

'A NOBLE CAUSE'

GOVERNMENT MANIPULATION OF THE VIETNAM UNKNOWN SOLDIER

by

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Three years ago one of my sisters told me that the Vietnam Unknown crypt at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was empty and that the soldier once there was exhumed and identified as Air Force pilot Michael Blassie. I was shocked that I had not heard of the momentous actions taken at Arlington and that the government actually broke ground at such a sacred place. My interest in the topic grew into deeper questions. Curiosity turned into research and research showed that history at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was much more complex than an empty crypt. Now three years later, I am still in awe of the events that put Michael Blassie in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the happenings that ultimately exhumed him, and the lacking knowledge of his story in the collective memory of American people. Any story that continues to cause this type of astonishment is one worth telling again and again. Therefore, without going any further, I must reveal that this project is written for future researchers that can continue to find answers to why this particular event occurred in American history and why it continues to be overlooked by much of society.

This project would not have been possible without the support of advisors, classmates, family, friends, and fellow researchers. I am particularly indebted to Michael's sister, Air Force Colonel Patricia Blassie. A series of events led Colonel Blassie and me to the small town of Warner Robins, Georgia. There, Colonel Blassie welcomed me with hospitality and provided me with every historian's dream, an enormous amount of letters, records, cards, artifacts, correspondences, and of course a firsthand account from the Blassie family. Colonel Blassie showed me what historians often forget, that Michael was more than a name in a newspaper or a record. He was an athlete, musician, honor student, friend, lover, brother, and beloved son. She reminded me that the effects of losing Michael and 58,220 soldiers in Vietnam is still a very harsh and unpleasant reality. An endless thanks to Colonel Blassie, this project would not have been possible without her unheeding support and inspiration.

I am also greatly appreciative to Philip Bigler former historian at Arlington National Cemetery and National Teacher of the Year who willingly gave his collection of Vietnam Unknown resources to a "future historian." Without these sources and his help, this project would have been incomplete. Many librarians have pushed me towards useful sources and showed me incredible patience. Thank you to Lauren Hall, librarian at Air War University, who put me in contact with Colonel Blassie. I would also like to thank the staffs at the Georgia College and State University Library, Library of Congress, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Department of Army, and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library.

With the complexity of this project, success would not have been possible without the helpful direction and constant encouragement of my advisor, Dr. Craig Pascoe. Any strength in this project reflects his infallibility to push my writing and thinking; any weaknesses it shows are my own. To my thesis committee members, Dr. Mark Huddle, Dr. Rachel Shelden, and Dr. Jamil Zainaldin, thank you for sacrificing your time to read, edit, and comment on this project. Your suggestions and guidance has been instrumental in helping me make this project a reality. I am also especially grateful for the tireless support of my family and friends who continuously heard my tirades on the importance of memorials and monuments in the commemorative memory of America. A special thanks to my parents, Wayne and Christina Aaron, and sisters, Amber Meeks and Jade Rowland, who have always inspired my passion to learn and dream big.

Most of all, I would like to thank my wonderful husband, Jarred, who has stood by my side for every step on this journey. From constantly listening to me read drafts, to comforting me when I thought I could not complete my deadlines. Your faith has always been one of your many admirable qualities and, for some unbeknownst reason, you continue to have faith in me. I am truly grateful for your love, kindness, and patience through this entire process. With all my love thank you, Jarred.

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Chapter One:

On a hill overlooking Washington D.C. the Old Guard, also known as the Army's 3rd Infantry Regiment, has guarded the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, since April 6, 1948.¹ The Old Guard traces its origin to 1784 and is the oldest active-duty infantry unit in the American Army.² While on duty the guard crosses a 63-foot rubber surfaced walkway in exactly 21 steps. He then faces the Tomb for 21 seconds, turns again, and pauses an additional 21 seconds before retracing his steps. The 21 is symbolic of the highest salute accorded to dignitaries in military and state ceremonies.³

The guard always bears his weapon away from the Tomb.⁴ He is methodical and ritualized. His perfect execution is a gift to the Unknowns for their sacrifice. He becomes part of the monument, bringing the past, present, living and dead together. Behind him sits a granite sarcophagus with an inscription that reads *Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God*.⁵ It has six wreaths sculpted on each side to signify the six major

¹ Luis Martinez, "Soldiers Guard the Tomb of Unknowns During Hurricane Sandy - ABC News," *ABC News*, October 29, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/10/soldiers-guard-the-tomb-of-unknowns-during-hurricane-sandy/> (accessed January 2, 2013).

² "The Changing of the Guard: 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment," *The Official Website of Arlington National Cemetery*, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/visitorinformation/ChangingofTheGuard.aspx> (accessed July 30, 2013).

³ "In 1842, the Presidential salute was formally established at 21 guns ...Today the national salute of 21 guns is fired in honor of a national flag, the sovereign or chief of state of a foreign nation, a member of a reigning royal family, and the President, ex-President and President-elect of the United States. It is also fired at noon of the day of the funeral of a President, ex-President, or President-elect. Gun salutes are also rendered to other military and civilian leaders of this and other nations. The number of guns is based on their protocol rank. These salutes are always in odd numbers."

"Fact Sheet: Gun Salutes," *Military District of Washington Headquarters*, May 1969, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/faq/salute.html> (accessed August 20, 2013).

⁴ Martinez, "Soldiers Guard the Tomb of Unknowns During Hurricane Sandy - ABC News."

⁵ "Arlington National Cemetery: The Tomb of the Unknowns." *The Official Website of Arlington National Cemetery*, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/VisitorInformation/TombofUnknowns.aspx> (accessed on March 20, 2012).

campaigns of World War I. The Tomb represents one of the most sacred national monuments in the United States.

The Tomb was built in 1921 to honor the Unknowns of World War I. However, America's involvement in other wars subsequently required the addition of three more Unknowns from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. The Tomb is unmatched in commemorative scope because it honors all four major twentieth century American wars. Unlike most monuments in Washington, its commemoration is not reserved for a specific war hero, a diplomat, or a single branch of the armed services. It does not represent one race, ethnicity, or religion. As President William Harding said at the memorial's first dedication, it is the "heart of the Nation."⁶ Its wide range of time and honorees makes the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier one of the best commemorative examples of American nationalism in Washington, D.C.

Like many monuments and memorials in Washington, the Tomb's commemorative importance was established by a series of Federal government nationalist initiatives. These initiatives started in March, 1920, when the U.S. meticulously planned and selected one of four fallen World War I Americans from France to be interred in the Tomb. On November 11, 1921, President Harding placed the first wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and started a tradition that every U.S. President has followed since.⁷

⁶ Warren G. Harding, "Address at the Burial of an Unknown American Soldier at Arlington Cemetery" November 11, 1921," *Library of Congress Digital Archive*, <http://hdl.loc.gov/gdc/scd0001.00180681568> (accessed March 3, 2012).

⁷ Ibid.

On the Tomb's fortieth anniversary, the newly elected President Kennedy made his first official visit to the Tomb of the Unknowns to lay a wreath and speak to a crowd of 5,000.⁸ He returned several times to Arlington over the course of his presidency and even made an impromptu visit on a Sunday afternoon in March, 1963, where he admired the view of Washington from the Custis-Lee Mansion. Kennedy noted that the view of the city was so beautiful that he "could stay there forever."⁹ That same year on Veterans Day, just eleven days before his assassination, Kennedy again paid homage to the Unknown Soldiers for a televised ceremony. The reporter noted that the Tomb was more than "stone or flesh. It is a flame in the hearts and minds of men that can never die, a flame that will burn forever."¹⁰ This image became eerily familiar two weeks later when Mrs. Jackie O. Kennedy "expressed a desire to mark the president's grave with an eternal flame similar to that of the French Unknown Soldier in Paris."¹¹ The decision to bury Kennedy at Arlington with an eternal flame connected him in death, just as they had been in life, to the Tomb of the Unknown.

Eight years and three presidents later, on Veterans Day, 1971, President Nixon eloquently spoke of the national symbolism of the soldiers buried at the Tomb, "Their skins may be black or white or red or yellow; they may have been young with their lives before them, or they may have had full lives already; their religions we do not know; the homelands from which

⁸ "Arlington National Cemetery: President John Fitzgerald Kennedy Gravesite," *The Official Website of Arlington National Cemetery*, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/visitorinformation/monumentmemorials/jfk.aspx> (accessed August 2, 2013).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "President John F. Kennedy at the Tomb of the Unknown soldier on Veterans Day in Virginia, United States," *Critical Past*, Veterans Administration Visual Aids Division for Information Service, http://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675022002_John-F-Kennedy_Arlington-Cemetery_Veterans-Day_Tomb-of-Unknowns (accessed August 2, 2013).

¹¹ "Arlington National Cemetery: President John Fitzgerald Kennedy Gravesite."

their ancestors came we cannot know.”¹² He continued to reassure his audience that physical attributes are not “essential” characteristics “in the American ideal.” In other words, only sacrifice and nationality were considered when choosing unknown soldiers. With the Vietnam War in the minds of all Americans, Nixon concluded his speech with the realization that “Soon, another Unknown may come to rest on this hallowed hill. We pray he will be the last.”¹³

The attention that twentieth century presidents gave to the Tomb helped convert it from a simple piece of granite to a purposeful symbol of the American nation. The Tomb is not the only commemorative symbol of the nation. Places like the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and many others are recognizable in the collective memory of Americans, but none of them have grasped the consistent attention of twentieth century presidents like the Tomb of the Unknowns. The collective memory, or emotional bond, surrounding the Tomb is a historical construction that has constantly been reconstructed based on political agendas. Planned out ceremonies, speeches, prayers, rituals, and dedications all combined to construct the Tomb as the nation’s “most sacred monument.”¹⁴ These devices and agencies connected to the Tomb have created a commemorative memory characterized by an emotional bond nationalistic in nature. History reveals that the Federal government’s role to continue the Tomb’s sacred position in the minds of Americans went far beyond annual ceremonies and presidential visitations.

¹² “Statement Following the Laying of a Wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery.” *The American Presidency Project*. November 11, 1971, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3214#axzz2hd9x5cUT> (accessed August 2, 2013).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ John H. Cushman Jr., “Remains of Unknown Are Disinterred,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/15/us/remains-of-vietnam-unknown-are-disinterred.html?ref=michaeljblasse> (accessed January 5, 2013).

Nixon's prediction of an addition to the Tomb did not come to fruition until 1981, when President Reagan took office. The previous decade had confronted the U.S. with the Watergate scandal, a rapidly falling economy complete with price controls and long lines for gasoline, continued tensions in the Cold War, exponentially rising immigration, and a Civil Rights Movement that expanded far beyond the African-American movement. These struggles, combined with the aftermaths of the Vietnam War, caused America to face one of the most divisive periods in its history.

In an effort to heal the wounds caused by the Vietnam War, the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars began lobbying Congress and the White House to bury a Vietnam Unknown at Arlington.¹⁵ Eager to respond, despite having only four potentially unidentified remains, the Reagan Administration manipulated the selection of the Vietnam Unknown. In 1984, the identity of Air Force pilot First Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassie was erased from records. The actions of the White House to underhandedly establish Blassie as the Unknown was a demonstration of their strong belief that the commemorative tradition at the Tomb was valuable in preserving national unity. Fourteen years following the burial, the Blassie family learned of their pilot's fate and pressured the executive branch to exhume the remains. Even though the 1998 administration complied, they continued to demonstrate a commitment to national unity by omitting the truth from the public about the intentional error.

Like the Vietnam War, the journey of Blassie's interment at Arlington and eventual exhumation was expansive and political. Blassie's story is reflective of the numerous layers that

¹⁵ Bill Thomas, "Hearts and Bones: the Vietnam War Soldier Who Wasn't Unknown," *The Seattle Times*, November 10, 2012, http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2019648637_unknown11.html (accessed August 24, 2013).

plague historians who dig into Vietnam history. Just as trying to answer why the United States fought in the Vietnam War, answering why Blassie was interred at the Tomb of the Unknowns becomes exhaustive and shambolic. However, in their messiness and sometimes lack of clarity, the histories of Vietnam and Blassie are interwoven in a variety of important historical, political, and social topics. Such topics include the growth of the American executive branch in the 20th century, the role of post-Vietnam grassroots organizations, POW/MIA support groups, post-Vietnam commemoration, post-Vietnam political culture, and, most relevant for this study, American commemoration and nationalism. This work focuses on American commemoration and nationalism because its details are most lacking in the limited historiography on Blassie and the Tomb of the Unknowns.

Currently only four major sources contribute to the historiography on Blassie and the Tomb of the Unknowns. The first is Robert M. Poole's 2009 book entitled *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery*. The book chronologically traces important figures and events in Arlington's decorated past. Poole devotes one chapter to the history of the Tomb of the Unknowns entitled "Known But to God," and another chapter to Blassie's story, "The Last Unknown."¹⁶ Poole is a former *National Geographic* journalist and interviewed major characters involved in Blassie's journey to interment and identification. His interviews included Michael's sister Patricia Blassie, a Central Identification Laboratory employee, Johnie E. Webb, Secretary of the Army, John O. Marsh, and Ted Sampley, a former green beret that first discovered Blassie's connection to the Tomb of the Unknowns. Poole's use of interviews as primary sources is a good addition to the current historiography on Blassie. However, he relied

¹⁶ Robert Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery*, (New York: Walker and Company, 2009).

too heavily on interviews and ultimately his work displayed the bias of those he interviewed. Because of the intense focus on interviews, Poole's work lacks broader historical questions such as why the historical circumstances of the 1970s and 1980s led to the interment of Blassie.

The same year Poole published *Hallowed Ground*, Vietnam historian Michael J. Allen added the second major scholarly source on Blassie entitled *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*. The book primarily focuses on the political and cultural influence that the Vietnam POW and MIA issue caused in the latter half of the twentieth century. Allen's exhaustively researched book argues that the POW and MIA issue became "the dominant means through which millions of Americans addressed their nation's defeat in Vietnam."¹⁷ In the work, Allen dedicates one section to the opposition of the Vietnam Unknown interment that the National League of Families, an organization that represented families of POWs and MIAs, showed based on their commitment to "full accounting."¹⁸ Allen's argument focuses on POW and MIA groups; therefore he does not consider why Blassie was interred initially. Allen correctly maintains, "Both Reagan and the League were committed to revising public memory of the Vietnam War."¹⁹ The work also provides a very detailed account of Ann Mills Griffiths, the executive director of the League who switched her stance from opposing to supporting Blassie's interment.

Two years later Allen published the third influential work on Blassie and the Tomb entitled, "Sacrilege of a Strange, Contemporary Kind: The Unknown Soldier and the Imagined Community after the Vietnam War." Allen concluded that the Vietnam War caused the

¹⁷ Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), xix.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, xx.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 236.

American people to doubt the “equity and integrity” of their government.²⁰ These doubts cause the American people to have little reaction to the “sacrilege” of the government knowing the identity of the Vietnam Unknown. Although comprehensive in the consequences of Blassie’s identification, Allen’s works did not address the national importance of memorials or why Blassie’s premature burial was a response to the divisive atmosphere in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

The final secondary source of note is the Air War College master’s thesis of Michael Blassie’s youngest sister, Air Force Colonel Patricia Blassie. Her work “Air Force Airman Selected as the Vietnam Unknown Soldier—The Truth and Its Consequences,” is a detailed examination of the ethical consequences of Michael’s interment at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.²¹ Colonel Blassie’s work is valuable to the continuing research on Michael Blassie because it has an extensive appendix with over forty primary documents that are referenced throughout her analysis. Her close connection to Michael provided her with more primary sources than any other work written on Lt. Blassie’s interment and exhumation. These sources include emails with Johnie E. Webb, the CILHI agent who certified that Michael was unidentified, and correspondences with the Pentagon. In addition to her primary documents,

²⁰ Michael J. Allen, “‘Sacrilege of a Strange, Contemporary Kind’ The Unknown Soldier and the Imagined Community after the Vietnam War,” *History & Memory*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011), 93.

