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This Project is dedicated to:

Cpl. Lane Fatutoa Levi of Fagatogo, American Samoa
SP4 Fiatele Taulago Teo of Pago Pago, American Samoa
LCPL. Fagatoele, Lokeni of Mapusaga, American Samoa
PFC. Benjamin Galu Willis of Leone, American Samoa

Whose names are engraved on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall at Arlington, Virginia

And to my Pacific Islands brothers and sisters of American Samoa who had served in the Vietnam War
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Preface

Throughout the Vietnam War, America and other allied forces that supported the South Vietnamese government awarded their courageous soldiers with distinguished medals for their extraordinary and exceptional bravery in combat. Yet, the recipients of these prestigious awards attest that their fallen comrades are the bona fide beneficiaries and heroes—the recognition of these soldiers’ deeds of valor in Vietnam was bittersweet knowing that many comrades perished in battle. This deep-seated sense of loss and survivor’s guilt caused some surviving soldiers to never disclose or revealed their notable services. Further, the controversy surrounding the Vietnam War affected the surviving soldiers in a heavier way; the unwelcome and disrespect they experienced when they returned to the United States (U.S.) caused many Vietnam veterans severe distress, for they had risked their lives. The anti-Vietnam War sentiment created an atmosphere of distrust among Vietnam veterans which forced the soldiers to conceal their war history and make it known to only a few, if at all. Most veterans remained silent about their experiences because of embarrassment, fear, anger, aggression, or trauma. Many veterans, to this day, continue to struggle with the debilitating effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as well as sleepless nights and mental and emotional torment consistent with war violence.

This project aims to collect and tell the stories of Samoan Vietnam veterans who made enormous sacrifices during the war. This will, hopefully, fill the gap in the literatures and make known to the world, and especially the consciousness of American citizens, the sacrifices of these Pacific Islanders. The service and unfortunate casualties of Samoan Vietnam veterans are generally unrecognized and unappreciated in the dominant narratives of American war histories.

As a Vietnam War veteran of Hawaiian ancestry, I have witnessed and engaged in the
brotherhood forged between U.S. soldiers who fought in Vietnam. I am particularly interested in the stories of my fellow Pacific Islanders who fought in Vietnam; it is this bond of brotherhood and injustice I felt at the non-recognition of Pacific Islander Vietnam War Veterans’ stories that inspired me to conduct this study and produce this thesis. Pacific Islander Vietnam veterans’ stories are an important part of U.S. history and narrative in the complex web of relationships between the U.S. and the Pacific Islands.

Unlike many scholars researching the oral histories of Vietnam War veterans, my positionality in the approach to this project is unique. I am an outsider in the sense that I am a non-Samoan scholar of the academy wishing to document the oral histories of Samoan Vietnam veterans. However, I am an insider because I too am a Vietnam War veteran. While I am not Samoan, my Kanaka Maoli (Hawaiian) ancestry connects me to my Samoan brothers through the currents of Oceania. Thus, I approach this project in the privileged position as both insider and outsider.

In the course of my research, I reviewed a number of sources on the Vietnam War and veterans’ experiences. Many of these stories were documented by those who had not personally participated in the Vietnam War, or had not ever served in any of the branches of service of the United States or other foreign military. Due to the anti-Vietnam War sentiment and its reverberations, many of the veterans who were willing to tell their stories did so under the safety of a pseudonym. While this ensured the protection of the veteran, the downfall is that these stories could not be corroborated, and this has caused problems in cases where Vietnam veterans have falsified their stories. In a climate of distrust, this has caused other Vietnam veterans to refute the work of these authors and refuse to tell their stories.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall in Arlington, Virginia (dedicated in November
1982; Egendorf 1985: 31) honors United States service members of its armed forces who fought in the Vietnam War, specifically, those who were missing in action and other service members who died in service in Southeast Asia. The names on the wall were based on each casualty’s official home of record (which may be the service member’s resident address at enlistment or the place where the person entered military service), and not home country, hence, only four Samoan Vietnam soldiers were honored at the Arlington Memorial and listed as casualties from American Samoa. There were numerous others who were probably listed with soldiers from other parts of the U.S.

