



After visiting the facilities of The Charlotte Post these distinguished visitors of the Lutheran Church, North Carolina Synod stopped for a moment to take a picture. They are from l. to r. (front row) Rev. Boyce Whitener, Regional Director of the Division for Mission-North America and Rev. Mark Menees,

Assistant to the Bishop-Minister for Leadership; (back row) Bishop Michael McDaniel, Head of the Lutheran Church, North Carolina Synod, Rev. Richard Perry, Director of Inclusive Ministry and Rev. Richard Little, Assistant to the Bishop, Minister for Church in Society. (Picture by Loretta Manago)

Battle Continues For Vietnam Vets

By Loretta Manago
Post Staff Writer

In an article written last week, two black Vietnam veterans, John Richardson and Norman Mitchell, shared their feelings, thoughts, and opinions on the Vietnam conflict. This week Beverly Higgins of The Vet Center discusses some of the problems of the Vietnam veteran and the uniqueness of the war.

To better understand the trauma and the stress that the Vietnam veteran has gone through and continues to go through since the end of the Vietnam conflict, it is important to understand how the Vietnam war was so very different from previous wars America has engaged in.

"This was the first guerrilla war America had ever fought. And for the combatant, there was no defined enemy. Everybody was the enemy," started Beverly Higgins, office manager-counselor at the Vet Center. Ms. Higgins explained that because the enemy was so hard to distinguish, because a North Vietnamese could be a friend at day and the enemy by night and because women and children were used to further the gains of the Vietcong, the soldier was never sure whom to trust.

"The war also dealt a lot with jungle warfare; booby traps were often deployed and the jungles were so dense that it was difficult to see where your enemy was. Situations like these always kept the soldier on the edge," stressed Ms. Higgins.

"In other wars there was always a front line, but in the Vietnam conflict, there was no frontline; anybody was subject to attack. There was never a feeling of safety," commented Ms. Higgins.

The Vietnam conflict has often been called America's first teenage war. That label in itself distinguishes Vietnam from other wars. According to Ms. Higgins, the average age of the combatant veteran was 19. This was the youngest-age group of soldiers ever involved in a war. And instead of going through the normal postadolescent transitions, the average combatant was fighting for his life.

A clearly defined length of duty acted as both hindrance and somewhat advantage in separating the Vietnam war from the rest. The Vietnam war was the first war that tried the rotated tour. Soldiers who went to Vietnam knew that in a year's time they would return to the States. What this did was to result in the lowest statistics for battlefield psychological breakdown. "Most combatants felt that they could endure for the twelve months of duty. And many did, which explained the low psychological statistics."

Whereas the definite time of tour did much to help the combatant endure the hardships of the conflict, it denied those same soldiers the troop morale and unity that existed in other wars. For many soldiers the war was a very private and individualistic battle, with few or no friends.

Clearly, the Vietnam war was different from the rest. However, when the Vietnam veteran returned to the States, those differences were made plain.

Unlike his comrades from other wars, the Vietnam veteran often returned to America alone. He was greeted with no marching bands or hometown parades, but rather with hostility from an America who felt the country had no business in Vietnam, who wanted to forget the entire war and who labelled those soldiers who fought and risked their lives "baby killers."

The life of the Vietnam veteran since returning to America for many has been one that has meant a denial of being a Vietnam veteran. It has meant an existence of dealing with his problems on his own and it has meant a battle for benefits rightfully due to him.

Problems that were caused by the Vietnam war only seemed to compound themselves once the veteran returned to the States. Many veterans found themselves seeking

Second in series

counseling at the Disabled American Veterans Association. Recognizing the need for counseling assistance for the Vietnam veteran, the DAV in 1979 was instrumental in getting the Vet Center mandated through Congress. Today, there are 200 Vet Centers across the country.

The Vet Center in Charlotte opened in 1982 and is located at 1523 Elizabeth Avenue. Counselor Beverly Higgins noted that out of the 40,000 veterans listed in Mecklenburg County, 2,000 have sought the services of the Vet Center. Ms. Higgins also stated that the Vet Center is open to all veterans, but was initially set up to counsel the Vietnam veteran.

"What we really try to get across to our clients is that they are not crazy," remarked Ms. Higgins. Many of the Vietnam veterans suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders and according to her, the stress that these veterans feel is a normal reaction that is also the same type of stress that victims of airplane crashes, earthquakes, rape, etc. undergo.

"The problems that I see from most of our clients is that they haven't been able to put Vietnam behind them. Skills that they learned to help protect them while they were at war, some vets are still using in

their everyday life," commented Ms. Higgins. For example, while a veteran was in Vietnam he was taught to not get close to people. In the event of their death, a real closeness was thought to endanger the life of the Veteran. But once the war was over, some veterans continued to remain distant.

"They were taught to be emotionally distant, but now they need to learn to share themselves and to trust others," voiced Ms. Higgins.

Another problem Ms. Higgins cited was that of a veteran's acute awareness of his surroundings. "I've seen some combatants who would immediately hit the floor if they heard a loud noise," others constantly check their premises before turning in at night and still others may sleep with a gun," recalled Ms. Higgins.

At the Vet Center, veterans can get all types of counseling—job, individual, family, group, drug, marital and interpersonal skills. "If we don't have the answer, we'll find the resources," stressed Ms. Higgins. The center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. "What we try to do here is to find alternative ways of dealing with the negative feelings that the veteran may feel. The problem is not Vietnam, but the way that they deal with their feelings," surmised Ms. Higgins.