²¹ The Air University Library at Maxwell Air Force Base did not have access to Colonel Patricia Blassie’s master’s thesis. According to an Air University librarian, Lauren Hall, the library did not have access because it was “not released by the Air University.” Colonel Blassie provided the copy used for this study. Patricia Blassie, “Air Force Airman Selected as the Vietnam Unknown Soldier—The Truth and Its Consequences,” (master’s thesis, Air University, January 17, 2005).

Colonel Blassie also provides an inside look at her family's reaction to the workings of the Pentagon, which makes the thesis a hybrid secondary-primary source.²²

The following thesis adds to the current historiography started by Robert M. Poole and Michael J. Allen by addressing how post-Vietnam era politics contributed to the interment of Lt. Blassie and how the Reagan Administration's manipulation of the Tomb was a calculated attempt to preserve national unity during the 1980s. In addition to these four secondary sources, this thesis combines an array of sources including newspaper accounts, Lt. Michael Blassie's service records, former Arlington historian Philip Bigler's collection, government publications, an interview performed with Colonel Patricia Blassie, and publications of Vietnam Veterans groups like the National Alliance of Families and Ted Sampley's *U.S. Veteran Dispatch*. This work combines the accounts of the National League of Families, Central Identification Laboratory, Department of Defense, Reagan Administration, Blassie family, and secondary sources into one comprehensive narrative. Because the Vietnam era and Blassie's history reflect the relatively recent past, this study should serve as an addition to the current foundational works and encourage future historical questions concerning post-Vietnam commemoration and nationalism.

Before addressing how Michael Blassie's interment was directly related to nationalism, it is necessary to consider the historiography of nationalism and offer a workable definition for the term often plagued by ambiguity. Although the terms *nation* and *nationalism* can be expansive in their definitions, for this study, nationalism represents the unifying bond of people within a particular country. Commemoration is among the many ways that nationalism is

²² Ibid.

expressed. In the following chapters the terms have been combined to coin the expression *commemorative nationalism*, which I have defined as memorials or monuments that promote national unity. My definition considers the current historiographical questions on nationalism, the ideas of Ernest Renan's "What is a Nation?" and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

According to Eric G.E. Zuelow, historian at the University of New England, four core questions circulate the academic study of the terms nation and nationalism: "How do we define nation and nationalism?, When did nations first appear?, How do nations develop?, How does nationalism relate to the western and non-western world?"²³ Works like Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), J.A. Armstrong's *Nations Before Nationalism* (1982), Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986), Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1788* (1990), John Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), and John Breuilly's *Nationalism and the State* (1982) all address these debates in some fashion.

Benedict Anderson published *Imagined Communities* in 1983, the year before Michael Blassie was buried at Arlington, and it has become a standard text on the topic of nations and nationalism.²⁴ Anderson defines nationalism as an imagined political community that is limited and sovereign.²⁵ His argument primarily stresses that nationalism is imagined because "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet

²³ Eric G.E. Zuelow, The Nationalism Project, <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what.htm>, (accessed December 1, 2013).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983), 9.

them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”²⁶

Throughout his book, Anderson stays committed to his concept of nationalism as an imagined space. Anderson recognizes that nationalist imagination is materialized by “cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers” but does not focus on these “emblems of the modern culture of nationalism.” Instead his attention focuses on the spiritual and imagined political communities that characterize nationalism. He also argues that nations exert “a deep, horizontal comradeship” that millions of people have been willing to sacrifice and even die for over the past two centuries.

One of the most famous studies on nationalism is Ernest Renan’s “What is a nation?”²⁷ In a lecture at Sorbonne in 1882, the French historian debated “the nation is a soul, a spiritual principle” that is the combination of past memories and the present attempt to preserve past glories. He emphasized that the nation was one unit solidified by “the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future.” In sum, Renan argued that the nation is a spiritual entity unified by the memories of sacrifice and the willingness to sacrifice in the present, and future.²⁸

Both Renan and Anderson correctly assess that a characteristic of nationalism is its unifying nature. They focus on the spiritual and imagined aspects of nationalism, but neither of them reflects on how national objects, like monuments, are created and recreated. Nor do they consider how leaders preserve the image of nationalism by manipulating physical spaces. Their foundational works influence the definition of nationalism for this study. However, this

²⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 5.

²⁷ Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” The Nationalism Project, <http://www.nationalismproject.org/what/renan.htm> (accessed December 1, 2013).

²⁸ Ibid.

work steps outside their “imagined” and “spiritual” definitions of nationalism by focusing on how memorials and monuments promote national unity. It is for these reasons that I have been conscious to label the phenomenon between Ronald Reagan, Michael Blassie, and the Tomb of the Unknowns as commemorative nationalism.

Most commemorative national spaces are found in national capitals such as Washington D.C., Paris, and London. Typically monuments are dedicated to a centralized character or historical event important to the nation. Figures like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln are among the praised statesmen that have a national memorial on the U.S. National Mall. The Washington Monument was the first national monument in America’s core. Construction began in 1848, was stalled by the Civil War, and finally finished in 1884.²⁹ The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was the second monument added to the monument core. Later monuments include the Lincoln Memorial (1922), Jefferson Memorial (1938), Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial (1982), Korean War Memorial (1995), World War II Memorial (2004) and Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial (2011).³⁰ Currently no national memorial solely honors World War I, but the World War I Memorial Foundation, founded in 2008, presently seeks land for a memorial on the National Mall. All of these national monuments, like the Tomb, are vehicles that express the American nation and shape collective memory. The Tomb commemorates all of the wars represented at the National Mall.

²⁹ “Washington, DC Timeline and Historic Plans: Illustrating the Evolution of the ‘Monumental Core’ of the Nation’s Capital,” *National Park Service*, http://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/FEIS/Timeline%20pages_3.pdf (accessed March 1, 2013).

³⁰ “World War I Memorial Foundation—Washington D.C.” *World War I Memorial Foundation*, <http://www.wwimemorial.org/> (accessed March 1, 2013).

Therefore its commemorative focus is nationalism, not specific war heroes or victims. As presidents of the past recognized, the Tomb is symbolic of the nation.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery is America's highest tribute to its fallen soldiers. However, honoring the unknown dead has been a tradition much older than the United States and the modern nation state. As early as ancient Greece, militaries have honored their fallen warriors in elaborate cemeteries. In 431 B.C. Thucydides, a Greek historian, wrote that fallen Athenian warriors from the Peloponnesian battlefield were accompanied by an empty casket to represent all those missing or bodies not returned.³¹ Thucydides' descriptions resembled those seen in the early years of Arlington National Cemetery.

Arlington was once a plantation of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, whose break with the Union was so disdained that his green hills were converted to a military cemetery. The Virginia soil was scarred with the graves of young Union soldiers and Freedmen that died trying to protect their nation's unity. The cemetery was established as permanent military burial grounds that revealed a past of disunion, reunion, segregation, and sacrifice. In 1866, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs grew concerned that Union soldiers at Bull Run and Kettle Run were not buried properly. In some cases "little earth was thrown over a soldier where he fell." One officer reported that "the action of the weather has removed this scanty covering of loose soil, and the bones of our patriots dead lay bleaching in the fields."³² Meigs

³¹ Robert Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: the story of Arlington National Cemetery* (New York: Walker & Company, 2009), 13.

³² "The Union Dead on the Battle-Fields of Virginia," *New York Times*, April 8, 1866, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F30D15FD3859107B93CAA9178FD85F428684F9> (accessed August 24, 2013).

immediately ordered that a Civil War Unknowns Monument be dedicated near the Lee Mansion. The monument became the final grave for 2,111 unknown Union soldiers gathered from Bull Run and the route to the Rappahannock.³³

As seen with the Civil War Unknowns, monuments became a way of healing in Arlington for the Union and the Confederate veterans. On June 4th, 1914, only seven years before the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was built, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, with the blessing of the Federal government, honored the fallen Confederate soldiers with the largest monument on the property.³⁴ Both Union and Confederate veterans were present for the dedication ceremony that represented a nation coming to terms with its separated past. President Wilson declared at the ceremony that such a reunion could only take place in a “democracy.” He continued saying all should strive to be a “replica of this great united people.”³⁵ The moment was a visual testament to the healing wounds of the nation that was slowly reuniting with the help of commemoration. Although it was not a national monument, the Confederate monument was an early Arlington representation of commemorative nationalism—the use of the commemorative sphere to achieve national unity within the nation.

That same summer, extreme nationalism resulted in the outbreak of widespread war in Europe. Young Brits, Frenchmen, Germans, and other nationalities waved their national flags in

³³ “Arlington National Cemetery | Civil War Unknowns Monument,” The Official Website of Arlington National Cemetery,
<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/visitorinformation/MonumentMemorials/CivilWar.aspx> (accessed August 5, 2013).

³⁴ Katherine Allamong Jacob, *Testament to the Union: Civil War Monuments in Washington D.C.*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 17.

³⁵ “Forget the Past, Wilson Bids South,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1914,
<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archivefree/pdf?res=F20F17FF3F5A12738DDDAC0894DE405B848DF1D3> (accessed August 24, 2013).

excitement for the great new adventure. Politicians and leaders alike exclaimed “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori!”—it is sweet and right to die for your country.³⁶ Months into the war, young soldiers were met with the reality of attrition, trench warfare, and deadly gas. Modern weapons clashed with traditional military strategy and foot soldiers were caught in the middle.

Wilfred Owen, a British poet, was one of these soldiers on the front lines of France. Halfway through the war he was removed from the battlefield for shell shock treatment. Owen was one of over 80,000 British soldiers treated for shell shock.³⁷ During his stay, Owen wrote some of the most acclaimed works from World War I that graphically described the horrors of warfare. In his most famous poem, “Dulce et decorum est,” Owen recalled the nightmarish memories that troubled those still living,

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,
 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
 But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
 And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime. . .
 Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
 As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
 In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
 He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.³⁸

In his memories, Owen struggled with constant reminders of those lost. The soldiers also filled his dreams as a constant nightmarish reminder of his lost friends. Like many other soldiers, Owen felt a duty to return to his comrades on the front lines, which he did in August 1918. He was killed on November 4, 1918, and his parents received word of his death on

³⁶ Wilfred Owen, “Dulce et decorum est,” October 8, 1917, <http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/owen1.html> (accessed August 24, 2013).

³⁷ Joanna Bourke, “Shell Shock During World War One,” *BBC*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/shellshock_01.shtml (accessed August 24, 2013).

³⁸ Owen, “Dulce et decorum est.”

Armistice Day. The twenty-five year old left behind his poetry that was published two years later. His words, along with writers like Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves, threatened political propaganda with parody and showed the disenchantment of war. A new kind of death cast a large shadow over the initial excitement of war and became increasingly unbearable to the living.

In previous wars, soldiers commonly died of disease, flesh wounds, infection, and lack of medical treatment. However, the technology of World War I ushered in a new soldier's death, disappearance. From 1914-1918, over 250,000 men disappeared in combat from artillery explosions and deep muddy sinkholes between enemy lines.³⁹ President Harding described modern war as, "no longer a conflict in chivalry, no more a test of militant manhood. It is only cruel deliberate, scientific destruction."⁴⁰ In a matter of seconds a young soldier could disappear and only exist in the memories of those who remembered him. This reality became unbearable. Mothers could not bury their sons, and nations ached for an answer to their grief. This resulted in a difficult commemorative question; how could nations best honor the war that brought such tremendous loss?

The answer was what French historian Jean-Yves Le Naour called the "cult of the Unknown Soldier."⁴¹ The "cult of the Unknown Soldier" was a movement by countries involved in World War I to commemorate all missing or dead with a single national tomb.⁴² The movement started on November 20, 1916 when the president of the French Memory organization proposed to bury an unknown soldier in the Panthéon. The French government

³⁹ Naour, *The Living Unknown Soldier: A Story of Grief and the Great War*, 2.

⁴⁰ Harding, "Address at the Burial of an Unknown American Soldier at Arlington Cemetery."

⁴¹ Naour *The Living Unknown Soldier: A Story of Grief and the Great War*, 78.

⁴² Ibid.

later determined the Unknown Soldier would be placed under the Arc de Triomphe. On Armistice Day 1920 "le soldat inconnu" was buried and an eternal flame was lit above his grave.⁴³ The streets of the procession were lined with people that camped over night "as to miss nothing."⁴⁴ He was meant to be a "national symbol" of sacrifice and to help "suffering families of the missing, by giving them a body they could imagine belonged to them."⁴⁵ French President Millerand honored all unknowns that offered their "lives for the ideal which France represented." He continued, "rest in peace. You have fulfilled your destiny. France and civilization are saved."⁴⁶ The speech foreshadowed the nationalist words of Unknown funerals in the United States.

That same day, the British grieved for their own unknown. They brought their Unknown Warrior from France to be buried at Westminster Abbey "among the kings."⁴⁷ He was "one figure that stood alone as the symbol of the nation in this tribute to the spirit of our dead."⁴⁸ On route to Westminster Abbey, the British Warrior traversed the lined streets of London pausing at the Cenotaph; the monument unveiled the same day for Britain's "'glorious dead."⁴⁹ The ceremony recognized the women who lost their "only son, or all their sons," and "women

⁴³ Edwin L. James, "France Celebrates Two Anniversaries," *New York Times*, November 20, 1920, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F60912FD345910738DDDAB0994D9415B808EF1D3> (accessed August 24, 2013).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Naour, *The Living Unknown Soldier: A Story of Grief and the Great War*, 72.

⁴⁶ James, "France Celebrates Two Anniversaries,"

⁴⁷ "Unknown Warrior." Westminster Abbey, <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/unknown-warrior> (accessed August 20, 2013).

⁴⁸ Sir Philip Gibbs "England Honors Unknown Soldier as War Memorial," *New York Times*, November 12, 1920, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=FA0C12FD345910738DDDAB0994D9415B808EF1D3> (accessed August 20, 2013).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

who lost their husbands” by giving them seats close to the Unknown. One girl was given a ticket because “she had lost nine brothers killed or missing.”⁵⁰

The Warrior was well received, “within two days 100,000 wreaths had been laid at the cenotaph in Whitehall.”⁵¹ Sir Philip Gibbs, the contributor of a two-page article for the *New York Times*, said “it did not seem an unknown warrior...he was known to us all.”⁵² The Warrior appeared to lift the spirits of Britain who still suffered from the war. Gibbs provided one of the best accounts of the healing power of the Unknown in Britain, “For a time at least, among some of us, spiritual faith has given place to jaded cynicism, but in Whitehall all day long around the cenotaph spirituality revived again and the emotion of multitudes was stirred by remembrance so deeply, so poignantly that the greatest pessimism must see new hope.”⁵³

In October 1921, the United States joined Europe in mourning when General Pershing was sent to Paris and London to award the Congressional Medal of Honor to the French and British unknowns.⁵⁴ Later that month, an American Unknown soldier was chosen by an U.S. Corporal who placed a flower on one of four flag covered coffins in France. The Unknown was transported to Arlington where he would join other fallen military heroes. The *New York Times*

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of spring: the Great War and the birth of the Modern Age*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 256.

⁵² Gibbs “England Honors Unknown Soldier as War Memorial.”