I am profoundly grateful to and appreciate the Samoan Vietnam veterans who agreed to be interviewed for this project—this is the first time that they have publicly told the stories of their bravery in the Vietnam War, and the first time for their families, friends, and communities (Samoan, American, and international) to hear these never-before told, yet valuable, stories.

Additionally, it is the marginalization and absence of the stories of Pacific Islander soldiers in WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Malay War and other wars involving global economic, military and colonial powers like the U.S. and Great Britain that has prompted me to research and write this paper. Here, I focus specifically on the stories of nine Samoan soldiers in the Vietnam War. By passing on their stories, I hope to ‘write into history’ and draw public recognition to the dedication and sacrifices of Pacific Islander men who fought and died for the United States of America. I also hope that this will prompt other Pacific Islander soldiers and war veterans to reveal their stories.

As the stories of many American soldiers from previous wars faded away from public memory and destine into the files of military archives, I felt that it was only a matter of time before that would happen to the stories of American Samoa’s Vietnam War veterans. This is
what prompted me to compile the stories of Samoan men who served in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War; it is of grave importance to recount their experiences before, during, and after the war. In the following pages, I tell the stories of how and why these men joined the U.S. military, their experiences in combat, their journey home after the war, and how they remember and tell the stories of their experiences in the Vietnam War. I want this to, not only fulfill an academic requirement for me, but a tribute to Samoan soldiers of Vietnam, and to Pacific Islander soldiers more generally.

This project has been both an experience and a healing process for me. I invite other Vietnam veterans to tell their stories to family, friends and others. This will help bring closure and healing to a war that left countless scarred.
Introduction

On June 5, 1968, the *Honolulu Advertiser* ran an article titled, “Samoa Flag to Wave in Vietnam.” It was a three-paragraph story tucked away at the bottom of page B-4, under a much bigger story on Honolulu budgets, and pressed against a wine advertisement—it was as though the editor wanted the story hidden away from public view.

For me, this was an important story. It was about a 22-year-old Samoan Marine corporal’s request for an American Samoan flag to fly on Hill 881-S in South Vietnam, which the Marines captured after suffering heavy casualties. The Samoan Marine Corporal’s name was Molimau Niuatoa Jr. from the island of Olosega in Manu’a. He joined the Marines in 1967. In a letter to the then Governor of American Samoa, Owen S. Aspinall, Corporal Niuatoa Jr. writes,

We got Hill 881-S on 20 January 68 and we lost 160 from the 181 in our company. There were 140 wounded and 20 killed. Another Samoan boy was with me but was wounded so he is back in the U.S. I would like a flag from American Samoa so I can raise it on this hill where we have many flags from the home states of Marines.

Corporal Niuatoa’s desire to raise the American Samoan flag alongside other U.S. state flags signified his desire for Samoa and Samoan soldiers to be recognized for their role in the Vietnam War. It was perhaps a statement that in the context of war, Samoa was the same as other states of the United States despite the fact that politically, Samoa was then, and continues to be, an unincorporated territory of the U.S. Samoans are U.S. nationals, but not citizens; they hold a lower political status, nearly that of a colonial territory. They are, in other words, not “real Americans”; yet, like Corporal Niuatoa, they were American enough to serve in United States’ wars. Perhaps the statement that Corporal Niuatoa wanted to make was that in war, political categories do not matter; everyone, whether state or territory, citizen or national, were fighting
the same war in the name of the United States of America, and therefore deserved equal recognition, thus Corporal Niuatoa’s desire for an American Samoan flag to “be raised on this hill where we have many flags from other home states of Marines.” However, despite this wish by Corporal Niuatoa and other Pacific Islander war veterans for appropriate recognition for their contributions, this has not been the case. What is at stake is more than recognition, it is for the Countries and Peoples too. Samoan soldiers (as U.S. nationals), like those from other U.S. Pacific Islands territories such as Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), fought alongside U.S. citizens in the wars that the United States was involved in, especially those in the twentieth century, making extreme sacrifices for the United States.