Addie Bradshaw Boyd, currently residing in Huntersville Hospital, was 100-years-old on January 27, 1985. To help her celebrate reaching this plateau in her life were her sister, Mrs. Janie Jackson, of Los Angeles; her niece, Mrs. Ollie Bell Wilkins, of Baltimore and Mrs. Edna Shannon, of Tennessee; along with her children and grandchildren. Their wish was to bring to Mrs. Boyd messages of love and best wishes on this momentous occasion.

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Untraditional Female Occupations Area Women Breaking Down Barriers

By AUDREY C. LODATO
Post Staff Writer

Several weeks ago in The Post, reporter Loretta Manago wrote about several men in untraditional occupations. Women, too, are breaking down barriers and are entering occupations once solely the domain of males. Construction and firefighting are two such areas.

Traci Morris has been with the Charlotte Fire Department since last August. "I like helping people and I couldn't see myself sitting behind a desk," she explained about her decision to apply for the job. Applicants must pass a variety of tests, including such physical activities as pulling hoses and using sledge hammers. She passed on the first try.

"You have to have a lot of endurance," Morris asserted. Although slight in appearance, the firefighter is used to strenuous work and outdoor activity. Previous employment included positions as sheet rock hanger, security guard, and laborer with the Parks and Recreation Department, where she worked with only men for three years. She also plays softball and has been active in rodeos since age five.

Morris remarked that she has not encountered any difficulties being accepted as a woman in a male-dominated field. "They treat me like one of the guys, yet they have respect for me," she commented. As a new recruit, she was the object of practical jokes, but, she noted, "every new recruit gets something. It's all in fun."

Robina Pittman and Cher Dodds are two other women who work where many other females fear to tread. Both are employed by Rea Construction in Charlotte. Pittman has been with the company for five years; Dodds, about three. What made these women decide to go for jobs where very few female faces are seen?

Recalled Pittman, who is now a tandem roller operator (an asphalt roller), "I wasn't working at the time and my brother said they (Rea Construction) were going to hire some women. I thought it was a joke, but he brought me an application and I filled it out." Even when her brother told her to be ready to go in with him on a Monday morning, she didn't take him seriously. "I still thought it was a joke 'til they put me on the road with a flag and a vest." Pittman started as a flag person. There were already some women working for the company, she recounted.

Dodds, also a roller operator in a



Traci Morris
Fire Fighter

paving crew, had previous construction experience before going to work for Rea. Her first taste of construction work came in Nebraska when she was working for a restaurant. The owner had hired some men to demolish an adjacent building so he could expand his business, but complained about their work. Dodds and another woman challenged the demolition crew. "They got fired," she laughed, "and we stayed on." Dodds also drove a dump truck during construction at Epcot in Disney World. "They asked me if I could and I said 'yes.' I've never said 'no,'" she related.

Trying new things and accepting challenges are attributes women in untraditional occupations seem to have in common. Pittman told how she advanced from flag person to roller operator. "My brother was a roller, so I got up with him one day and asked him to show me how to operate it. The superintendent saw and asked if I'd like to try to run one." She declined at first but eventually trained with her brother. "After about two weeks, the foreman asked if I was ready to solo," she related, adding, "At first I didn't know how to drive a straight drive, but I learned!"

Declared Dodds, "I enjoy living on the challenging side of life. Not many people challenge me. I've never had much respect for a

woman who was too painted, too pretty, too delicate. If you dropped a bomb on her, what would she do?" She liked the surprised looks she got in times past when she drove up in a truck. Then, when she would unload it, "that really surprised them."

Both Morris and Pittman told of supportive family and friends. Pittman, who has three children now ages seven, nine, and eleven, has gotten a lot of help from her husband with regard to running the household and caring for the children. Morris revealed that, although she did get some kidding, most people close to her were encouraging.

Although Pittman felt some harassment at first, she reported, "That has never been a problem for me. I can handle myself." The general experience of the three women, however, has been one of acceptance. "I feel like the guys always treated me fair because I didn't pull any punches from square one," stated Dodds. She probably summed up the feelings of the others when she said, "They don't make it hard to be a woman in a man's world. They make me feel like a million. They're telling me, 'Go for it!'"

Older Americans Eligible For Certain Tax Benefits

GREENSBORO — North Carolina's population of older Americans is approaching the one million mark, according to the latest count. These citizens are eligible for certain Federal income tax breaks, the Internal Revenue Service says.

Single persons 65 or older do not have to file a Federal tax return if their income was less than \$4,300 in 1984. For a married couple filing jointly the limit is \$6,400 when only one spouse is 65 or older and the limit rises to \$7,400 if both are over 65.

Another break is the double personal exemption of \$2,000 for one person and \$4,000 for two persons if both are over 65, the IRS said. Another special benefit is the Tax Credit for the Elderly and Permanently Disabled. This credit can in some cases reduce taxes due by as much as \$750 for single persons and \$1,125 for married persons filing jointly. For 1984, individuals under 65 will be eligible for this tax break only if they retire with total and permanent disability and have income from a public or private employer because of that disability.

Persons over 55 are included in the once-in-a-lifetime exclusion of \$125,000 on the gain on the sale of their principal residence. In other words, any profit of up to \$125,000 would not be taxable.

Taxpayers needing assistance with the preparation of their returns can turn to the Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE), an IRS program through which local community groups provide free information and assistance to individuals age 60 or older. Contact 1-800-424-1040, toll-free, for the nearest site.

Black History Month

The Uptown YWCA will kick off Black History month with a week-long art exhibit featuring original and reproductions by local and southeastern artists. The exhibition will run from Feb. 1-8.

In addition, a film entitled "Contemporary History of Afro-American Art in the Southeast," will be shown on Feb. 1, at 7:30 p.m. This presentation will be made by local artist T. J. Reddy. For more details contact Terry Hogan at 333-7553.

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