

Queens, off your thrones ...and to your gavels

Another Homecoming has come and gone, and with it goes a cast of thousands, the beauty queens.

One can see the need for Miss NCCU, queens of fraternities, and queens of organizations and clubs. But at NCCU a kind of queen mania has set in. Is there really a need for Miss Central Heating, Miss Plumbing or Miss Electricity? At NCCU, queens are like "the lilies of the field," beautiful but just as common as weeds.

Queens are a tradition at NCCU, and these women are highly regarded by the organizations they serve, but face it, being a queen at Central is just too easy. Sometimes it is merely an excuse for an ego trip.

Just because something is a tradition does not always justify its existence.

The energy that is expended on the queen's elections could be channeled into something more important. Women outnumber men 3-to-1 on this campus, so why aren't more women elected class officers and SGA executives?

If women had their act together politically on campus matters, male candidates would not stand a chance unless they made some concessions amenable to women voters. Conversely, a well-qualified and competent woman candidate could easily trounce her male rival—if women voted in force and in bloc.

Sadly, students, many of them women, refuse to take the candidacy of a woman seriously; thus Central students are squandering a very valuable resource.

Fortunately, women are progressing beyond vanity titles at NCCU. This year, the senior class is being led by Sheila Smith, who is proving to even the most steadfast male chauvinists that a woman can be an assertive student leader.

It was encouraging to see women running for president of the freshman class. I just hope their defeat did not discourage them from running for offices in the future.

Of course, the women serving in the Student Congress should not be overlooked, since they are the pool from which leaders can be picked.

This is not an attack on male candidates, but rather an open invitation to the women of NCCU to consider taking a more organized, active role in the electoral process here at Central.

Women should look beyond the vanity titles, for they are a reminder that at one time these titles were the only thing that women could run for. The image that these titles suggest, that a woman's only responsibilities was to look attractive and smile, should be reptilian to most women seeking a college degree.

Marion McKinney

The champs need no help

The Nov. 6 football game against Johnson C. Smith was significant not only because it was Homecoming, but because the CIAA Southern Division championship was on the line.

NCCU won the game and will play Virginia Union Nov. 20 for the league championship. But, there seems to be some doubt cast by an article in The Charlotte Observer which alleges that NCCU owes its victory to a controversial call by an official.

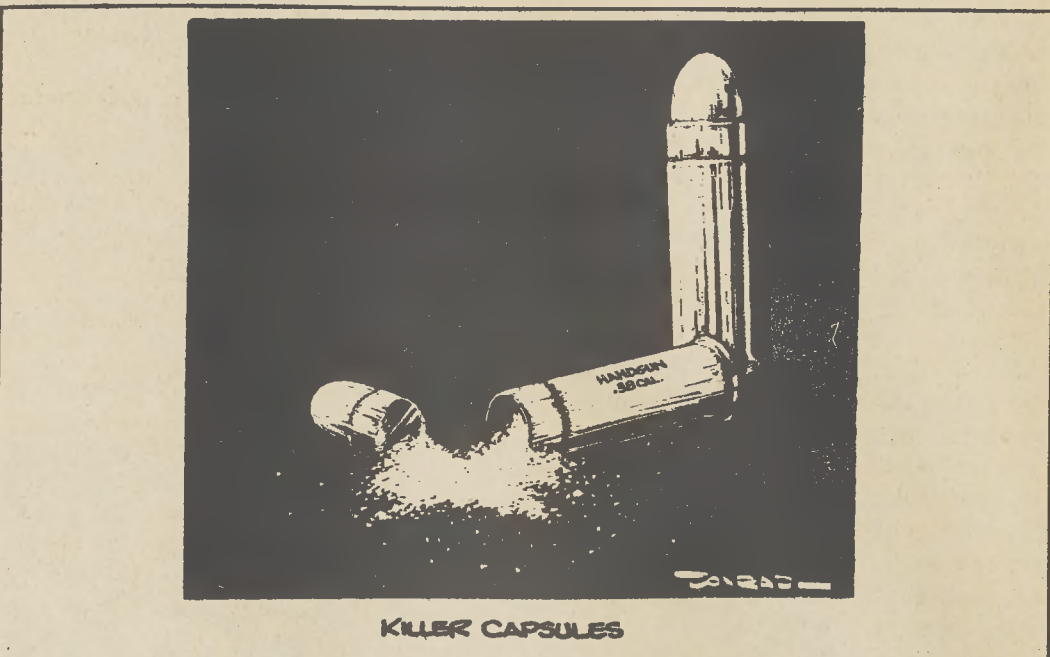
The article, headlined "With A Little Help, Central Edges Smith," by David Scott, said "Central's domination of the game was too decided, too complete. The Eagles, if nothing else, should have proved that they deserved to be the conference's Southern Division champion ... by clean, hard statistics."