One such sacrifice is illustrated during a personal interview with retired Samoan Marine Master Gunnery Sergeant Navy Suiaunoa on 7 July 2011, where he tells of how he lost a fellow Samoan Marine during a battle in Vietnam. He recalls,

I saw my Samoan friend PFC. Misa, on a stretcher. He was unconscious and had IV tubes running into his body…. Now, on this lonely battlefield, on March 19, 1968, I couldn’t talk or comfort my friend because he was unconscious and in extreme distress. Misa and I were put on the medivac helicopter together, along with three other Marines from my unit, who I also knew, but whose names I don’t recall after all these years. Misa never regained consciousness during the helicopter ride to the medical facilities at Da Nang, and it wasn’t until the next day that I was told that Misa had died of his wounds.

Sergeant Suiaunoa, who is one of the Samoan Vietnam veterans who shares his story in more detail, was wounded twice on the battlefield in Vietnam within seven months.
Samoans and other Pacific Islanders from Hawai‘i, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Marshall Islands, and Palau, fought for the U.S. in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and more recently in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the death toll among Pacific Islander soldiers from U.S. territories like American Samoa, Guam, CNMI, and affiliated states like FSM, Marshall Islands, and Palau was about 5.8 per 100,000 inhabitants. This is more than four times the U.S. national average (Asian Correspondent, 15 June 2010). In other words, more Pacific Islanders died in these wars per capita than those from the U.S. mainland.

Even Pacific Islanders from non-U.S. affiliated territories have assisted the U.S. in its wars. During WWII, for example, Solomon Islander Coast Watchers supplied information that contributed to the U.S. defeat of the Japanese imperial army and its expansion in the Pacific (Feuer 1992; Horton 1975; White 1991; White and Lindstrom 1989). In the Pacific Islands, the New Zealand and Fijian militaries were established by the British colonial administration as extensions of the British colonial army, and Maori and Fijian soldiers fought for Great Britain in WWI, WWII, and the Malay War. Cook Islanders, Niueans, Tuvaluans, Gilbertese (now Kiribati) and Fijians were also recruited to serve in the New Zealand army that fought for Great Britain during WWI. This was because of their status as British colonial subjects, or for the Maori, former colonial subjects.

Pacific Islanders fought and died in unknown numbers and even the most basic statistical information about their role in U.S. wars remains either unknown or inadequately examined.
This paper has six chapters. Chapter one, “Pacific Islands, Islanders, and Wars” provides a broad overview of the Pacific Islands region, its histories and the major events that have influenced the region and the islanders. These include European explorations, colonization, decolonization, World War I and II, and the conflicts associated with the Cold War period. This chapter also discusses broadly Pacific Islanders’ involvement in wars as soldiers, coast watchers and laborers. It shows that Pacific Islander soldiers have long been involved in wars that were not of their making—which include the two World Wars, the Korean War, Malay War, Vietnam War and more recently, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. These were wars fought by military and economic super powers that Pacific Islands and Islanders are connected to through colonial histories. The chapter also shows how the stories of Pacific Islander soldiers are either marginal, or absent in the histories of these wars.

Chapter two, “Samoa and Samoans” focuses on the relationship between America and the Samoa. It briefly outlines Samoa’s history, the centrality of the fa’asamoa, its colonization by the U.S. and its inclusion in the U.S. strategic plans. As the U.S. posed itself as a global military and economic power in the late 1800s, eastern Samoa became important to the U.S. in the late 1800s because of its deep Pago Pago Harbor. This was important for U.S. maritime expansion and proved valuable especially during WWII when Pago Pago Harbor hosted U.S. Navy vessels and a coal station. The U.S. military then fortified Tutuila Island and established the Samoan Fita Fita guardsmen that supplemented the American military. This was the beginning of Samoans’ involvement in the U.S. military and U.S.-led wars.

Chapter three, “Veterans, Reflections, and Memories of the War” discusses the pain of wounded soldiers and the effects of wars and soldiers’ ability to readjust to substantial adequate livelihood and the struggles that conclude. This chapter also includes how our Pacific veterans’
memories of war are rekindled and their strength the forfeit the pain in establishing this project. It includes a brief description of the American military’s highest awards presented to soldiers whose valor and bravery is beyond the “call of duty”.

In chapter four, “The Boundaries of Choice” discusses the rigors of the U.S. military training and service and how Pacific Islanders adjusted to it. Here, I weave my own experiences with that of the American Samoan recruits.