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ “General Pershing Visits France: Will Award Medal of Honor to Unknown Soldier,” *St. Petersburg Times*, September 11, 1921, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=888&dat=19210911&id=5wZPAAAAIBAJ&sjid=DU0DAAAAIBA J&pg=3704,4148309> (accessed August 5, 2013).

hailed him as “the embodiment of the spirit of 2,000,000 doughboys who came to France at their country’s call.”⁵⁵

A month later, on Armistice Day 1921, the U.S. buried an Unknown at Arlington National Cemetery. The soldier was paid “all the homage a grateful people could pay.” The ceremony differed from the fellow unknown ceremonies in France and Britain because loss of life was not as dramatic or as present in the United States as it was on the battlefields of Europe. One reporter noted that the ceremony “seemed more like the celebration of a great victory than a funeral.”⁵⁶ Those that attended saw that “everywhere flags waved.”⁵⁷ But when the Unknown passed in his bier, it was a silencing and somber experience. Among those that mourned was General Pershing who elected to walk with the caisson from the Capitol to Arlington to show his respect.⁵⁸ During his funeral speech, President Harding used the opportunity to highlight the senseless loss in war and the purpose of peace. His words represented the swift isolationism that swept over the nation following World War I. Amid the flags, cheers, silence, and dismal words, the ceremony left an overall “swelling spirit of brotherhood on the nation.”⁵⁹

Over the next fifty years as nationalism grew stronger so too did rituals at the Tomb. Annual Armistice and Memorial Day ceremonies, presidential speeches, and the introduction of the Tomb Guard established the Tomb as one of the country’s strongest national symbols. The

⁵⁵ “Unknown Soldier Chosen in France,” *New York Times*, October 25, 1921, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F40615F7385A1B7A93C7AB178BD95F458285F9> (accessed July 17, 2013).

⁵⁶ “Nation Grieves For Unknown Hero,” *Evening Tribune*, November 11, 1921, A1 <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=svZgAAAAIBAJ&sjid=smMNAAAAIBAJ&pg=3721,1131852&dq=american+unknown+soldier&hl=en> (accessed July 17, 2013).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

monument's commemorative scope grew in 1958 when Congress commissioned Unknowns from World War II and the Korean War to be buried in front of the white sarcophagus. Two tombs that lay flush to the plaza were prepared for the new additions. In an effort to make it truly Unknown, the World War II Unknown was chosen from European and Pacific theater remains. The WWII and Korean War Unknowns underwent rituals similar to those the Great War Unknown received almost forty years earlier. Both laid in state at the Capitol Rotunda over Memorial Day weekend then traveled in caissons to Arlington, where an estimated 100,000 people lined the route.⁶⁰ As the caskets passed over the Memorial Bridge twenty military planes flew overhead with one plane symbolically missing from the front. At Arlington, President Eisenhower and other dignitaries welcomed them. Three chaplains of different faiths performed the prayers at the funeral. President Eisenhower presented the Medal of Honor to the two Unknowns, but did not make a speech as President Harding had thirty-seven years earlier and President Reagan would for the Vietnam Unknown in 1984.

The Cold War was clearly on the mind of principal speaker Navy Secretary Charles S. Thomas when he cautioned listeners from falling into the "disunity of a divided house."⁶¹ He urged the audience to unite behind the president and Congress because together they would "need to fear no foreign foe or agnostic creed."⁶² Following Thomas's speech, the "mournful sound" of taps began playing to represent the conclusion of the funeral.⁶³ *New York Times*

⁶⁰ Jack Raymond, "Unknowns of World War II and Korea Are Enshrined" *New York Times*, May 30, 1958 <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0530.html#article> (accessed July 17, 2013).

⁶¹ "Eisenhower Leads Nation in Tribute to War Dead," *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, May 31, 1958, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1842&dat=19530530&id=kfsrAAAAIBAJ&sjid=pMYEAAAAIBAJ&pg=4095,5567809> (accessed July 17, 2013).

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Raymond, "Unknowns of World War II and Korea Are Enshrined."

reporter Jack Raymond said, "Many men and women wept." Like the first Unknown, the World War II and Korean War Unknowns seemed to unite Americans under the belief that the fallen soldiers were "theirs."⁶⁴ The 1958 burials presented an opportunity for unity following a tumultuous eight years that involved two Cold War conflicts, increased Civil Rights activity, and a communist witch hunt performed by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House of Un-American Activities Committee.

The same week of the Unknown burials, on May 28, 1958, Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan welcomed their second child and first son together, Ronald Prescott "Ron" Reagan. Ron was the last of Ronald Reagan's five children. Ronald Reagan was forty-seven when Ron was born and had already transitioned from a successful movie career to politics in California. In the 1950s Reagan was a democrat who supported Eisenhower's candidacy. In 1954 he was hired by General Electric to host the Sunday night "G.E. Theater."⁶⁵ Here he found a political education and honed his political ideas during speeches. He increasingly discussed the "government's encroachment on individual freedom."⁶⁶ In 1960 Reagan heavily supported the Nixon campaign and gave two hundred speeches as a "Democrat for Nixon."⁶⁷ In 1962 G.E. fired Reagan, considering him a political liability, when he attempted to take on the Tennessee Valley Authority as an example of "big government."⁶⁸ Shortly afterwards, Reagan switched his

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "Timeline Reagan" PBS: Public Broadcasting Service, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/reagan/> (accessed July 22, 2013).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

political allegiance to the Republican Party and openly fought Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs. His actions positioned him as a leading face in the conservative movement.⁶⁹

In 1966 Reagan submitted his candidacy for California governorship. He won by more than 1 million popular votes. He immediately made state spending cuts; some were popular while others like the mental health support and university budgetary cuts were not. His governorship from 1967-1975 mirrored some of the most intense anti-war protesting in American history. Many of these protests were a direct result of his cuts targeting the University of California Berkley and his no-nonsense attitude towards what he believed was a lackadaisical faculty and violent students.⁷⁰

In February of 1969 the unrest became a reality when over 3,000 protesters chanted, "We want Reagan...Get him...Kill him."⁷¹ The protestors also threw tear gas at National Guard troops and turned over several police cars. Reagan called it "guerrilla warfare" and demanded that the University's Board of Regents eliminate faculty and expel students known to be involved in the violent protesting. The UC protests lasted over a month and influenced other university students to protest their grievances to their universities.⁷² The death threats did not seem to discourage Reagan. In a letter to a friend Reagan optimistically wrote about the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "3000 Students Battle Police in Berkley "Guerilla War," *Pittsburgh Press*, February 21, 1969, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=6RcfAAAAIABAJ&sjid=EZYAAAAIABAJ&pg=1334,2619051&dq=reagan+and+university+of+california+berkeley&hl=en> (accessed July 22, 2013).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "Other Campuses Hit: End to Cal Chaos Seen by Reagan," *Eugene-Register Guard*, February 22, 1969, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=rjVWAAAAIABAJ&sjid=B-gDAAAAIABAJ&pg=5680,4600547&dq=reagan+and+university+of+california+berkeley&hl=en> (accessed July 22, 2013).

student demonstrations, “take hope—they are arresting students...Don't worry about the campus—we are going to win this one.”⁷³

President Nixon was not as laid back and hopeful as the California Governor. In response to the year of protest against the war, Nixon spoke to the nation about why the U.S. was in Vietnam and why it was necessary to stay there. His address and plan for Vietnam became known as “Vietnamization.”⁷⁴ The President was up front with the public, explaining the death toll and his goals to end the war. He wanted to end the war “to save the lives of those brave young men in Vietnam,” and “so that the energy and dedication of you, our young people, now too often directed into bitter hatred against those responsible for the war, can be turned to the great challenges of peace.”⁷⁵ The president then concluded, “it may not be fashionable to speak of patriotism...but I feel it is appropriate to do so on this occasion.” He continued to urge unity among the American people proclaiming, “Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat.”⁷⁶

Reagan, the avid supporter of Nixon, said that the frankness of the president was very “statesmanlike.”⁷⁷ He admired the president’s call for unity, a tactic he would use eleven years later when he ran for president. Reagan further commented on Nixon’s speech, “When you want to ask young men to fight and die for their country, I think you have a moral

⁷³ “Ronald Reagan to Marquita Maytag,” *Reagan: A Life In Letters* edited by Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, Martin Anderson, (New York: Free Press, 2003), 189.

⁷⁴ “President Nixon's Speech on 'Vietnamization,' November 3, 1969” Vassar College, <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/doc14.html> (accessed July 30, 2013).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Reagan Blames Press for Distorting Unrest,” *Lodi News Centennial*, November 10, 1969, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=fnwzAAAAIBAJ&sjid=4DIHAAAAIBAJ&pg=7434,3528212&dq=reagan+berkeley&hl=en> (accessed July 30, 2013).

obligation to make that cause worth the fighting and the dying, in other words worth the winning."⁷⁸ Ironically, Reagan's words mirrored his 1984 speech commemorating the Vietnam War at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He stated, "We've learned that government owes the people an explanation and needs their support for its actions at home and abroad."⁷⁹

Twelve days after Nixon's proclamation for peace, the Vietnam Moratorium Committee staged the largest antiwar protest in United States history. The protest titled the Anti-Vietnam War Demonstration was the pinnacle of people distrusting the government. An estimated half a million people in Washington demonstrated for peace in Vietnam.⁸⁰ This was a precursor for the 1970 demonstrators that objected to the U.S. entering neutral Cambodia. On May 8, 1970, over two hundred twenty universities closed their doors in protest of the war and the fatal shootings of four Kent State students.⁸¹

In addition to anti-war protests, immigration into the United States, specifically California, almost doubled from the 1960s to 1970s from 3.8 million to 7 million.⁸² An immigration law, changed in 1965, influenced legal immigration to be at its highest in fifty

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at Memorial Day Ceremonies Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict May 28, 1984," <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/52884a.htm> (accessed March 23, 2012).

⁸⁰ "Nov. 15, 1969: Anti-Vietnam War Demonstration Held" *New York Times*, November 15, 2011, <http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/15/nov-15-1969-anti-vietnam-war-demonstration-held/> (accessed November 20, 2012).

⁸¹ "President Moves to Ease Crisis Over Cambodia As Protesters Pour into Capital," *Toledo Blade* May 8, 1970, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=eQwwAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=xAEAAAAIIBAJ&pg=6043,5723267&dq=president+moves+to+ease+crisis+over+cambodia+as+protesters+pour+into+capital&hl=en> (accessed March 3, 2013).

⁸² "U.S. Immigration at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Testimony before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims Hearing on 'The U.S. Population and Immigration'" Committee on the Judiciary U.S. House of Representatives." The Urban Institute, <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=900417&renderforprint=1&CFID=26566259&CFTOKEN=54290962&jsessionid=f030a34fa34760a0173047613434d3f5268e> (accessed March 3, 2013).

years.⁸³ Not only did legal immigration increase, but large-scale undocumented immigration also began to rise in the 1970s.⁸⁴ Historian Paul DiMaggio argued, “Periods of large-scale immigration have also been associated with national soul-searching and the rise of ethno cultural nationalism.”⁸⁵

With anti-war protests and immigration threatening the unity of the nation, discussion about the nation and nationalism became important to the Nixon Administration and later the Reagan Administration. Serving as the California Governor during the most intense protests in American history, Reagan recognized the frightening consequences of disunity. DiMaggio discussed this phenomenon in his study on American nationalism. He explained how discussion about national unity becomes more important when harmony of the nation is threatened.⁸⁶ Threats could include wars, immigration, terrorist attacks, and internal cultural strife, all of which occurred in the late 60s and 70s. During the 1970s these threats specifically included the Watergate scandal, a rapidly falling economy, price controls and long lines for gasoline, exponentially rising immigration, the expanding Civil Rights movement, and most notably the anti Vietnam War protesting. Recognizing the numerous nationalism threats during this era becomes imperative in order to grasp the later actions of the Reagan Administration in the 1980s. Reagan’s hyper-national acts in the 1980s were a direct response to divisive events that he experienced during his governorship in California.

⁸³ “The Law Changed in 1965; Immigration Is At Its Highest,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 1975, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70A14FB3E5E16738DDDA10894DE405B858BF1D3> (accessed August 30, 2013).

⁸⁴ Paul DiMaggio, Preface to *American Nationalism: Literature Review*, by Bart Bonikowski (Princeton University, 2008), http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/bonikowski__dimaggio_american_nationalism_0.pdf (accessed December 10, 2012).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Two years following the Kent State shootings, the press revealed that President Nixon had decided to mine North Vietnamese harbors. The decision outraged the American people and provoked the “most turbulent outburst since 1970.”⁸⁷ Despite the public’s thoughts, Nixon had already significantly decreased the soldiers in combat. By January of 1972 only 133,000 American soldiers remained in Vietnam, a number that decreased to 43,000 by August 1972.⁸⁸ American soldier deaths also drastically decreased. In 1971, 2,414 soldiers perished compared to only 759 in 1972.⁸⁹ However, those in the anti-war movement did not notice the decreasing American involvement. Thousands lined the streets in college towns to express their dissatisfaction with the United States’ continued involvement in Vietnam. Californians were among the most vocal that protested the war. At UC Berkley the police fired putty bullets to battle “window demonstrators near the University of California.”⁹⁰ Also a crowd of 3,000 rallied to break up a City Council meeting “where a peace resolution that included aid to a North Vietnamese hospital was narrowly defeated.”⁹¹ Students at a sister university in Santa Barbara unsuccessfully tried to set fire to a bank.⁹²

⁸⁷ “College Anti-War Protests Growing,” *The Evening Independent* May 10, 1972, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=q21IAAAIIBAJ&sjid=61cDAAAAIIBAJ&pg=4857,2660672&dq=california+anti+vietnam+protests&hl=en> (accessed July 30, 2013).

⁸⁸ “Vietnam Battlefield: Timeline,” Public Broadcasting Station, <http://www.pbs.org/battlefieldvietnam/timeline/index3.html> (accessed August 30, 2013), “Operation Linebacker I,” Air Force Historical Studies Office, April 27, 2011, <http://www.afhso.af.mil/topics/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=15264> (accessed August 30, 2013).

⁸⁹ “Statistical information about casualties of the Vietnam War,” National Archives and Records Administration, <http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#date> (accessed March 14, 2013).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² “College Anti-War Protests Growing,” *The Evening Independent*, May 10, 1972, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=q21IAAAIIBAJ&sjid=61cDAAAAIIBAJ&pg=4857,2660672&dq=california+anti+vietnam+protests&hl=en> (accessed July 30, 2013).

The demonstrations were not isolated to California; a national uproar against the war again took college campuses by storm. Another 3,000 protestors against Nixon's mining decision hit the streets near Kent State University. At Michigan State University police used tear gas to break up a group of "between 1,000 and 2,000 young people who blocked a busy intersection."⁹³ Columbia University students filled the New York City streets and eighteen were arrested. In Albuquerque, police wounded two when they tried to break up a 500-person demonstration. In Boulder 50 people were arrested which paled in comparison to Gainesville, Florida where 150 were detained.⁹⁴ At Ohio State University 350 demonstrators threw "rocks and potatoes" at vice president Spiro Agnew's limousine when he arrived for a Republican fundraiser. The demonstrations were truly national and affected nearly every region of the United States.⁹⁵ The day was a small representation of the greatest divide in American society since the Civil War.

Amid the division, war went on, and one day after the mass protests Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassie reported for an early morning mission at Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam.⁹⁶ All of America questioned why soldiers still fought in Vietnam, but the reason was clear to Michael. In a letter home he wrote, "If you only knew how these people were being treated, you would understand why I am fighting for them."⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ John Darnton, "Violent Actions Reported Rising: Frustration Also Mounts as Students Express Anger -- U.N. Is Target," *New York Times*, May 12, 1972, <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10B15F63B591A7493C0A8178ED85F468785F9> (accessed August 20, 2013).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "Mending a National Wound: The Tomb of the Vietnam Unknown," YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URs3ODmSdi4> (accessed March 5, 2013).

Chapter Two:

George Blassie and Jean Adrian met at a 1940s ballroom dance in St. Louis. At the time George was a butcher and Jean a nurse's aide at DePaul Hospital. George served as an Army Corporal in World War II and saw action on Normandy beach. The two were married in 1947 and had their first child, Michael Joseph Blassie, the next year. Michael was the oldest of five children and the first of his family to attend college.⁹⁸ Michael was an honor student, an accomplished soccer player, and a musician that played bassoon and saxophone for his high school band.⁹⁹ Michael had an athletic build with dark hair and was rarely pictured without a huge smile. He played his role as an older brother well, constantly giving advice and amusement to his siblings.