Our record, at game time, of 6-1 in the CIAA and 7-2 overall, our hard-hitting defense, the rifle arm of Gerald Fraylon and the sure hands of Victor Hunter should have been proof to J.C. Smith, The Charlotte Observer and its readers that we deserved to win.

For the reporter to imply that J.C. Smith lost the game "because a referee's judgement went Central's way" is absurd. Smith lost the game because NCCU beat them soundly and by "clean, hard statistics."

Journalists are taught to be objective in their reporting but apparently this reporter was suffering from amnesia. By the time of the championship game, in Charlotte, we hope he will have received treatment.

LaTanya A. Isley



KILLER CAPSULES



Onlookers read the names of American dead on Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Photo by R. Norman Matheny, staff photographer for The Christian Science Monitor.

Vietnam Flashback

War memorial reawakens troubling memories

By Tom Evans

*Well it's one, two, three, what are we fightin' for?
Don't ask me I don't give a damn, next stop is Vietnam.*

Country Joe McDonald
"Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag"

Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?

Protestors' Chant

*"We could win this damn war
if we had the American people united behind us."*

Pentagon General, 1970

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated last week in Washington, D.C.

While television, with its repetition of triviality and nonsense, has often demonstrated its capacity to numb, the network coverage of the debate over the monument gave me repeated shocks that I have not felt since I watched the last helicopters lift off from the roofs of Saigon in 1973.

War in our living rooms

Vietnam was the first televised war. Most Americans, in fact, know the war only through television. Television brought the blood and confusion into our living rooms. It did not often make sense of the experience but it made us all participants. It provided most of us, who had the profound good fortune not to be there, a window-seat and fun-house-mirror view of history.

We experienced the war—those of us not torn with anxiety for a husband, son, father or brother—in the crazy-quilt patches dictated by the format of the nightly news, experienced it with our evening meal, or just before bedtime, so that it was sure to be the stuff of our dreams.

Mental scar tissue

The war went on for 10 years, the violence far longer. So unless it was our brother, son, husband, or father who got off the plane in a wheelchair or body bag or who just never found his way back to the normative values Vietnam vets called "the world," unless it happened to us, we developed defenses against that nightly barrage of imagery.

We developed mental scar tissue.

We told ourselves it wasn't real. We told ourselves the war was just television. We put it all off in the same corner of our minds with the surreal melange of game shows and commercials for underarm deodorants.

When, at last, we couldn't just dismiss it any longer, some of us stood in peace vigils with the Quakers on Wednesday afternoons and signed petitions. Some of us marched on the Pentagon, took over armories, staged sit-ins on the lawns of college campuses and occupied college administration buildings. Some of us had our heads broken by police and went to jail. So we said we had done our bit, and deep in our souls we felt that because we had done our bit, we could forget the nightly horror show.

Some of us turned inward, turned on, tuned out, moved to communes in the country, fled to Canada, followed the Maharishi to transcendental consciousness, followed the yellow brick road to Woodstock and Haight-Ashbury. If the music were loud enough, the psychedelic haze thick enough, then maybe we didn't have to watch.

