the



of heroin addiction; performances feature Townshend, Ron Wood, Steve Winwood and Rick Grech.

14 The Miami Dolphins defeat the Washington Redskins, 14–7, in Super Bowl VII, after a perfect 16–0 season.

Elvis Presley's live performance at the Honolulu International Center Arena captures the largest TV audience to date; the concert is later released as a double LP and becomes his last #1 album.

Glam star Gary Glitter celebrates six months of success with his new moniker by discarding photos, records, tapes and other mementos of his past stage personae – skiffle bandleader Paul Russell and rocker Paul Raven – into the Thames River in London.

16 The Soviet eight-wheeled remote lunar probe *Lunokhod 2* lands and explores the moon's surface.

Steve Carlton signs a one-year, $167,000 contract with the Philadelphia Phillies and becomes professional baseball's highest-paid pitcher.

17 Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo again face charges for leaking state secrets as the second Pentagon Papers trial opens.

18 The Rolling Stones raise more than $400,000 for Nicaraguan earthquake victims with a special benefit concert at the L.A. Forum. Nearly 19,000 fans catch the Stones and openers Cheech & Chong and Santana.

22 In the landmark *Roe* v. *Wade* decision, the Supreme Court rules that no state may prevent a woman from having an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. Within three weeks, the National Council of Catholic Bishops warns that any Catholic woman undergoing an abortion will immediately face excommunication.

Heavyweight champion Joe Frazier loses the title to George Foreman in a second-round TKO in Kingston, Jamaica.

Former president Lyndon B. Johnson dies of a heart attack in Johnson City, TX.

23 Legendary New Orleans jazz trombonist Edward "Kid" Ory dies.

President Nixon announces that the Paris Peace Talks have yielded an agreement between Henry Kissinger and

convention Kovic invaded were arrested by the federal government and booked on conspiracy-to-riot charges. I covered their August 1973 trial for ROLLING STONE as well. The alleged VVAW ringleader, former Marine Sergeant Scott Camil, talked with me about the crimes the government was *not* charging him with: From atop a railroad trestle, his platoon had shot everyone who moved in the village below; on another occasion, he had personally blown an unarmed woman's brains out when she tried to conceal a fleeing Viet Cong. He said he would willingly plead guilty to those war crimes, but he couldn't find any court willing to charge him. As for the conspiracy, the jury acquitted Camil and the seven other defendants.

Despite their peacemaking role, Vietnam veterans began the new decade subsumed under the sway of dark images attached to the war itself. The public at large knew few veterans, but they knew all about the war itself and were largely unable to separate it from the warriors who had been sent to carry it out. Hollywood did little to dispel the cloudy, threatening image of the returning veteran. In 1974 alone, TV detectives on *Mannix*, *Cannon*, *Columbo*, *The Streets of San Francisco* and *Hawaii Five-0* had their hands full in at least one episode with the "good boy gone bad," twisted by battle and/or drugs.

In truth, the war had been a bloody enterprise and its veterans were often assumed to be dangerous, but such character traits were hardly widespread among the soldiers once they returned stateside. Most of the more than three million men and women posted in Southeast Asia during the previous decade had disappeared into the larger social morass with hardly a ripple.

According to a *Washington Post*–ABC News poll taken on the tenth anniversary of the war's end, 30 percent of veterans of the Vietnam theater, combat and otherwise, had gone on to college, 78 percent owned their own homes, 43 percent considered themselves middle class and 70 percent voted Republican. Little of that America informed the veterans' Seventies stereotype, though – largely because of some veterans' very visible association with two of the decade's flagship issues. And in the light that those issues cast, the young men who returned from fighting among the rice paddies by the South China Sea seemed both the ghosts of an unwelcome past and the harbingers of a future far scarier than that for which we had hoped.

The first issue was drug abuse. The trickle that became a tidal wave of hard-core addiction inundating American neighborhoods, schools and social institutions began in Vietnam, before the troops even came home. In 'Nam, the drug of choice was heroin: grown as opium in the "Golden Triangle" where Thailand, Laos and Burma came together; flown south by the Central Intelligence Agency–fronted airline Air America; refined in Laos by a general in the army of America's principal Laotian allies and distributed in Vietnam by high-ranking members of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. For the last two years before the American Army withdrew, 80 to 99 percent pure number-four-grade smack was available from dozens of outlets around every permanent American base or along the roads connecting bases. Soldiers used it to treat the pain of having their lives dangled over an abyss ten thousand miles from home with nothing to show for those who fell in. In 1971, army medical officers estimated that 10 to 15 percent of lower-ranking soldiers – 25,000 to 37,000 people – were consuming number four on a regular basis. When those soldiers went home to the streets of America to chase their habit, they were the Seventies' first clear signal that what constituted pursuing "drugs" had escalated from a relatively harmless use of psychedelics to a far more heavy-metal social tryst.

The other Seventies issue attached to the returning veterans was a new, more pernicious from of shell shock, the twisted public reenactment of a past that would not go away when they were confronted by a present they could not master. Just as Kovic had predicted, the war was not easy to end. Early in the decade, several very visible incidents occurred featuring armed and disoriented veterans set off by such commonplace stimuli as car backfires (that sounded like AK-47 rounds) or Caterpillar trucks (that sounded like armored personnel carriers advancing over Vietnamese red dirt, hard as concrete during those last weeks before the monsoon set in). The echo would send a vet reeling back in time, to a firefight somewhere out in the rice paddies, while he was actually standing in a strip mall or housing project. I reported on one former sniper who went up on a hill in Los Angeles's Griffith Park with a rifle and was finally forced to surrender to the police after

a standoff of several hours. The media coverage of this incident and similar segments on the evening news effectively strapped signs that read DANGEROUS around Vietnam veterans' necks for the rest of the decade.

Ironically, the eventual diagnosis of those freak-outs, and a far larger number of similar but less dramatic regressions, led to a psychiatric breakthrough that was perhaps the closest thing to American self-realization the Seventies ever achieved. This condition was labeled post-traumatic stress disorder. It assumes that some experiences are far too intense to be assimilated when they occur, and that one's need to survive the immediate traumatic moment forces a suppression of an inevitable need to come to grips with the experience. If that intense experience remains unassimilated after the fact, obstructed by avoidance and denial, it often breaks to the surface again as a spontaneous recurrence of the emotions of the original circumstance, if not as a full-blown hallucination.

PTSD not only provided a framework for treating those men stuck in time, but also served as a metaphor for the era. Despite widespread avoidance, our trauma was inescapable, and the Seventies were shadowed throughout by the war America had just managed to survive. Its emblem was always those poor boys who had grown old too soon and come home too late to do anything about it. Now, of course, they are no longer boys, and the traits the Seventies credited to them have long since become commonplace among all the constituencies of American life. But their trauma – and America's – still echoes.

For most of that new decade, I lived in a house in Menlo Park, California, around the corner from a Veterans Administration psychiatric treatment facility. I often crossed paths with the outpatients at the neighborhood grocery store, where both they and I would stop to buy cigarettes. Occasionally, one of them would bum a smoke off me. I got to know Leroy that way. He was at the store a lot. He'd been a Spec. 4 with the 1st Air Cavalry, liked $1.50-a-quart burgundy and smoked Camels. We got so we would banter whenever we encountered each other, always in more or less the same way.

"What's up, Leroy my man?"

"Same old same old."

"Sing me a few bars," I said.

"Jes' like always," Leroy answered. "They's somewhere out there in the trees and we's stuck out here in the middle with no motherfuckin' place to hide." ⊕