

'Brothers in Arms' draws truce with memories

By **JAMES SUROWIECKI**
Assistant Sports Editor

In the last 25 years, no experience has shaken the American psyche more than the Vietnam War. In many respects, the story of that war, of the men who fought in it and those who fought against it, was the central narrative of the American consciousness in the 1970s.

The United States had, after all, finally lost a war. Even more, we seemed to have been on the wrong side, propping up a government that had no popular support, sending American boys to die for a cause in which they ultimately had no real stake. The war shook the foundations of U.S. foreign policy and, when coupled with Watergate, shook the American people's faith in their government.

At the heart of this story is the Vietnam veteran. He fought an enemy he never knew for reasons he was never told. On his return home he was reviled and treated like an outcast in his own land. For him, the healing process has only recently begun.

William Broyles, who was in Oxford in 1968 and in the jungles

of Da Nang in 1969, needed to do something more, something more than the memorials and parades. After leaving his job as Newsweek Editor-in-Chief in 1984, Broyles returned to Vietnam in search of the part of the war he never came to grips with. He was searching for his enemy, and he found him.

The result of Broyles' travels is "Brothers in Arms," a work that is at times terribly powerful but whose force is diluted by a lack of focus. His visit can be divided just as Vietnam was, into North and South, and the book is fragmented in the same way. The fragmentation does not give the book more scope, but rather diffuses its impact. The essence of the book is not revealed, and the journey from war to peace, as Broyles terms it, does not really begin, until he goes south, into the land where he fought, the land he knew.

Nevertheless, his visits to Hanoi, Phat Diem and Nam Dinh are interesting and give the reader a Westerner's view of what life in Vietnam is like. Broyles is laden with oversimplistic ideas about capitalism vs. communism and Western vs. Eastern, but the stories he tells are

fascinating.

Because Broyles really wants to talk about people, he is on much firmer footing when he does just that. His writing is beautifully concise and hard, with very little excess. In that sense, his style fits well with his topic, for one of his themes is that the Vietnamese are a hard, ascetic and driven people, enormously focused and willing to give all for the cause. As Uncle Ho said, and as just about every person we meet in the book says of the war, for the Vietnamese "Nothing is more important than independence and freedom."

The people Broyles encounters north of the DMZ keep the book moving through its first half. He talks to a woman whose husband was away for nine years fighting the Americans and did not come home once. "I received one letter," she says. "I remember it well. It was in 1969." His interviews with a number of generals provide a compelling view of American strategy from the other side, as well as Vietnamese tactics from the inside.

Broyles' narrative really gets going, though, when he heads south. His experiences in the North, although provocative, have a detached air. Broyles is the observer, the visitor. The men and women he talks to, whatever their role in the war, are not his brothers in arms. They were part of a war he never knew.

But the former members of the

Viet Cong he meets in the South were part of a war he knew only too well. They were the people he tried to kill and who tried to kill him. Many of the memories they share are the memories he returned to Vietnam to exorcise. Yet one of the most powerful themes of the book is that for the Vietnamese these memories are not so important. What is past is past. They did what they had to do, and now must deal with today. Life goes on.

Throughout the book, Broyles intersperses the account of his travels with memories of his first tour of Vietnam. Reminiscent at times of Caputo and Del Vecchio, but lacking the gritty sense of immediacy those authors provide, these memories come alive when Broyles talks with the VC. The shadowy figures in the night, the faces behind the green tracers of the AK-47s, are finally illuminated.

It is in his conversations with these people that Broyles' experiences

become meaningful to us. These conversations comprise the heart of his journey, and the tragedy of the book is that we do not get enough of them.

Throughout his travels, Broyles seems anxious to exorcise his memories, to cleanse himself of his past and get on with living. But what his journey shows him is that the need is not to exorcise, but to accept. He tells of the terrifying beauty of war and the camaraderie, of the amazing sense of being alive that he felt in the jungle.

He finds that those things, wordless sentiments, he can share only with his former enemies and his former comrades, for they are all now his brothers in arms. And in that discovery the book finally triumphs over its limitations. It is there we finally find the heart of this story. For in the end, the book is less about ideas and nations than it is about people, about the things that bind all men, and all soldiers, together.

Fishin' for recipes?

By **GREG MOORES**
Contributing Writer

As promised, here is a crockpot recipe that requires little more equipment than a crockpot, cutting board and sharp knife. However, one does need some way to cook a pot of rice.

Crockpots are great time-saving devices for students. Most vegetables can be chopped up the night before and then thrown into the cooker before class the next day. The slow-cooking process will have most meals ready within eight hours, retain the vitamins of slow-cooked foods and enhance food flavors.

This week's seafood recipe is high in protein and vitamins, provides needed carbohydrates and has almost no fat or cholesterol. I'm definitely not saving the best for last. This is currently my Number 1 recipe, and it is absolutely delicious.

SEAFOOD STEW (serves 4)

- 1 large can tomatoes
- 1 medium green pepper, chopped
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2-3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, sliced (optional)
- 1-2 bay leaves
- oregano, basil to taste
- 1 swordfish steak, chopped
- 2 pieces of sole or perch, chopped
- 1/2-1 pound shrimp, shelled
- 15 small scallops, whole (optional)

Put all the vegetables and spices in the crockpot and cook on low for at least six hours. Then add the fish and cook for another hour, making certain to check for any small bones that may remain in the fish. If you are using the scallops, add them after the fish. The shrimp should be added last, about 3/4 hour before eating. Serve over hot rice.

If you want to make this into an authentic Louisiana Gumbo, add a 10-ounce package of frozen okra and 2 teaspoons of file seasoning (available at Ram's Head Plaza A&P) with the other vegetables at the beginning.

The addition of a salad and garlic bread will create a complete main meal for four.



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