Chapter five, “The Stories of Vietnam War Veterans” is the heart of this project. This chapter, I acquaint with the stories of the American Samoan Vietnam War veterans that I interviewed in the summer of 2011. Their stories tell of their experiences in Vietnam and the struggles they encountered after the war. Their stories are the focus of this project.

In chapter six, the “Conclusion,” I revisit some of the issues learned from the stories and experiences of the Samoan Vietnam War veterans and that of other Pacific Islanders involved in U.S. led wars. Here, I also reiterate the need to write Pacific Islander soldiers into the histories of wars, especially the Vietnam War. I include in this chapter the services provided by the Veterans Affairs of the United States and other veteran organizations and the CBOC at Tutuila. I hope that this will encourage other Pacific Islander war veterans to tell their stories.

The histories of these wars from a Pacific Islander’s perspective, and the stories of Pacific Islanders’ involvement are either marginal, or absent. This is partly because the wars were not Pacific Islanders’ wars and Pacific Islander soldiers made up for a relatively small percentage of the military involved. To date, there are only a few writings that focus specifically on Pacific Islanders involvements and their memories about these big wars (White 1991; White and Lindstrom 1989). It is my hope that this project is a meaningful contribution to the body of
writing about the valuable, yet untold stories of Pacific Island war veterans, and especially, that of Samoan Vietnam War veterans.

Chapter 1

**Pacific Islands, Islanders & Wars**

The Pacific Ocean covers one-third of the earth’s surface, making it the world’s largest geographical feature. It has countless volcanic and coral islands inhabited by people whose ancestors first arrived some 5,000 years ago. These island peoples developed superior navigational skills and for thousands of years explored and settled this vast ocean long before Europeans did.

Europeans ventured into the Pacific beginning in the mid-1500s. Spanish explorer, Vasco Balboa, while establishing a colony in Santa Maria (Panama), South America heard from natives about the ‘South Sea.’ In 1513, he and his expedition team crossed the Isthmus of Panama and he became the first Europeans to see the great ocean. In 1520 under the Spanish flag, Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, sailed around the southern end of South America through rough weather. Upon reaching the calmer waters of the Pacific Ocean, he named it *Mar Pacifico*, which in Portuguese means, “peaceful sea” hence, the name, “Pacific Ocean.” Magellan’s expedition reached Guam in the Mariana Islands on 6 March, 1521. They travelled on to the Philippines where Magellan was killed on 27 April, 1521. Magellan’s expedition was followed by numerous other European explorers, missionaries, traders, beachcombers, and later, colonial administrators. One of those explorers was Captain James Cook, a British officer who traversed this great Ocean until his death in the hands of Hawaiians at Kealakekua Bay, Hawai‘i, in 1779.
Map of Pacific Islands

Source: Courtesy of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai‘i
In the centuries that followed, Europeans influenced the Pacific Islands and its peoples in many different ways. On some islands, the diseases that Europeans brought destroyed a large percentage of the islands’ populations. Islanders lacked immunity to tuberculosis, leprosy, influenza, measles, chicken pox, cholera, and sexually transmitted diseases. Guns and ammunition, also introduced by the Europeans, changed the balance of political power among islanders in some Pacific Islands places.

By the late 1800s centralized authority had been established in Hawai‘i by Kamehameha I, in Tahiti by Pomare, in Tonga by the Tui Tonga and in Fiji by Cakobau (Howard 1991). There was also the introduction of the cash economy, the use of land and labor for the development of plantations, the harvest and sale of resources such as sandal wood, bêche-de-mer, and the mining of minerals like phosphate (guano). The U.S. Guano Act of 1856, for example, was made to claim possession of and protect U.S. interest in guano (phosphate) deposits in Pacific Islands like; Baker, Jarvis and Howland, Kingman Reef, and Johnston Atoll. The Act states that,

Whenever any citizen of the United States discovers a deposit of guano on any island, rock, or key, not within the lawful jurisdiction of any other Government, and not occupied by the citizens of any other Government, and takes peaceable possession thereof, and occupies the same, such island, rock, or key may, at the discretion of the President, be considered as appertaining to the United States (Guano Act of 1856).

Other Pacific Islands places became strategically important. Guam, for example, was strategically important, first for the Spanish and then for the U.S. after they defeated the Spanish in the Spanish-American War in 1898.
The Europeans mapped and carved the Pacific Islands into colonial territories, some of which later became nation-states. They redefined and represented the islands and the islanders through European cartographical and racial lenses.