After finishing high school, Blassie was admitted to the prestigious Air Force Academy in 1966.¹⁰⁰ During college he established himself as a superior soccer player for the Falcons where he wore number thirty-three. His athletic prowess was felt by one of his teammates, Allan Swaim, who had an untimely encounter with one of Michael's forty-yard kicks. Swaim was blasted on the right side of his face and recalled missing class for three days due to his swollen eye. Michael's commitment to his team also showed in his time spent outside of organized practice. On one occasion, Michael trained on his own at the Falcon's field when the Falconer was giving the school's mascot some exercise. He enthusiastically launched the ball across the

⁹⁸Michael's father George served in World War II as an Army Corporal and younger sister Patricia currently serves as an Air Force Colonel. Blassie Thesis, 2.

⁹⁹ "Jean Blassie dies; she fought to get her son buried at home in St. Louis," St. Louis News, http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/obituaries/jean-blassie-dies-she-fought-to-get-her-son-buried/article_3b0854bb-3f08-5dbd-8cb0-e993e81f93b7.html?mode=comments (accessed August 20, 2013); Robert Mann, Miryam Williamson, *Forensic Detective*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 95

¹⁰⁰ Blassie Thesis, 2.

field. Like Swaim, the falcon fell victim to Michael's kick when one of the balls accidentally struck the bird out of the sky.¹⁰¹ Michael's optimistic personality positioned him to laugh off these ill-timed events. All those around him felt that Michael loved life and life loved Michael.

Michael's superiors respected him as much as his peers and siblings admired him. They even chose him to escort Lucile Ball while she was at the Academy to film *Yours, Mine, and Ours*.¹⁰²

The actress even wore his athletic jacket during her month stay at the university.¹⁰³

Outside of soccer, movie stars, and the Falcons, Michael and the rest of the Air Force cadets knew that graduation from the Academy led to service in the Vietnam War. In spite of the public's soured opinion about the war, the graduates felt something had to be done and it was important for them to be in Vietnam.¹⁰⁴ Following his 1970 graduation, Michael attended pilot training at Columbus Air Force Base. In January 1972, towards the end of the Vietnam Conflict, Blassie was sent to South Vietnam at the age of 23 to serve with the 8th Special Operations Squadron at Bien Hoa Air Base.¹⁰⁵ He left behind his parents, four younger siblings, and Lou Adams Pennebaker, the woman Michael planned to marry. Lou remembered Michael telling her before leaving, while they stood under the St. Louis arch, that he had to go to war because he could not let down his country or his father.¹⁰⁶ Once in Vietnam, Michael often wrote home to his four siblings back in St. Louis. As the oldest brother, he gave them guidance or words of encouragement. In one of his letters home to his sister Mary, Michael said, "If you

¹⁰¹ "Mending a National Wound: The Tomb of the Vietnam Unknown."

¹⁰² Mann, *Forensic Detective*, 95.

¹⁰³ Helen O'Neill, "Mom says Bring Her Son Home." *Rome News Tribune*, May 11, 1998, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=348&dat=19980511&id=JnQwAAAAIBAJ&sjid=9TYDAAAAIBAJ&pg=4409,3527563> (accessed August 30, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ "Mending a National Wound: The Tomb of the Vietnam Unknown."

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Patricia Blassie interview.

only knew how these people were being treated, you would understand why I am fighting for them.”¹⁰⁷ In one of his last letters to his girlfriend Lou, Michael wrote, “I’ll keep on living to fight as long as there’s a fighting reason to live or for others to live.”¹⁰⁸

Blassie only served four and a half months in Vietnam, yet still managed to total one hundred thirty missions. Just a month after his 24th birthday, on May 11, 1972, First LT Blassie flew his A-37 Dragonfly near An Loc to attack an anti-aircraft site that was preventing friendly forces from necessary defense measures. According to Jim Connolly, Blassie’s Flight Commander, that morning was one of the most hazardous missions the squadron had flown.¹⁰⁹ In the midst of the mission, Blassie’s plane was hit and began streaming fuel. No ejection was attempted nor was a distress call made, leading Connolly to believe that Michael was immediately killed. U.S. Air Force pilot Robert Goree was called to support the mission that morning. He observed Blassie crash in a rubber plantation without any attempt at ejection before impact.¹¹⁰ Several fighters kept the site clear while a helicopter team rushed to the scene to determine if Blassie was on board when the Dragonfly crashed. Once it was concluded that he had not escaped his aircraft, the helicopter team, under heavy enemy ground fire, quickly pulled out. Connolly continued to orbit the site until “the last hope faded and all other aircraft departed the scene.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Mann, *Forensic Detective*, 95.

¹⁰⁹ Jim Connolly, “Letter to Mr. and Mrs. George Blassie” *Department of the Air Force 8th Special Operations Squadron*, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 2.

¹¹⁰ Crash site coordinates recorded at XT 716 906. Library of Congress POW/MIA Database. 1994. *Joint Task Force-Full Accounting: Michael J. Blassie Biographic/Site Report As of October 27, 1994*, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pow:10:/temp/~frd_ODmK:: (accessed February 9, 2012).

¹¹¹ Connolly, “Letter to Mr. and Mrs. George Blassie,” in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 2.

Those that knew Blassie mourned his loss noting he was “fearless” and “an example for all to follow.”¹¹² Four days after his death his flight team extended a last salute to Mike, as they called him, with a memorial service and flyby. On May 12th, 1972 an Air Force team visited the Blassie family to recount the information provided by Major Jim Connolly. That same day they received a telegram from the Chief Mortuary Branch stating that Michael was Killed in Action-Body Not Recovered (KIA-BNR). The Mortuary Branch assured the family that they would be informed “immediately” as further details became available, but that was the last information the Blassie family received from the government for twenty-six years.¹¹³

Five months later on October 31, 1972, a South Vietnamese reconnaissance team 1/48 found and positively identified Michael Joseph Blassie. They used an identification card, a beacon radio, two compasses, a US flag and a parachute to identify the remains.¹¹⁴ Both Major Chris Calhoun and Captain William Parnell accompanied the team. Parnell recalled the event, “I know that we recovered Blassie. I know I touched this man, I touched this boy...All I remember physically touching was the ID card, maybe a dog tag, some piasters, a nametag and this bundle that used to be a person.”¹¹⁵ The same day of the recovery, Major Donald E. Lunday, Acting Chief of the Joint Personnel Recovery Center, wrote a memorandum for the record explaining that a body was recovered at XT 716 906 coordinates with dog tags and an identification card that positively identified First LT Blassie. Lunday connected the remains from the May 1972

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ R.L. Trask, “Telegram to Mr. and Mrs. George C. Blassie, Western Union Telegram: May 12, 1972,” in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 3.

¹¹⁴ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database. 1972. *Aircraft Mishaps Report Michael J. Blassie* by Bruce L. Sisco, October 22, 1972, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pow:3:.temp/~frd_Omk:: (accessed February 9, 2012).

¹¹⁵ Blassie Thesis, 1.

crash to Blassie and confirmed that his status was formerly labeled Killed in Action-Body Not Recovered.¹¹⁶

Two days after Lunday's memorandum, Captain Richard S. Hess gave Blassie's remains and belongings to SFC Malcolm R. Biles. Biles received an empty plastic bag for Blassie's remains to be sent to the mortuary, as well as a deployment bag with a parachute. Hess certified that several items including Blassie's identification card were placed in the deployment bag. Three days later John C. Rogers, physical anthropologist at the Tan Son Nhut Mortuary, phoned Major Lunday to inform him that the 'Believed to Be' (BTB) remains of "1 LT Blassie" could not be officially identified due to insufficient remains. Rogers continued to say, "All that was received was four ribs, one pelvis, one humerous, a small portion of NOMEX flight suit, a raft, ammo pouch, and part of a parachute."¹¹⁷ Despite this message Lunday again connected the remains found by the recon team at the crash site of the A-37 wreckage near An Loc to Blassie.¹¹⁸

From 1972 to 1975, the Graves Registration Service (GRS), overseer of mortuaries in Vietnam, faced numerous changes in location and personnel due to American withdrawal in Vietnam.¹¹⁹ The GRS directed the Da Nang and Tan Son Nhut mortuaries, which received,

¹¹⁶ Crash site coordinates recorded at XT 716 906. Library of Congress POW/MIA Database. 1994. *Joint Task Force-Full Accounting Case 1853-0-01 Narrative*, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pow:5:./temp/~frd_ODmk:: (accessed February 9, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Library of Congress POW/MIA Database. 1994. *Joint Task Force-Full Accounting Case 1853-0-01 Narrative*, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?pow:5:./temp/~frd_ODmk:: (accessed February 9, 2012).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ The Graves Registration Service was renamed to Memorial Affairs in 1991. The reduction of American troops was a result of Richard Nixon's Vietnamization program. The program provided intense training for South Vietnamese and left only 70,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam. "Vets Of Army's Mortuary Unit Bear Unique Burden," *National Public Radio: Story Corps*, November 11, 2010, <http://www.npr.org/2010/11/11/131251081/vets-of-army-s-mortuary-unit-bear-unique-burden>

processed, and identified United States military in Vietnam. A third site under the GRS, the Personal Property Depot, was accountable for sorting personal belongings of deceased soldiers. The entire accounting process took approximately 7-10 days per body.¹²⁰ In February 1972, the Da Nang mortuary was closed due to American withdraw in North Vietnam. All operational responsibilities and personnel were transferred to the mortuary at Tan Son Nhut. Also in 1972 the Personal Property Depot was closed and relocated inside the Tan Son Nhut mortuary. Blassie's remains were processed at the Tan Son Nhut mortuary during 1972 amid these changes. One year later, increased Viet Cong activity in Saigon forced the Tan Son Nhut mortuary to relocate to Thailand (CIL-THAI).¹²¹ The final move occurred in 1976 when the CIL-THAI was moved to its current location in Hawaii (CILHI). Blassie's remains were transferred to the Tan Son Nhut mortuary during the Da Nang and Personal Property Depot closures and later moved to CIL-THAI and CILHI. Increased volume at the Tan Son Nhut mortuary and several transfers of the remains could explain why some of Blassie's personal items were missing. These closures were a result of decreasing American soldier deaths and increasing Viet Cong presence, both of which represented a slow and long-awaited conclusion of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

In the midst of these transfers, on January 3, 1973, Representative Hamilton Fish, Jr. introduced the first of six joint resolutions concerning the Vietnam Unknown. These

(accessed February 9, 2013); "Nixon Announces Additional Troops Withdrawl," History. com, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/nixon-announces-additional-us-troop-withdrawals> (August 5, 2013).

¹²⁰ "Memorial Affairs Activities-Republic of Vietnam," Mortuary Affairs Center, (Fort Lee, Virginia: Army Quartermaster Museum), <http://www.qmmuseum.lee.army.mil/mortuary/MA-Vietnam.htm> (accessed March 25, 2013).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Congressional resolutions were also indicators of the Vietnam War coming to a close. The first resolution authorized "the interment of an unknown soldier from the Vietnam War in the Arlington National Cemetery."¹²² Congress authorized the Secretary of Defense to locate and commission the burial of a Vietnam Unknown at Arlington, but the bill did not delineate a time for completion. The project was halted because the resolution mirrored a steep decline in American casualties in Vietnam. In 1971 there were 2,414 American casualties in Vietnam, which contrasted the 68 casualties just two years later.¹²³ Legislation and death records revealed that Blassie's death occurred at the rise of Vietnam Unknown congressional awareness and the decline of American fatalities in Vietnam. These circumstances were heightened by the advancement in casualty identification.

The most important task of the Graves Registration Service was to accurately and efficiently identify the remains of deceased personnel. The primary form of casualty identification was matching remains to the identification card, tags, or boots and clothing. The second method of identification was fingerprinting, which had a seventy-five percent success rate at the Tan Son Nhut mortuary. A third effective but tedious method for identification was comparing the remains with dental records.¹²⁴ If none of these methods were an option, as in the case of 1 LT Blassie, then the remains would be matched with recorded characteristics such

¹²²" Library of Congress Bill Summary and Status H.J. RES. 82, January 3, 1973," <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d093:H.J.Res82>: (accessed February 12, 2012).

¹²³ "DCAS Vietnam Conflict Extract File record counts by Incident or Death Date as of April 29, 2008," <http://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.html#date> (accessed March 25, 2013).

¹²⁴ "Memorial Affairs Activities-Republic of Vietnam."

as “height, race, hair color, tattoos, scars, healed fractures, injuries, cause of death, markings on clothing and jewelry.”¹²⁵

During the Vietnam War, the GRS identification rate was extremely high during the Vietnam War due to immediate transportation of remains to in-country mortuaries, advanced technology, and the relatively low number of casualties compared to previous wars. The high identification rate made finding an Unknown difficult for Secretaries of Defense.¹²⁶ By 1982 the Central Identification Lab in Hawaii successfully identified all but four bodies in their possession. Because pressures increased to find an Unknown, the CILHI was instructed by the Department of Defense to begin shredding documents pertaining to the four remains.¹²⁷ The four unidentified remains included two who were unlikely American soldiers, one casualty who could possibly be identified through dental records, and the final was Blassie.

Authorities considered Blassie’s remains unidentified based on the findings of physical anthropologist Tadao Furue who inspected Blassie’s bones in 1978. Furue had a bizarre history before linking up with Blassie in Hawaii. As a young Japanese man he was chosen to be a kamikaze pilot in the closing days of World War II, but the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and subsequent Japanese surrender saved him from sacrificing himself for his Emperor.¹²⁸ After the war Furue became an anthropology student in Tokyo. The U.S.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Seven Secretaries of Defense served from January 1, 1973-May 28, 1984 (date that Blassie was buried at Arlington).

¹²⁷ Ann Mills Griffiths, “Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: Proposed Interment of an Unknown from the Vietnam War.” <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b820726.htm> (accessed on February 22, 2012). Johnie Webb, “Second Memorandum for Record: Documents to be Removed from X-26 File and Placed in Blassie File,” April 4, 1984, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 31.

¹²⁸ William R. Maples, Michael Browning, *Dead Men Do Tell Tales: The Strange and Fascinating Cases of a Forensic Anthropologist*, (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 198.

government hired Furue and other students to help identify American soldiers killed in World War II. Furue was respected for his abilities and in 1977 the U.S. government hired him to work for the newly established CILHI in Hawaii. Furue measured bones to estimate characteristics about deceased Vietnam soldiers. William Maples, an anthropologist from the Florida Museum of Natural History and a friend of Furue, admitted that Furue was an honest and upright man, but was flawed by his intense pride.¹²⁹ Maples noted that Furue thought the phrase “fullest possible accounting” was an attainable feat. “Ultimately this unreachable standard of perfection led to his [Furue’s] downfall.” Furue’s obsession with perfection led him to reach conclusions when no answers were possible.¹³⁰

In 1978 Furue was pressured by the Armed Services Graves Registration Office (ASGRO) to find an unidentifiable soldier from the Vietnam War.¹³¹ On December 4, 1978 he began processing Blassie’s remains. Furue used his experience in bone analysis to re-examine the remains. The problem with bone analysis was that there were not enough of Blassie’s bones, which made Furue’s work an estimate at best. Furue estimated that the six bones and equipment revealed that the soldier was 26-33 years old and between 65.2”-71.5” inches tall.¹³² Following his analysis, Furue recommended that Blassie’s remains, labeled TSN 0673-72, be disassociated with the label “BTB: Blassie” and be designated a new unknown number (X-26).¹³³ Furue determined the remains unidentified but not unidentifiable. In other words, he

¹²⁹ Ibid, 198-201.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 201.

¹³¹ William G. Courtney, “Memorandum to HQ DA, Washington D.C.: Proposed Elimination of (BTB) Status,” March 23, 1979, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 19. Maples, *Dead Men Do Tell Tales*, 201.

¹³² Tadao Furue, “Special Anthropological Narrative: Processing of TSN 0673-72,” December 4, 1979, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 18.