Not everyone took mind trips to never-never land, though. Some of us tried to believe it all made sense, that there was a cause to fight for and that the cause was just. The ideals of duty, honor and country had never had it so tough, but they endured. Just listen to the conservative political philosophies espoused by returned POWs running for office. When there is nothing else to shield you from the horror—duty, honor and country will serve.

When it was finally over, those of us who had not gone to war felt less guilty about forgetting. For those who had gone, of course, this quick turn away from their recent trauma was the most damning of betrayals.

That betrayal has been thorough indeed. In the years immediately following the war, there were few public honors for Vietnam vets. In fact, the public has regarded the vet with some distrust and fear—as if he were threatening us physically, or worse, threatening to reawaken the memories of the war which

we have pushed to the bottoms of our minds.

In our popular mythology we have made him a permanent stranger in our midst.

Time bombs waiting to go off

Following the two world wars and even the war in Korea, even if the veteran was not always seen as a hero, he was at least seen as a man who had been through horrible experiences but was in the process of readjusting to society and putting his life back together. Battle fatigue or shell shock, as it was once called, was thought to be a curable condition—given time, rest and love.

Now, however, battle fatigue is called Delayed Stress Syndrome and is characterized by incurable flashbacks that make the vet a public menace, a time bomb waiting to go off, liable at any moment to bring the chaos of war literally back into our lives.

Witness the rampage of Sylvester Stallone in his latest film, "First Blood." Although the film presents the establishment as insensitive and corrupt, it is clear that Stallone's anti-heroic character can never be a normal citizen integrated into the fabric of society.

A similar message came through in last week's episode of "Hillstreet Blues." One plot-line featured a crazed veteran with uncontrollable screaming in his head who forces a sympathetic policeman to shoot him. In the last scene, even the policeman, himself a veteran, reveals that he has not yet come to grips with his own war experiences.

The implication of these stories—both of which claim to be sympathetic portrayals of the veteran's plight—is that the veteran, unable to put his life back together, is angry and self-destructive, a threat not only to his own life and limb but to the whole social order as well.

The fear of fear itself

So we are afraid of the vet. What we fear, of course, is not so much the veteran himself—though the media may have brainwashed us in that direction—but our own Delayed Stress Syndrome. By his very presence, the veteran threatens a return of all that brutal imagery that we as a nation have so successfully buried in our subconscious minds.

Repressed fear also energizes the debate over the design of the Washington war memorial. The memorial disturbs us because it has the power to flash us back to the terrible imagery of Vietnam.

Someone has said that from a distance the memorial looks like a tombstone. So it brings back the death.

It is partially buried in the ground, like a blackened shard chipped off the Pentagon. It points into the earth, like an inverted Washington Monument. Because it does not celebrate the war it memorializes, it recalls the counter-culture of protest the war engendered.

The memorial fools the eye. As you approach it, it is scarcely visible. You stumble into it, fall into it—as we fell into the war itself.

Again like the war itself, it is at once immensely personal and impersonal. A black granite wall which lists the 57,000 names of the war dead, it reminds us all too concretely of the individual Americans who died in Southeast Asia.

Yet the memorial itself contains no human figure with which to empathize. That is why a group of veterans supported a successful effort to have a more traditional and less disturbing statue of a soldier erected within sight of the memorial. They felt the unadorned memorial sucked the life from their sacrifice.

Even here the memorial seems true to its occasion, for the unjustness of the war itself and the public reaction against it also sucked the life from their sacrifice.

The memorial, therefore, raises a vexing philosophical question: how should we pay tribute to the bravery and sacrifice of honorable men caught up in the service of an ignoble enterprise?

Insofar as it raises that question, it has done more than most public monuments ever do.

Insofar as it has the power to raise that question, it is a moving work of art.

The country ought to be grateful for it.

Tom Evans is a 38-year-old assistant professor of English and a faculty adviser to The Echo. He is not a veteran.

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