¹³³ Ibid.

believed that more time and returning to X-26's crash site would reveal his identity. The committee did not consider his request to delay interment of X-26's remains. This decision made Furue feel that the remains were "wrested prematurely from his care, taken from the CILHI and taken to Washington."¹³⁴

On April 22, 1981, the ASGRO admitted, "Congressional inquiries accelerated the selection of an unknown serviceman from the Vietnam Conflict for burial in Arlington."¹³⁵ Maples recalled Furue's frustration with rushing the identification process claiming, "If they had only given me more time! I could have identified him!"¹³⁶ Despite Furue's disappointment, ASGRO removed Blassie's BTB status from the X-26 remains, which brought it one step closer to providing Congress with an unknown serviceman from the Vietnam War.¹³⁷ ASGRO took the next step by meeting with the Department of Defense in Washington to "discuss the action the DoD should take."¹³⁸

Despite the actions taken by ASGRO and other government officials to provide an 'unknown,' actually attaining a Vietnam Unknown provided a few more large hurdles. The first was the "criteria" for an Unknown, which clearly became a major obstacle in establishing Blassie as the Unknown. Among other qualifications the criteria stated, "remains must be nearly complete, generally considered to be 80%." Blassie's less than ten percent did not come

¹³⁴ Maples, *Dead Men Do Tell Tales*, 206.

¹³⁵ Bobby Ballard, "Casualty Matters," April 22, 1981, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 21.

¹³⁶ Furue died in 1988, ten years before Blassie's body was exhumed in 1998. Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ann B. Smith, William Courtney, A.F. Eskridge, and WM. M. Annetti, "Approved Board Results," Armed Services Graves Registration Office, May 7, 1980, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 20.

¹³⁸ Blassie's name was officially removed from his remains on May 7, 1980. However the bottom of this memorandum transcribed in 1981 was a handwritten note, "X-26: LT Blassie ID card (ID lost)." The handwritten note suggests that his name was still associated with X-26 until April 1981. Bobby Ballard, "Memorandum for MPC: Selection of Unknown from the Vietnam War," April 22, 1981 in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 21.

even close to this requirement.¹³⁹ However, the most important requirement was that the Unknown be “an unidentified American serviceman who was killed in the Vietnam War.”¹⁴⁰ According to William Courtney, Air Force ASGRO member, this point “should remain steadfast.”¹⁴¹ In 1981, Courtney wrote an Air Force position paper concerning interment of a Vietnam Unknown. It was attached to a Memorandum from Lieutenant Colonel Bobby Ballard to MPC and was entitled “Casualty Matters.” The memo had handwritten notes on the bottom of the page and listed the four potential unknowns, X-32, X-15, X-26, and A-78. Next to X-26 Blassie’s name was listed denoting “10-15%” and “ID Card (ID Lost).” These notes suggest that as late as April, 1981 Blassie’s name was still linked with X-26 and the Air Force was aware of the connection. Blassie’s family was unaware that certain people in the military still associated the remains with Blassie. Because that connection was tenuous, the Air Force was Blassie’s only ally in protecting his potential identification.

Courtney’s report was submitted to the DoD where John O. Marsh, Jr., Secretary of the Army during the Reagan Administration, resumed the task to find an Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam War. In the middle of 1982, Marsh wrote a memorandum to Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, indicating his position concerning the selection of a Vietnam Unknown. Marsh proposed proceeding with an “anonymous selection” and interment of a Vietnam Unknown on Veterans Day 1982. He claimed that his careful consideration led him to

¹³⁹ “Criteria for an Unknown,” in “Burial of the Vietnam Unknown Soldier Working File,” from the Office of the Historian, Arlington National Cemetery, March 1984. Courtesy of Philip Bigler, Historian--Arlington National Cemetery 1983-1985. From this point forward referred as Philip Bigler Collection.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ “Selection of Unknown from Vietnam War,” Air Force Position Paper, April 21, 1981, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 22.

meet the “interests of the Nation” with a Vietnam Unknown.¹⁴² Marsh’s nationalist vernacular mirrored similar statements by other government officials within the Reagan Administration like Caspar Weinberger who hoped that the Vietnam Unknown would “renew the spirit” of the American character.¹⁴³

The increased nationalist discourse was a direct reaction to the growing discontent with the government and national spirit in the 1970s. In the late sixties and early seventies, when Congress commissioned the Secretary of Defense to find a Vietnam Unknown, America experienced tremendous national turmoil. Media and popular culture began overtly questioning the national identity of America. This became visible in music; in 1970, Edwin Starr sang “War...What is it good for?” and Marvin Gaye asked “What’s Going On?” in 1971.¹⁴⁴ These songs represented a growing trend in American society that began to seriously inquire about the motives of its government. Dellie Hahne, an interviewee in Studs Terkel’s *The Good War*, stated that in the 1970s, “The disillusionment was so great, that was the beginning of distrusting my own government.”¹⁴⁵ The people of this period arguably questioned the government more than any other time period since the South in the American Civil War.

American historian Paul DiMaggio argued in a historical analysis of modern nationalism that discussion about the nation becomes more important when harmony of the “nation”

¹⁴² John O. Marsh Jr., “Memorandum for Secretary of Defense: Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era—ACTION MEMORANDUM,” June 16, 1982, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 23.

¹⁴³ Caspar Weinberger Forward to “The Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Era,” by William M. Hammond (Center of Military History, United States Army, Washington D.C., 1985).

¹⁴⁴ Marvin Gaye, “What’s Going On?” *The Vietnam Reader: the Definitive Collection of American Fiction and Nonfiction On the War* ed. Stewart O’Nan, (New York: Anchor, 1998), 290-292.

¹⁴⁵ Dellie Hahne, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II* compiled by Studs Terkel (New York: The New Press, 1984), 136.

seems to be threatened.¹⁴⁶ In the late 1960s and 1970s such threats were numerous. The U.S. was confronted with the Watergate scandal, a rapidly falling economy complete with price controls and long lines for gasoline, continued tensions in the Cold War in places like Libya, Cambodia, and Chile, and a Civil Rights Movement that expanded far beyond the African-American movement. In addition to these uncertainties, the United States experienced increased immigration. From the 1960s to 1970s, documented immigration doubled from 3.8 million to 7 million.¹⁴⁷ Not only did legal immigration increase, but large-scale undocumented immigration also began to rise in the 1970s. According to DiMaggio, periods of large-scale immigration are often associated with “national soul-searching.”¹⁴⁸ The nation experienced more than just average national growing pains in the seventies. Ideologies, morals, and traditions were challenged. The country continued to deal with the failures of the Vietnam War and the crisis of faith in government created by the Watergate scandal. The nation especially struggled with the apparent inability of the Carter Administration to ‘heal the nation’ and solve numerous social and economic problems---stagflation and rapidly rising interest rates. By the close of the decade politicians and citizens began looking for new leadership.

No event epitomized this national soul-searching better than Jimmy Carter’s 1979 “Crisis of Confidence” speech. By 1979 President Jimmy Carter realized his popularity was dwindling along with his hopes of being reelected. In his confusion and frustration, on July 15 he

¹⁴⁶ DiMaggio, Preface to *American Nationalism: Literature Review*, by Bart Bonikowski.

¹⁴⁷“U.S. Immigration at the Beginning of the 21st Century: Testimony before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims Hearing on ‘The U.S. Population and Immigration’” Committee on the Judiciary U.S. House of Representatives.” The Urban Institute, <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=900417&renderforprint=1&CFID=26566259&CFTOKEN=54290962&sessionid=f030a34fa34760a0173047613434d3f5268e> (accessed March 3, 2013).

¹⁴⁸ DiMaggio, Preface to *American Nationalism: Literature Review*, by Bart Bonikowski.

embarked on a ten-day search for “Why have we [America] not been able to get together as a nation to resolve our serious energy problem?”¹⁴⁹ The question fused into a much deeper reflection that he labeled the “crisis of confidence.”¹⁵⁰ On television he told the American people, “It is a crisis that strikes at the very heart and soul and spirit of our national will. We can see this crisis in the growing doubt about the meaning of our own lives and in the loss of a unity of purpose for our nation.”¹⁵¹ Carter went on to say that the wounds of assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate, and the oil crisis further isolated the government from its people’s pain. He proclaimed, “The wounds are still very deep.”¹⁵² In closing, Carter suggested the American people needed to join together and become united. Carter succeeded in recognizing the national unity problem, but failed in becoming its savior and pinpointing the cure.

His speech illuminated the need for a national leader in the eyes of the American public. This national leader needed to be both a role model with charismatic qualities and recognizable to the American people. This leader needed the promise of improvement and a proven record of achievement. Carter was correct when he told the American public that they needed leadership and revitalization of the American spirit, but the electorate decided that Carter was not the leader they needed. In the 1980 presidential election, California Governor Ronald Reagan became the perfect candidate for concerned voters. Reagan campaigned against President Carter asking voters if they felt better or worse in 1980 than they had four years

¹⁴⁹ “Crisis of Confidence, Jimmy Carter.” PBS: Public Broadcasting Service, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/carter-crisis/> (accessed August 1, 2013).

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

earlier?¹⁵³ According to American historian Michael Schaller, Reagan did not stress his conservative credentials, but focused on a “promise to restore national strength and pride.”¹⁵⁴ Reagan denounced those who claimed “that the United States had had its day in the sun.” He rebutted, “This is the greatest country in the world...We have the talent, we have the drive, we have the imagination. Now all we need is the leadership.”¹⁵⁵

Ronald Reagan’s natural leadership came from his ability to connect to most American voters. Reagan was funny, charming, and good-looking. According to Robert Dallek, author of *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism*, Reagan possessed an “intuitive feel for national concerns.”¹⁵⁶ Reagan’s ideals were a product of his youth. He was born in 1911 and attached his old-style virtues to his small town upbringing and schooling, which taught him “the great ideals of this nation.”¹⁵⁷ Above all, these ideals included character, pride in country, and a rigorous work ethic. In addition to his all-American childhood, Reagan was a likeable actor with a successful career as a movie star. In fact, his life as an actor played a significant role in how Americans viewed Reagan’s political life. As he built his political career, many were unable to differentiate between Reagan’s fact and fictional life as an actor. Actually, Gipper, the nickname of a football player he played in the 1940s, became his universal nickname in all the largest newspapers.¹⁵⁸ Reagan’s life as an actor and politician began to fuse together, but his

¹⁵³ Schaller, Michael. *Ronald Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

¹⁵⁶ Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁸ In 1984 Ronald Reagan was criticized by Democratic Presidential nominee Walter Mondale’s campaign for staging ultra-patriotic events to sway media coverage and electorate. Some in the media agreed and began to produce negative reports on the president. See Michael J. Robinson, “Where’s the Beef? Media and Media Elites in 1984,” in *The American Elections of 1984* by Austin Ranney, 166-202.

amiability on the silver screen was not just a trance conducted on movie-going voters; reporters also fell in love with what they considered a genuine friendliness.

Reagan had an uncanny ability to charm everyone in a room, including his political opponents. Reporter Lou Cannon recalled his first encounter with Ronald Reagan in 1965 when the fresh politician was raising interest for his campaign as California governor. Cannon said he “made a good impression,” was “pleasant,” and open about his little knowledge about government. However, Cannon recalled the most striking aspect about the event was that “everyone seemed to like him, the reporters included.”¹⁵⁹ Throughout his career, Reagan achieved this notorious likability through his stories and anecdotes. Reagan often began a speech with a heartfelt story or joke to immediately eliminate the obvious space between the presidency and his audience. Reagan’s “optimism was infectious,” which paired with his friendly nature and humor to win the unheeding allegiance of subordinates and secretaries in the White House.¹⁶⁰ This allegiance within the White House would play a significant role in the selection of a Vietnam Unknown during Reagan’s presidency.

In addition to his positive rapport with his staff, the press, and the public, President Reagan understood the urgency for reuniting the country. Reagan’s ultra-patriotic ideologies took form in his presidential speeches, national holidays, and memorial visits. Even before his presidency started, his election badge read, “Let’s Make America Great Again.” Biographer Michael Benson concluded that, “Reagan believed it was most important that Americans did not lose faith in their country. He wanted to restore their sense of strength and pride.”¹⁶¹ Hugh

¹⁵⁹ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), ix.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 96.

¹⁶¹ Michael Benson, *Ronald W. Reagan*, (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications, 2004), 73.

Hecló, author of "Reaganism and the Search for a Public Philosophy," argued, "Rarely before in peacetime has such a continual effort been made to celebrate the national spirit."¹⁶²

Reagan believed the most obvious way to restore the nation was to make the Vietnam War "a noble cause."¹⁶³ Despite conclusion of the war in 1975, heated divisions in American society existed well into the early eighties. As Reagan put it in a speech at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Wall in 1984, "The war in Vietnam threatened to tear our society apart, and the political and philosophical disagreements that animated each side continue to some extent."¹⁶⁴ Reagan's administration and Congress tried to purge the divisiveness caused by the Vietnam War.

In the American consciousness, the Vietnam War was a series of corrupt political decisions.¹⁶⁵ The era also promoted individual interest groups rather than the 'nation.' As Reagan put it himself, "As we came to the decade of the eighties, we faced the worst crisis in our postwar history. The seventies were years of rising problems and falling confidence."¹⁶⁶ Reagan and the legislative branch wanted to change that perception. He urged citizens to identify first with America and second with their individualism. Reagan had several tactics for achieving this goal. The most obvious was his unembarrassed patriotism and charismatic

¹⁶² Hugh Hecló, "Reaganism and the Search for a Public Philosophy," in *Perspectives on the Reagan Years* ed. by John Logan Palmer, (Washington D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1986), 42.

¹⁶³ O'Nan, *The Vietnam Reader*, 300.

¹⁶⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Archive, November 11, 1984, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/111184a.htm>, (accessed July 20, 2013).

¹⁶⁵ An anonymous Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii sergeant noted that the "premature" burial of X-26 was political just like everything else in the war See Susan Sheehan, *A Missing Plane*, (New York: The New Yorker Magazine Inc., 1986), 112.

¹⁶⁶ Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Archive, January 25, 1984, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12584e.htm> (accessed January 20, 2013).

personality, which surfaced in his speeches and campaigns. In 1984 the Reagan-Bush election campaign promoted the “It’s Morning Again in America,” where the country was portrayed as “prouder and stronger and better.”¹⁶⁷ In January 1984 Reagan spoke at a Spirit of America Rally in Atlanta, Georgia, where he encouraged the attendees, “The spirit of America is strong, and the future of America is great.”¹⁶⁸

Outside of speeches, Reagan helped to build a patriotic American culture through commemoration. In 1983 Reagan took an impromptu visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to lay flowers at the wall.¹⁶⁹ In his notes he wrote of his first visit to the memorial, “It’s quite a place—a very impressive and moving experience.”¹⁷⁰ A year later on Veterans Day 1984, Reagan signed a document putting the once privately owned Vietnam Veterans Memorial under federal government control. While signing, Reagan patriotically spoke the unifying words, “Now it belongs to all of us, just as those men who have come back belong to all of us.”¹⁷¹ Reagan’s emotional connection to veterans was visible in his diary that day, “It was quite an event and I hope it finally makes up for the way the Vietnam returnees were treated when they came home.”¹⁷² However, Reagan’s actions spoke louder than his diary. In his

¹⁶⁷ “Ronald Reagan TV Ad: “Its morning in America again,” YouTube, 1984, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU-IBF8nwSY> (accessed August 3, 2013).

¹⁶⁸ Ronald Reagan, “January 26, 1984,” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Archive, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/12684g.htm> (accessed January 20, 2013).

¹⁶⁹ “C14312-5A, President Reagan visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC,” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Archive, May 1, 1983, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/photographs/atwork.html--5/1/83>. <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/photographs/large/c14312-5A.jpg> (accessed January 30, 2013).

¹⁷⁰ Ronald Reagan, and Douglas Brinkley, *Reagan Diaries*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 149.

¹⁷¹ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at Dedication Ceremonies for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Statue” November 11, 1984 <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/111184a.htm> (accessed January 30, 2013).

¹⁷² *Reagan Diaries*, 277.

entire presidency Reagan rarely missed a Veterans Day or Memorial Day visit to Arlington National Cemetery or another national monument. His attendance showed his commitment to healing the wounds of Vietnam and building pride in the nation. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was a commemorative success to the Reagan Administration. The Wall's popularity and Reagan's commitment to the veterans of Vietnam ultimately influenced the White House to make the Vietnam Unknown another symbol of American healing.

The Reagan Administration's efforts to create the Vietnam Unknown as a symbolic healer were halted by a major challenger, Ann Mills Griffiths. Griffiths was the sister of a Missing in Action soldier and served as the Executive Director of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia (NLF) from 1978 to 2011.¹⁷³ Griffiths was considered the face and most influential non-government official involved in the MIA/POW effort in Vietnam. As much as the Vietnam Wall and Vietnam Unknown represented national healing, the League and Griffiths symbolized the pain that Vietnam continued to cause. In *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*, Michael J. Allen argues that the issue of recovering MIAs and POWs became "the dominant mean through which millions of Americans addressed their nation's defeat in Vietnam" and Griffiths was the dominant character of this movement.¹⁷⁴ As Allen put it, "Talk about lost warriors became a way to talk about a lost war, and the effort to account for them was as much a means to establish accountability for their loss as it was a search for their remains."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Griffiths is currently the head of the Board for the NLF. "About the League." The National League of POW/MIA Families, <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org/about-the-league/> (accessed November 11, 2012).

¹⁷⁴ Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War*, xix.

¹⁷⁵ Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, xix.

The National League of Families, with Griffiths as their leader, was primarily responsible for the persistent talk and pressure on the government to account for soldiers. The League was not large in size due to its exclusivity to immediate family members of MIA and POW soldiers. However, it gained power from the interest of fellow Americans and government officials. By 1979 the League attained security clearance at high government levels by Griffiths' appointment on the Inter-Agency Group on POW/MIA Affairs (IAG). Griffiths made her presence immediately noticeable. She became close with high-level officials like John Negroponte, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, who also served on the IAG. By the 1980s the IAG became the "focal point" of U.S. policy on POW/MIA issues.¹⁷⁶ The increased authority of the IAG ultimately provided Griffiths with more power. She became the sole liaison between the League and the IAG, but her link to the League was limited because she agreed to sign a secrecy document to gain security clearance. This caused many within the League to suspect Griffiths of being seduced by government officials.

Earl Hopper, the League's board chairman, feared that Griffiths' high level clearance opened relationships between the League and government that threatened the League's autonomy.¹⁷⁷ Hopper was right; the League's influence eventually became solely connected to Griffiths' power on the IAG. Both were content as long as Griffiths' personal objectives were congruent with the League's goals. Initially concerning the interment of a Vietnam Unknown, the League and Griffiths' views were consistent. Both were strongly against burying a Vietnam Unknown because they believed it would halt the search for soldiers still missing in Vietnam.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 195.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 196.

The League's popularity in American culture paired with the relentless determination of their leader, Griffiths, enabled them to briefly halt the burial of a Vietnam Unknown.

Griffiths' clearance and connections in Washington became further apparent by July 1982. Only a month after John O. Marsh suggested to Caspar Weinberger that he proceed with choosing an Unknown in the "interest of the nation," Griffiths wrote Weinberger to express her disapproval.¹⁷⁸ She was aware that the CIL only possessed four unidentified remains from the Vietnam War and that all records pertaining to those men had been shredded. Griffiths knew that none of the remains fit the established criteria for an unknown and identification was possible with time and proper resources.¹⁷⁹ She believed that the DoD was making a "conscious effort to obscure or eliminate identification data to meet political objectives."¹⁸⁰ Griffiths finished by asking Secretary of Defense Weinberger to "not approve" the proposal for an unknown because breaking the qualifications would "nullify the purpose."¹⁸¹

The following month Department of Defense official Richard Childress informed William P. Clark, often referred to as Ronald Reagan's top hand, that all the major decision makers concerning the Unknown (State, Defense, JCS, DIA, NSC, and the League) were in full agreement that an interment under current circumstances was premature.¹⁸² Childress had been

¹⁷⁸ John O. Marsh Jr., "Memorandum for Secretary of Defense: Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam Era—ACTION MEMORANDUM," June 16, 1982, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 23; Ann Mills Griffiths, "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: Proposed Interment of an Unknown from the Vietnam War," <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b820726.htm> (accessed on February 22, 2012).

¹⁷⁹ Griffiths, "Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: Proposed Interment of an Unknown from the Vietnam War."

¹⁸⁰ Ann Mills Griffiths, "Letter to John O. Marsh," National Alliance of Families, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b820811.htm> (accessed on January 10, 2012).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Richard Childress, "Letter to William P. Clark," National Alliance of Families, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b820826.htm> (accessed on March 22, 2012); Paul Kengor,

convinced by the tireless efforts of Griffiths to halt the DoD from interring a soldier. He knew the purpose of the tomb was to heal the wounds of the Vietnam War and in order to successfully inter a remaining unknown Ann Griffiths and the League of Families needed to support the effort. For the moment, Griffiths and Childress successfully delayed the eager John O. Marsh and Caspar Weinberger from interring a Vietnam Unknown.

Griffiths believed the next point of action to stop the burial was to publicly inform the families of the situation, but that never happened. Childress had personally advised Griffiths several times to not go public with the information she attained about the shredded documents at the CIL. Childress suggested that if the public realized the facts, "rather than 'heal the wounds' of Vietnam, they would be reopened, the accounting process would be undermined, the hard-won trust built up the POW/MIA families over the past would be jeopardized, and the credibility of the Central Identification Lab (which families have visited) would be thrown into doubt."¹⁸³

By early 1984, Griffiths had become increasingly "cozy" with the Reagan Administration.¹⁸⁴ In February 1984 Griffiths took a trip to Hanoi with Childress and Richard Armitage, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. She described the trip as "the highest level mission to Vietnam since the end of the war."¹⁸⁵ Due to her secrecy and high-level clearance, the board was unaware of her trip, and thus did not approve her travel. Upon her return, Griffiths, without the support of her board, told the Reagan

Patricia Clark Doerner *The Judge: William P. Clark, Ronald Reagan's Top Hand*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 258.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Bill Hendon, Elizabeth A. Stewart, *An Enormous Crime: The Definitive Account of American POWs Abandoned in Southeast Asia*, New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007), 248.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Administration that she was satisfied with interment of a Vietnam Unknown. The details of her trip and why her position concerning the unknown suddenly changed are unclear. However, it is clear that members of her board questioned her integrity, and others noticed that she became extremely close with political higher-ups.¹⁸⁶ Earl Hopper believed that Griffiths started taking orders from the White House rather than her board.¹⁸⁷ The board continued to openly oppose the interment of a Vietnam Unknown.

Griffiths' approval on March 15 quickly spurred the administration to action. The next day, Weinberger informed the president that the League supported interment and indicated that "we have one set of remains which cannot be identified and which, although not as complete as we would like, meets the legal requirements for the Vietnam Unknown and therefore is qualified."¹⁸⁸ Five days later Johnie E. Webb, Jr. certified that TSN 0673-72 (X-26), Michael Blassie, was "unidentifiable."¹⁸⁹ He endorsed the claim that no positive identification could be made for X-26. In the certificate he noted that all identification efforts since November 4, 1972, had been made, but results had proved negative.¹⁹⁰ That same day the Commander of the Joint Casualty Resolution Center, Joe B. Harvey, announced that his personnel conducted a thorough review of records and found no remains associated with the evacuation number of X-26.¹⁹¹ Two weeks later Webb removed three documents from the X-26

¹⁸⁶ Josh Getlin, "Unfriendly Fire : POW-MIA activist Ann Mills Griffiths is a power player in Washington. Critics say that power has gone to her head," *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1991, http://articles.latimes.com/1991-08-11/news/vw-931_1_ann-mills-griffiths (accessed March 31, 2012).

¹⁸⁷ Hendon, *An Enormous Crime*, 248.

¹⁸⁸ Charles Weinberger, "Memorandum for the President, March 16, 1984," National Alliance of Families, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b840316.htm> (accessed March 18, 2012).

¹⁸⁹ Johnie Webb "Remains of TSN 0673-72 (X-26)," in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 23.

¹⁹⁰ Johnie E. Webb Jr, "Certification Remains of TSN 0673—72 (X-26)," *National Alliance of Families*, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b840321.htm> (accessed January 30, 2012).

¹⁹¹ Joe B. Harvey, "Review of JCRC Records," March 21, 1984 in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 27.

file pertaining to Blassie. Then Dr. Robert R. McMeekin, Deputy Director of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, certified that no records existed in the X-26 file.¹⁹² Finally, Webb claimed in a statement that all papers concerning X-26 were passed to his director.¹⁹³

On April 13 Caspar Weinberger announced that the Vietnam Unknown was selected and burial would take place on Memorial Day 1984. The League's board was shocked. They had no knowledge of Griffiths' Hanoi trip or her sudden change of opinion. Anne Hart, Vice Chairman of the board, pleaded for President Reagan to stop the interment for the sake of MIAs and POWs.¹⁹⁴ Hart was the wife of Captain Thomas T. Hart who went missing in December 1972 near the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos.¹⁹⁵ Hart felt that the burial of a Vietnam Unknown would halt efforts by the U.S. government for those still missing like her husband. She also believed the only person that could stop the burial was President Reagan.

In response to Hart's letter, Robert McFarlane sent Reagan a memorandum explaining the Department of Defense's two-year resistance that deferred Congressional wishes for an Unknown. He claimed that every possible avenue for identification was made and that the board only feared the potential closure of search and rescue for MIAs and POWs. John O. Marsh mirrored McFarlane's confidence and was not concerned with the opposition of the League's board. He did not expect the lack of support to "significantly degrade the positive aspects of the event."¹⁹⁶ Therefore, in early May, Reagan responded to Hart with a letter

¹⁹² Dr. Robert R. McMeekin, "Memorandum, April 4, 1984," Armed Forces Institute of Pathology Washington D.C., in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 29.

¹⁹³ Johnie E. Webb Jr., "Statement" April 4, 1984, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 30.

¹⁹⁴ "Anne Hart to President Reagan" National Alliance of Families, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b840418.htm> (accessed February 25, 2012).

¹⁹⁵ Hendon, *An Enormous Crime*, 252.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

assuring her that “our first obligation was to the families themselves.” He continued hoping that the board would join him “in an act of national unity.”¹⁹⁷ Reagan and the Pentagon continued to address the League’s concerns in numerous letters and speeches. Weinberger responded to the League’s apprehension by telling them that “there are almost 2,500 Americans still missing in Southeast Asia...Our duty to them should be strengthened by this ceremony.”¹⁹⁸ Reagan on several occasions stated that full accounting would be “a matter of highest national priority.”¹⁹⁹

Ten days after Reagan’s response to Hart, on May 17, 1984, Michael Blassie—now classified as an ‘unknown’ Vietnam soldier-- began his journey to Washington. The flag draped coffin of the Unknown traveled from Pearl Harbor Naval Base to San Francisco aboard the U.S.S *Brewton* and was escorted by the U.S. Coast Guard for the first and last fifty miles of the journey.²⁰⁰ Upon arrival at Alameda Naval Air Station on May 24, the remains were transferred to Travis Air Force Base. Then the Unknown traveled across country to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. The casket stayed in the Capitol Rotunda where it was on public view for three days. Upon Blassie’s arrival, President Reagan began the long awaited close to a painfully long war,

We may not know of this man’s life, but we know his courage. He is the heart, the soul and the spirit of America...This American hero may not need us. But we surely need him...It is up to us to protect the proud heritage now in our hands, and to live in peace as bravely as he did in war.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Ronald Reagan, “Letter to Mrs. Anne Hart May 7, 1984,” National Alliance of Families, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b840507.htm> (accessed February 25, 2012).

¹⁹⁸ Hammond, 5.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 5

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 5-9.

²⁰¹ Philip Bigler Collection, “Associated Press: Presidents Remarks,” 11.

President Reagan's address marked the beginning of First Lieutenant Michael Joseph Blassie's last duty as the Vietnam Unknown soldier.

Chapter Three:

Michael Blassie received over one hundred thousand visitors during the three days that his remains laid in the Capitol Rotunda.²⁰² Politicians, soldiers, veterans, grieving wives, and young children all gathered to pay their respects to the fallen Unknown Soldier. Some brought flowers and mementos while others stood sobbing for the ones they had lost during the war.²⁰³ The Blassie family did not pay attention to the happenings in Washington that weekend. Michael's sister Patricia did not even recall watching the ceremonies because it had been twelve years since her family had received any substantial information concerning Michael.²⁰⁴

Others did however remember their visit to the rotunda. Dan Clurman served two years in Pleiku and brought his 10-year-old son to view the casket. As he approached he silently wept and told a reporter, "I came to pay my respects to everyone who wasn't quite as lucky as I was."²⁰⁵ Another family, Earl and Betty Smith, visited the rotunda for a special reason. Their son Lewis P. "Skip" Smith II was not recovered after he was shot down in 1968. "There's a possibility that could be our boy,' Smith said, 'and as far as I'm concerned, that is our boy in there."²⁰⁶ As President Reagan would later attest, the Unknown Soldier was "symbolic of all our boys."²⁰⁷

By noon on Monday May 28, 1984, the public viewing concluded. Servicemen from each military branch marched softly into the rotunda to escort the Unknown to his Arlington

²⁰² Philip Bigler Collection, "Why We'll Never Know Who He Was," *USA Today*, 27.

²⁰³ Philip Bigler Collection, "Associated Press: Presidents Remarks," 14.

²⁰⁴ Patricia Blassie interviewed by author, Warner Robins, Georgia, March 22, 2013.

²⁰⁵ Newspaper Anthology on the Burial of the Unknown Serviceman from the Vietnam conflict compiled by Philip Bigler, "Associated Press: Presidents Remarks," 14.

²⁰⁶ Philip Bigler Collection, "Why We'll Never Know Who He Was," *USA Today*, 27.

²⁰⁷ Philip Bigler Collection, "Associated Press: Presidents Remarks," 14.

resting place.²⁰⁸ The casket was placed on a black caisson drawn by six white horses. Eight pallbearers, representing each branch of the military, and two Vietnam POWs, accompanied Blassie in the rainy procession.²⁰⁹ Over 240,000 people stood along the route as Blassie's body traveled the two-mile journey to Arlington National Cemetery.²¹⁰ The road was also lined with 1,750 servicemen of all the branches of military who presented arms as the Unknown approached.

The procession was televised by all of the major news channels.²¹¹ The Unknown only paused once, at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, where fifty-six veterans presented the flags of all the states and territories of the United States.²¹² This intermission displayed the connection that the two commemorative sites shared. Both honored and mourned the Vietnam dead. However, they did it in different fashions, one with 58,220 names etched into the black granite memorial and the other with none on the white granite.²¹³ The procession continued over the Memorial Bridge and neared the gate of the cemetery while President Reagan and other dignitaries waited at the Arlington Amphitheater.²¹⁴ The ceremony was national in every sense. After a two hour procession, the casket arrived, the funeral party was seated, a song was

²⁰⁸ Philip Bigler Collection, "Why We'll Never Know Who He Was," *USA Today*, 27.

²⁰⁹ Philip Bigler Collection, "Honorary Pallbearers" United States Army Military District of Washington Public Affairs Office: News Release, May 23, 1984.

²¹⁰ Philip Bigler Collection, "A Missing Son, Known Only to God, Finds Rest in Nation's Heart," May 29, 1984.

²¹¹ "Vietnam Unknown Lies in State Capitol," *Palm Beach Post*, May 28, 1984, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=WwAtAAAAIBAJ&sjid=n80FAAAAIBAJ&pg=2340,5361136&dq=vietnam+unknown+lies+in+state+capitol&hl=en> (accessed July 20, 2013).

²¹² Hammond, 12.

²¹³ Michael Blassie's name is located on panel 1W row 23 at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington D.C.

²¹⁴ Hammond, 25.

played by a marine trumpeter, the audience sang “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” and Caspar Weinberger introduced President Reagan.²¹⁵

The president began by reminding the audience that Memorial Day was about honoring “the dead of our wars.”²¹⁶ He paraphrased Lincoln’s 1863 speech at Gettysburg, noting that the deeds of the dead spoke much louder than the living ever could. By doing this, he brought the audience back to one of America’s most divided days. He then compared the Union’s rededication in the Civil War to the “resilience” and growth of the American people after Vietnam.²¹⁷ According to Reagan, the Vietnam War had taught valuable lessons.²¹⁸ He said that some lessons were learned at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial ceremonies in 1982. There, hundreds of veterans staged their own parade on Constitution Avenue. The memorial had caused some controversy, but in the end, “the wall proved to be a healing force.”²¹⁹ The bands and speeches produced “a lot of healing” according to one combat veteran.

In his address, Reagan dedicated a large portion of his speech to the impact of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. He explained that the Wall produced conversation among veterans, college students, and politicians alike. He said that the memorial evoked healing and reassured Americans to “listen to each other and to trust each other again.”²²⁰ This suggested that—in the eyes of Reagan—memorials had the ability to heal and unite in grief. He

²¹⁵ Hammond, 12.

²¹⁶ Philip Bigler Collection, 24.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ “For Vietnam Vets the Healing Goes on” The Miami News, November 12, 1984, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=EZUmAAAAIBAJ&sjid=cQEGAAAAIBAJ&pg=1249,3172680&dq=for+vietnam+vets+the+healing+goes+on&hl=en> (accessed July 20, 2013).

²²⁰ Philip Bigler Collection, 24.

consciously addressed the “healing” powers of the memorial because he hoped to produce a similar reaction with the Vietnam Unknown.

The president also addressed those that opposed interment like the National League of Families. He said the memorial represented a time of rededication to the “families of those missing in action.”²²¹ He recognized that families without answers still suffered and that Vietnam was “not over for them.”²²² At that time the military could not account for the whereabouts of Michael Blassie or for the loved ones of 2,498 families. Therefore the State wanted to put those families at ease by reassuring them that the Unknown was not “a final memory.”²²³ For those families, the president commissioned a recommitment to find their sons still missing. He then called to the government in Hanoi to return Americans to their families so that they could end their grief.

Finally the president posed questions about the Unknown that many likely were pondering that day, “As a child, did he play on some street in a great American city? Did he work beside his father on a farm in America’s heartland? Did he marry? Did he have children? Did he look expectantly to return to a bride? We will never know the answers to those questions about his life.”²²⁴ To Reagan, the Unknown was not just one name or one boy from the city or the country. He was “symbolic of all our missing sons.”²²⁵ He represented the healing, the political mistakes of Vietnam, and the courage of the individual servicemen. Because he was Unknown he represented whatever the public wanted him to represent. To

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Hammond, 12.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

the politician he was a closing line to a tumultuous Vietnam chapter. To the veteran he was a method of healing and honoring his friends that had fallen. To the grieving mother of a soldier still unaccounted for, he was a promise of rededication to the MIA/POW cause. He encompassed all of these emotions and unified all visitors because he was an American that lost his life and identity for the nation.

After pondering the Unknown's beginnings, President Reagan continued a few more minutes then concluded his speech saying, "Thank you, dear son, and may God cradle you in His loving arms."²²⁶ The president then presented the Medal of Honor, which, like the cemetery, traced its beginnings to the Civil War.²²⁷ The medal was given to the Unknown for "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy during the Vietnam Era."²²⁸

The pallbearers then carried Blassie's body to the Tomb of the Unknowns where religious prayers, scriptures, and hymns were performed. The flag that draped Blassie's coffin during its trip from Hawaii was folded and presented to President Reagan as the next of kin. Reagan symbolically acted as the father of the young soldier of the nation. This act became the epitome of his symbolic effort to reestablish nationalism in the 1980s. However, in doing so, the president took away that privilege from Michael's real father, George Blassie. In essence, Michael not only gave up his life for his nation, but also surrendered his death to the nation. As "Taps" played the ceremony concluded. Those wishing to pay respects filed past the crypt until

²²⁶ Philip Bigler Collection, 24.

²²⁷ "The Medal," Congressional Medal of Honor Society, <http://www.cmohs.org/medal-history.php> (accessed July 20, 2013).

²²⁸ Ronald Reagan, "Citation Accompanying the Award of Medal of Honor to the Vietnam Unknown," May 28, 1984, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 6.

the cemetery ended. From 8:30pm to 11:30pm workmen set the vault cap and crypt cover in place. The Unknown was put to rest for what most thought would be forever.

The Reagan administration had accomplished its goal; reporters had flooded the news with updates of the ceremony. Headlines read, "A missing son, known only to God, finds rest in nation's heart," "Honored Symbol: Vietnam War's Unknown Buried In Arlington," "Vietnam War hero laid to rest," "Vietnam A Final Symbol," and "Now We Are All Veterans of Vietnam,"²²⁹ The ceremony for the Unknown Vietnam Soldier and the headlines it made was the first in a series of 1984 events that brought Americans closer together in a sense of nationalism and made them trust the campaigning Reagan even more. Of course the events also masked growing internal problems such as poverty, crime, and intense political division. They mirrored a dedication to nationalism, but also suggested that nationalism was a ticket to Reagan's reelection.

Following Memorial Day, Americans were getting prepared for the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. President Reagan officially opened the games on July 28. Despite several Soviet Union countries boycotting the games reporters considered it "the greatest opening ceremony in Olympic history."²³⁰ That same year Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.," took the nation's music charts by storm. The song spoke to the negative effects of the Vietnam War on returning vets trying to find jobs, but was largely misunderstood to be patriotic and nationalistic. In fact Ronald Reagan's reelection committee attempted to use the song during the 1984 campaign.

²²⁹ Philip Bigler Collection.

²³⁰ "L.A.'s greatest sports moments: No. 3: 1984 Olympics opening," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 2011. http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/sports_blog/2011/12/las-greatest-sports-moments-no-3-the-1984-olympics-opening-ceremony.html (accessed July 25, 2013).

George Will, at the time a reporter for the *Observer-Reporter* in Pennsylvania and an aide to the Reagan reelection campaign, said about the musician and song, “I have not a clue about Springsteen’s politics, if any, but flags get waved at his concerts while he sings songs about hard times. He is no whiner, and recitation of closed factories and other problems always seems punctuated by a grand, cheerful affirmation: Born in the U.S.A.!”²³¹ The Reagan camp was denied use of the song by Springsteen who wondered if President Reagan had listened to the lyrics.²³² Springsteen later commented on the situation to *Rolling Stone* magazine, “I think people have a need to feel good about the country they live in. But what’s happening, I think, is that that need—which is a good thing—is getting manipulated and exploited.”²³³

The song did not hurt Reagan’s support; Reagan won forty-nine of fifty states in the race and 58.8% of the popular vote.²³⁴ Instead the president turned to another hyper-nationalist song that came out in 1984, Lee Greenwood’s “God Bless the USA.” The song was not written for Reagan’s campaign, but the two became inseparable in the national consciousness. Ultimately the song evoked the president’s “dreamy vision of the nation” and the two became

²³¹ George Will, “Springsteen and the work ethic in the U.S.A.,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 14, 1984, “Bruce Springsteen: ‘The Blue Collar Troubadour,’” <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=K24aAAAAIBAJ&sjid=FCoEAAAAIBAJ&pg=7069,3197082&dq=bruce+springsteen+the+blue+collar+troubadour&hl=en> (accessed July 10, 2013).

²³² Allison Brennan, “Campaigns Rock at Their Own Risk,” CNN, August 16, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/16/politics/music-in-campaigns/index.html> (accessed August 15, 2013).

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ David Leip, “1984 General Election Results,” Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1984> (accessed July 23, 2013).

“permanently linked in the public imagination.”²³⁵ Just as Reagan hoped, the majority of Americans seemed to be happy with America again.

Reagan’s ability to promote nationalism was his greatest strength as a politician. However, to effectively promote nationalism Reagan and his administration elaborated and fabricated national unity. Creating a Vietnam Unknown was one of the most effective avenues used to construct nationalism. The Unknown became a necessity for continued healing. Therefore, when an Unknown was not available, one was created. Ultimately, attaining the “noble cause” came at the expense of a family and multiple government falsehoods. However, many, like Springsteen, were cautious of the Reagan administration’s motives.

As early as 1982 journalists reported that a Vietnam Unknown “was hard to find.”²³⁶ In September 1982 the Austin Associated Press wrote, “Federal officials are about to revise a rule that made it difficult to find an unidentified Vietnam War casualty to place in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.”²³⁷ Two years later, the day Blassie was buried at Arlington, Carlyle Murphy of the *Washington Post* also reported on the State’s lacking unknown candidates. He wrote, “Only four sets of remains brought into the lab from Vietnam were unidentified.”²³⁸ In the article, the public became aware that 80% of the remains were not present in the case of the Vietnam Unknown like in previous wars. According to Major Robert Shields, a Defense

²³⁵ Carl Anthony, “A Reagan Country Song & California Classic by ABBA: His 1980 & 1984 Campaign Music,” October 11, 2012, <http://carlanthonyonline.com/2012/10/11/the-reagan-country-song-a-california-classic-by-abba-his-1980-1984-campaign-theme-music/> (accessed August 1, 2013).

²³⁶ “Vietnam Casualty Hard to Find: Law Revision Proposed to Unknown War Victim,” *The Press-Courier*, September 27, 1982, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=OkdKAAAAIABJ&sjid=3yINAAAAIABJ&pg=3714,5216514&dq=vietnam+casualty+hard+to+find+law+revision+proposed+to+unknown+war+victim&hl=en> (accessed August 2, 2013).

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ Philip Bigler Collection, “‘Unknown’ Was Hard to Find.”

Department spokesman interviewed by Murphy, the Unknown represented three criteria; “He’s an American. We know he died in the conflict,” and “we just don’t know who he is.”²³⁹ The report claimed that all records pertaining to the unknown were destroyed to protect the anonymity of the Unknown. Shields refused to comment on “how long the remains were at the lab or from where they came.”²⁴⁰ The issue was largely laid to rest with Blassie’s interment at Arlington, but a few writers and journalists inquired about the rules not being “followed.”²⁴¹

Two years after the burial, writer Michael Hastings wrote a fictional thriller entitled *The Unknown Soldier* about a MIA tracker, Walt Meredith, who discovered that the Pentagon was deliberately covering up the true story of the Unknown Soldier’s death. The novel began with factual information pertaining to the Unknown, such as the details provided in previous news articles. Despite the fictional plot, the novel suggested that writers were curious about legality concerning the Vietnam Unknown. It also implied that Springsteen was not alone in his suspicion that the need to feel good about one’s country could be “manipulated and exploited.”²⁴²

The same year that Hastings released his book, Susan Sheehan, an investigative journalist with *The New Yorker*, published *A Missing Plane*. The non-fiction writer helped to solve a war mystery about a World War II American bomber that was lost for 38 years. Her exploration took her to the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii where she joined forces with Tadao Furue to identify twenty-two members of the American plane. One hundred pages into the book Sheehan devoted three pages to the CILHI’s identification of Vietnam soldiers.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Brennan, “Campaigns Rock at Their Own Risk.”

She outlined, in detail, the process of identifying all but one set of remains from the Vietnam War. Her account narrowed the Unknown's death to May 11, 1972 and told that they were that of a helicopter team member or a fighter plane pilot. She explained that the remains were six small bones; only 3 percent complete, and were accompanied by "a few objects such as remnants of a flight suit, of a pistol holster, and of a parachute, and a one-man inflatable raft."²⁴³

Sheehan revealed that the remains were labeled X-26 and when the Department of Defense asked Furue to recommend X-26 to be chosen as the Unknown Soldier for the Vietnam War, "he declined to go...he believed that if additional remains of X-26 were ever found he could identify him."²⁴⁴ Sheehan concluded her aside by saying, "Johnie Webb and Tadao Furue refused to discuss the Vietnam Unknown." An unnamed former sergeant at the CIL did however comment, "'putting X-26 in the Tomb of the Unknowns was politically expedient. At best, it was premature. Perhaps it was appropriate to the Vietnam War. So much else about it was political. Everything connected with X-26 has been ordered shredded, but you can't shred what's in men's minds.'"²⁴⁵

For many years the detailed information on the Vietnam Unknown went virtually unnoticed. Then a Vietnam Army Green Beret and "self professed 'MIA radical'" Ted Sampley read Susan Sheehan's book.²⁴⁶ Sampley closely researched the information. In July 1994, Sampley's self-published *U.S. Veteran Dispatch* he declared that Michael J. Blassie's remains

²⁴³ Sheehan, *A Missing Plane*, 111.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

²⁴⁶ Bill Thomas, "Last soldier buried in Tomb of the Unknowns wasn't unknown," *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-11-08/lifestyle/35503085_1_patricia-blassie-life-raft-human-bones (accessed January 5, 2013).

were in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Referencing Sheehan's findings, Sampley narrowed down the candidates based on the belongings found with the body. First, he claimed that the remnants of a flight suit indicated an airman. As Sheehan reported, there were only three airmen Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered in the vicinity of X-26's crash site, two helicopter crew members and Blassie's A-37. A parachute ruled out any helicopter personnel, which left only Blassie as a possibility. However, to cross-reference his findings, Sampley discovered that Blassie was the only fighter pilot listed as Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered within a 2500 square mile radius of where the Unknown's remains were found.²⁴⁷ At the close of his article, Sampley challenged the CILHI to "right this wrong."²⁴⁸

Sampley approached the Blassie family with his findings. Michael's sister, Patricia Blassie, was a captain in the Air Force working in Marietta, Georgia when she received a phone call from Sampley. She remembered hearing that Sampley was the founder of the Rolling Thunder rally in Washington and was known for stirring up trouble with the government.²⁴⁹ Blassie could not believe the claims, but decided to take the information to the Air Force Casualty Office. They assured her that nothing on file could prove Sampley's claim. Blassie saluted and left the office. She dropped the matter because she, and her family, "couldn't believe the U.S. government would actually bury a known soldier in the Tomb of the Unknowns. It didn't make sense."²⁵⁰

Three years later Vince Gonzales, a "CBS correspondent-in-training," approached them with the same claim. Gonzales was living in Los Angeles when he found Sampley's article on the

²⁴⁷ Ted Sampley, "The Vietnam Unknown Can Be Identified," U.S. Veteran Dispatch, July 14, 1994.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Thomas, "Last soldier buried in Tomb of the Unknowns wasn't unknown."

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

Internet. He researched for three months and discovered a paper trail leading Michael to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Despite Gonzales' strong argument, the Blassie family was not initially in full agreement to go forward with a nationally televised claim. They met to discuss and debate the decision. Michael's brother, George, felt that the Tomb was a place of honor to be buried, "'maybe this is where we should leave him.'"²⁵¹ Michael's youngest sister, Patricia, being a Captain in the Air Force, had a lot to lose. The middle daughter, Mary, felt that if she were lost, "'Michael would come find me.'"²⁵² The conversation continued for hours until Jean, Michael's mother who had lost her husband six years earlier, said, "'For 26 years, we have been told that Michael was never found. Yet, he was found five months after he was shot down and then buried without our knowledge in the Tomb of the Unknowns...I want to bring my son home.'"²⁵³ With that, the decision was made to fully cooperate with Gonzales.

Next, the young correspondent took his findings to the CBS News bureau in Washington where they chose Eric Engberg to be the on-air spokesman.²⁵⁴ After further research, the CBS team produced a story claiming that Michael J. Blassie was in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and that the military had deliberately hidden his identity from "his family and the public."²⁵⁵ The CBS nightly news on January 19, 1998, almost did not air the Blassie report due to the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal that had hit the news the same week. In the interview Patricia Blassie demanded that her brother be exhumed and DNA testing be performed.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

Patricia Blassie became the primary spokesperson for her family concerning the matter. Her experience in the military and strong oratory skills allowed her to communicate her family's wishes to the DoD and the public. But, as journalist Bill Thomas put it, "Blassie was not only challenging the defense establishment she served, she also was threatening its most sacred shrine."²⁵⁶ Thus, her family endured criticism from those who felt that the Blassie family was disturbing the Tomb on a "hunch."²⁵⁷ In response Patricia wrote, "Exhuming the Tomb of the Unknown isn't something the Blassie family takes lightly. The monument is central to remembering the price paid for our freedom. It is hallowed ground. Yet this shouldn't stand in the way of any family who only wants an answer."²⁵⁸ She also later said, "'I never wanted to embarrass the military or the country...I just wanted to know the truth."²⁵⁹

After the news story aired the Department of Defense began their own research. Defense Secretary William Cohen assigned Rudy de Leon, working in the Personnel and Readiness Office, to study the case and make a recommendation. The Department held a news briefing on January 20, 1998 where reporters posed questions concerning CBS's claims. Captain Doubleday indirectly answered questions about Blassie's appointment as the Unknown; at one point he stated, "I can't at this point describe to you the process. I simply don't know."²⁶⁰ Doubleday, among other DoD officials, likely did not know the details concerning Blassie.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Patricia Blassie interviewed by author, Warner Robins, Georgia, March 22, 2013.

²⁵⁸ Patricia Blassie, "Tomb of the Unknowns Holds My Brother," April 1998 National Alliance of Families, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/blassie.htm> (accessed November 30, 2012).

²⁵⁹ Thomas, "Last soldier buried in Tomb of the Unknowns wasn't unknown."

²⁶⁰ Captain Mike Doubleday, "DoD News Briefing Transcript, January 20, 1998, in Blassie Thesis, Appendix 33; "DoD News Briefing: Tuesday January 20, 1998- 1:30" <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan1998/t0120asd.html> (accessed August 20, 2013).

Fourteen years passed and most of the personnel in the DoD, CILHI, and White House had changed. Only one person closely connected to the interment still worked for the government.

Johnie Webb was that person and was called concerning Michael Blassie's remains.

Mark Blair transcribed a "Memo for Record" about the conversation; it stated that he asked Johnie Webb,

If in fact when the BTB ID of Lt. Michael Blassie was rescinded, did those remains then become X-26 and were they eventually interred in the tomb of the Unknown? He answered yes; he also stated that he feels this will get very complicated before it is resolved.²⁶¹

Surprisingly the issue was not complicated. The Department of Defense gathered enough information to order an unprecedented exhumation at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. On April 28, 1998, the Washington Associate Press reported that a Pentagon Panel recommended that the remains be exhumed from the Tomb of the Unknowns "because they could be Blassie's after all."²⁶² Department of Defense Secretary, William Cohen, announced that the DoD would open the tomb "with profound reluctance."²⁶³ The casket was then unearthed a week later on May 14, 1998, at midnight where Arlington officials chipped away at the granite and removed large metal plates meant to perpetuate the anonymity of the soldier. When the casket was unearthed, it was cleaned and draped with an American flag. Meanwhile, the tomb guard continued their symbolic march and closely watched the Unknown just as they

²⁶¹ Mark Blair, "Memo for Record, January 14, 1998," National Alliance of Families, <http://www.nationalalliance.org/blassie/b980114.htm> (accessed March 12, 2012).

²⁶² "'Unknown' soldier may be exhumed" Washington Associated Press, *The Item*, Sumpter, SC., April 28, 1998, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=ldYvAAAAIbAJ&sjid=paoFAAAAIAAJ&pg=5340,7577946&dq=unknown+soldier+may+be+exhumed&hl=en> (accessed July 15, 2013).

²⁶³ John H. Cushman Jr., "Remains of Unknown Are Disinterred," *New York Times*, May 15, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/15/us/remains-of-vietnam-unknown-are-disinterred.html?ref=michaeliblassie>, (accessed March 30, 2013).

had watched him for the last fourteen years.²⁶⁴ At dawn the first and likely last exhumation ceremony took place at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Hundreds of people attended the ceremony filled with “somber hope.”²⁶⁵

Among these were eighteen people that represented five of the nine families told that there was a “chance” that the unknown was their lost relative. All nine families gave a DNA sample to compare to the Unknown. Considering the extensive evidence pointing to Blassie, the invitation to the other eight families was a thoughtless action by the State that likely caused further grieving. One of the sons of the nine men missing, Steve Amesbury, commented on the entire situation, “Here I am 26 years later, and I have a hole that isn’t filled yet.”²⁶⁶ He continued to say that he did not believe the remains were his father’s, an Air Force major. Of course the Blassie family, the reason for the entire initiative, continued to feel strongly that Michael was in the Tomb. Patricia Blassie told the *New York Times*, “knowing he was there, just seeing the casket, is one more step to bringing him home.”²⁶⁷ After a wreath was laid and a military band played several songs the casket was escorted to a hearse that drove Blassie’s remains across town to the Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

The families then waited another month and a half for word from the Pentagon. On June 29, the Blassie family received a phone call in St. Louis where they were told that the DNA provided by Jean Blassie was virtually an identical match to Michael’s.²⁶⁸ The Pentagon did not officially announce the discovery until the next day. Jean Blassie said that she was “relieved

²⁶⁴ Eric Enberg letter to Patricia Blassie, interview with Patricia Blassie 2013.

²⁶⁵ Cushman, “Remains of Unknown Are Disinterred,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1998.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Patricia Blassie interviewed by author, Warner Robins, Georgia, March 22, 2013.

and thankful” to have closure and to “bring him home.”²⁶⁹ In preparation for burial in Missouri, the Blassies were informed that the Air Force would transport Michael’s remains from Washington to St. Louis. Behind the scenes, the Department of Defense told the family that the Medal of Honor awarded to the Vietnam Unknown Serviceman would not stay with Michael. The DoD claimed that the medal was reserved for the Unknown Serviceman of Vietnam and could not remain with an identified serviceman. The Blassies were shocked. When Secretary Cohen asked to speak at Michael’s funeral, Patricia Blassie replied, “If you give Michael his Medal of Honor you can. If not, there is nothing further to discuss.”²⁷⁰ Secretary Cohen attended the ceremony without giving a speech.

On July 11, several hundred people including veterans, friends, family, and community members attended the funeral. Four F-15 jets flew overhead, and one of the four broke away in the traditional ‘missing man’ salute. Lieutenant Blassie’s name was placed on a second tombstone at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. In 1991, the Blassie family had buried Michael’s father George at the same cemetery. George died without knowing his son’s body was recovered. He feared that Michael may never be returned and would never have a tombstone with his name and rank. Therefore, George had Michael’s name accompany his on his own tombstone—“Father of Lieutenant Michael J. Blassie.”²⁷¹ Seven years later, Michael was buried with full military honors on a hill overlooking the Mississippi River. All four of Michael’s siblings spoke at the ceremony to welcome their oldest brother home. William

²⁶⁹ Steve Lee Myers, “Cohen Sees No Further Unknowns for Tomb,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/01/us/cohen-sees-no-further-unknowns-for-tomb.html?ref=michaeljbllassie> (accessed August 30, 2013).

²⁷⁰ Patricia Blassie Interview.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Parnell, retired Army Colonel, who was part of the reconnaissance team that recovered Michael's remains recalled,

Every soldier, sailor, airman or marine knows that if they are killed in combat, somebody will find their remains and bring them home. We thought we had—I touched that boy's bones. We put them on a helicopter taking out the wounded. But a series of administrative errors were made, and created a disaster. Now, finally, this young man has come home to Missouri.²⁷²

The statement revealed both a sweet homecoming and a somber reality that a young serviceman lost his life and due to administrative mistakes also lost his identity. Those administrative mistakes caused over a quarter-century of sacrifice by the Blassie family who, like Michael, had remained in a state of unknown.

For the Blassies, the administrative mistakes continued when the Defense Department denied their request to retain the Medal of Honor given to the Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam War. Rudy de Leon, the person originally appointed to research the possibility of Blassie's remains in the Tomb, announced that the medal would not be "transferred."²⁷³ He claimed that the medal was intended to be "symbolic," but the term was not used once in Public Law 98-301. The Medal of Honor was a Congressional order, thus Leon stressed that the department had no authority to give Blassie the award.²⁷⁴ However, the law also did not suggest that anyone, including the Defense Department, had the authority to take the Medal of Honor from "the unknown American who lost his life while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam era and who has been selected to be buried

²⁷² "From Tomb of the Unknowns to Grave of Lieut. Blassie," *New York Times*, July 12, 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/12/us/from-tomb-of-unknown-to-grave-of-lieut-blassie.html> (accessed August 30, 2013).

²⁷³ "Vietnam Unknown's Medal of Honor Transfer Denied," Department of Defense, August 25, 1998, <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=41850> (accessed August 30, 2013).

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

in the Memorial Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery.”²⁷⁵ At the time there was a small possibility of filling the empty Tomb with new ‘unknown’ remains from Vietnam. The new remains would have inherited the Medal of Honor, but almost nine months after Blassie was removed from Arlington, Secretary Cohen concluded that science and technology outpaced the tradition at the Tomb of the Unknowns. He decided to leave the Vietnam crypt empty. This determined that no other Vietnam soldier would be “selected to be buried” at Arlington, which should have placed the Medal of Honor back with Blassie. However, after 26 years without Michael, the Blassie family seemed to be too tired to fight more battles with the Department of Defense.

Without national pressure, the Defense did not give Lieutenant Blassie the Medal of Honor for his fourteen years of service as the Vietnam Unknown. His family was never given an official apology for his interment at Arlington because an apology would admit guilt. Instead the interment was blamed on lost identification articles during the far off and forgotten Vietnam War. The exhumation and identification of Blassie was a result of “scientific advances, including new genetic tests,” not administrative corruption or nationalism gone awry.²⁷⁶ The “administration errors” were not addressed by the Defense Department because journalists did not push the issue. In their minds, they had larger current stories to follow, like the escapades of President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.

If the reality of Michael Blassie was reported, it was in a passive fashion. For example,

²⁷⁵ Public Law 98-301, May 25, 1984 H.R. 5515, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-98/pdf/STATUTE-98-Pg216.pdf> (accessed January 20, 2013).

²⁷⁶ Steven Lee Meyers, “Arlington Yields to Science: No More ‘Unknowns’ Likely,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1999, <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/25/us/arlington-yields-to-science-no-more-unknowns-likely.html?ref=michael|blassie> (accessed April 15, 2012).

sources like the Arlington National Cemetery Official Website describe the journey of the Vietnam Unknown to Washington, then below the report in parentheses the website explains,

The remains of the Vietnam Unknown were exhumed May 14, 1998. Based on mitochondrial DNA testing, DoD scientists identified the remains as those of Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Joseph Blassie, who was shot down near An Loc, Vietnam, in 1972. It has been decided that the crypt that contained the remains of the Vietnam Unknown will remain vacant.²⁷⁷

These circumstances surrounding Blassie's story ultimately made and continue to make it less known to the public. Few visitors to the nation's cemetery realize that the Vietnam Unknown crypt is empty and has subsequently left a blemish on the "most sacred monument" in Arlington.²⁷⁸ Even fewer visitors know that the empty Tomb once held an American soldier that had always been identified by a select few in the government. The collective memory of Americans has largely been guarded from this memory because the empty Tomb is not visible. After the exhumation of Blassie in 1998 the only visual change to the Tomb was a refinished crypt that now reads *Honoring and Keeping Faith with America's Missing Servicemen*. Visitors to the Tomb could not see this change because the plaza is guarded round the clock by the Old Guard. In addition, operations at the Tomb were not altered. Presidents repeatedly visited the site and ceremonies continued as if nothing had changed.

However, when the Reagan Administration manipulated the selection of the Vietnam Unknown, they marked the end of a tradition much older than the modern nation. Michael Blassie was the last American Unknown. With the advancement of science and medicine, there

²⁷⁷ "The Tomb of the Unknowns: Vietnam, The Official Website of Arlington National Cemetery," <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/VisitorInformation/TombofUnknowns.aspx> (accessed May 20, 2013).

²⁷⁸ Cushman, "Remains of Unknown Are Disinterred."

will be no more Unknowns from the Gulf Wars, Iraqi War, War on Terrorism, or any others to follow. No longer will Americans be connected to a future unknown soldier by nationality. Although operations continue at the Tomb as if little has changed since Blassie's identification, consideration should be given to how the absence of future unknowns could initiate a decline in commemorating the nation. Also, could dwindling space on the National Mall and in Arlington Cemetery influence how Americans commemorate the nation? Answering these questions may provide more insight to the American government's relationship to nationalism, commemoration, and individualism.

By its actions to establish Blassie as the Unknown, the Reagan administration demonstrated its belief that the commemorative tradition at the Tomb was profoundly valuable to preserving national unity. The continued tradition at the Tomb of the Unknowns reveals that there is still a commitment to uphold national unity through commemoration, but again without future unknowns how long will rituals and traditions continue at the Tomb? Because Arlington is a nationally funded cemetery, commemorative tradition at the Tomb is also threatened by economic hardships. Could this result in cutting funds that support the preservation of tradition and commemoration at the Tomb? The 2007 economic recession resulted in a decision not to fill the vacant position of Arlington's Historian, a valuable position concerning the preservation of tradition at the Tomb. Could future economic failures cause presidents to lack commitment towards the Tomb or perhaps the removal of the Old Guard? If that were the case, would this change cause a decrease in commemorative nationalism at Arlington?

History reveals that the Tomb has been a visual symbol of the American nation for the last ninety-two years. The Tomb has symbolized the triumphs and struggles of America throughout the twentieth century. Michael Blassie's interment and identification is not exempt from the Tomb's symbolism; he is merely an addendum to it. Blassie's story added the injustices and inhumanity of the war and politics during the Vietnam era to the narrative of the Tomb. His memory adds to the conflict between individual and national healing. Lastly, Michael Blassie became the epitome of Ronald Reagan's assertion that "the government owes the people an explanation."²⁷⁹

The Reagan Administration showed an intense dedication to national unity and healing when they placed Michael Blassie in the Tomb. A score of individuals including Ronald Reagan, Caspar Weinberger, Richard Childress, John O. Marsh, Ann Mills Griffiths, William Courtney, Johnie Webb, and others associated with the DoD all contributed to placing a known soldier in the Tomb of the Unknowns. Each of their actions, combined with circumstances surrounding Blassie's death, caused Michael Blassie to be buried at Arlington. Conversely, the Blassie family, Ted Sampley, Tony Gonzales, and CBS Productions radically challenged the American government, which caused the DoD to make an unprecedented decision to exhume and identify Blassie. Both groups are part of the fabric of American twentieth century society. The former displays the massive size and power of the national government, while the latter illustrates a democratic freedom of press and information. The people and events associated

²⁷⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at Memorial Day Ceremonies Honoring an Unknown Serviceman of the Vietnam Conflict May 28, 1984," <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/52884a.htm> (accessed March 23, 2012).

with Blassie's journey to the Tomb and back to St. Louis exemplify why the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a purposeful symbol of the American nation.

Occasionally, when the president visits the site on Veterans or Memorial Day, national attention returns back to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. On these occasions, attention rarely focuses on the Vietnam Unknown and the mistakes made by the government. Instead, ceremonies focus on sacrifice, honor, and courage. No matter the event, the scene of the Tomb and the hills of white stone graves are always a somber reminder that young soldiers are still victims to war. Small tombstones showing the names, birthdates, deaths, and ranks of America's servicemen are added to the cemetery daily; and daily thousands visit the cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. As the day concludes, the cemetery closes while the Old Guard continues his march.

Twenty-one steps. Pause. Twenty-one seconds. Twenty-one steps. Pause. Twenty-one seconds.

Each day the sun sets on Washington, D.C., and the guard keeps his watch over the Tomb and the quiet fields of General Lee's plantation. Every crypt is occupied, except for one. The one crypt sits empty amid three unknown soldiers from America's twentieth century wars. It is the former tomb of the Vietnam Unknown, Michael Blassie, America's last Unknown Soldier.

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