In 1826, for example, French explorer and naval officer, Jules Dumont d’Urville, travelled the islands and by 1832 divided the islands into the sub-regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia (Clark 2003: 155; Gurney 2000: 183-202). These divisions remain to this day, and are used by the islanders themselves. However, at the time when d’Urville divided the islands and coined their names, it was more for the convenience of Europeans and a reflection of their worldview, rather than a reflection of any real division amongst the Islanders. Yet, like many other colonial institutions, these cartographical divisions are used by the Islanders themselves, and by non-Pacific Islanders to represent Pacific Islanders.

These early explorations opened the Pacific Islands and its ancient societies to European influence, and later colonization. By the end of the 1800s, nearly every island in the Pacific Ocean had become the property of one European power or another, and its peoples became colonial subjects (Talbot and Swaney1998: 15). The colonial powers included Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, France, the United States, Japan, and Chile. They were joined in the twentieth century by Australia and New Zealand, former British colonies (Campbell 1989). Indonesia, a former Dutch colony, invaded and took over West Papua in 1961. In 1969, under United Nations Supervision, the Act of Free Choice was administered, which formally made West Papua a province of Indonesia. In spite of this, there is continuing struggle for independence is West Papua (King 2004)—and this narrative of islanders’ fight for independence from colonizers is a recurring theme in Pacific Islands histories.
The late 19th century and most of the 20th century were dominated by colonial rule and the impacts of colonial policies in the Pacific Islands region. The U.S. was a relatively late colonial power, acquiring Guam in 1899 as its first colonial territory after defeating Spain in the Spanish-American War of 1898. Its other colonial territory was eastern Samoa (present day American Samoa). The Samoan archipelago was divided under the Tripartite Agreement: The Berlin Act of 1889, between Germany, Great Britain, and the United States. The U.S. took possession of the eastern islands of the archipelago, mostly because of its interest in the Pago Pago Bay on Tutuila Island. Hence, American Samoa was born. The British gave what became Western Samoa (now Independent State of Samoa) to Germany. In exchange the Germans gave Great Britain some of the northwestern islands—Choiseul, Isabel, and New Georgia—what became Solomon Islands. Apart from colonialism, a twentieth century event that had enormous impact on the Pacific Islands and islanders was the Second World War.

**Pacific Islander Soldiers in Wars**

The Pacific Islands and Pacific Islanders got involved in international wars in the 21st Century, not by choice, but because of their geographical location and colonial histories. The Pacific Islands did not see much of the fighting of World War I because most of it was concentrated in Europe. In spite of this, Pacific Islanders were involved. The New Zealand military, for example, sent a Battalion that consisted of 2,688 Maori and 346 Pacific Islanders, including 150 Niuens. The others were from the Cook Islands and the then British colonies of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands – present day Kiribati and Tuvalu – and Fiji (http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/pacific-islanders-nzef; accessed, 6 February 2012). This was in response to Great Britain’s declaration of war on Germany. In Fiji, as a response to the British
Secretary of State for the colonies’ call to “raise and equip a force of picked men for active service at the Front,” many European residents in Fiji joined the British, New Zealand and Australian military. The Legislative Council passed a resolution that led to the establishment of the Fijian Rifle Association. This combined with the Fiji Volunteers, which existed since 1880s, forming the Fiji Defense Force. However, only European residents of Fiji were allowed to join, although a handful of native Fijians did make it into WWI. Amongst them was prominent high chief, Ratu Josefa Lalabalavu Vana’ali’ali Sukuna, who later distinguished himself in government service. Ratu Sukuna, who was studying at Oxford University in England, tried to enlist in the British Army but was refused. He responded by joining the French Foreign Legion and was eventually decorated with the Medaille Militaire for his actions of bravery. Ratu Sukuna was one of the 35 men to survive from a force of 2,500 Legionnaires (http://www.freewebs.com/fiji/, accessed on 1 February 2012).

Following Germany’s defeat in World War I, the Japanese acquired the former German colonies in the Pacific under a League of Nations mandate. These included virtually all of Micronesia – Northern Marianas, Palau, Caroline Islands, and Marshall Islands – with the exception of Guam an American possession (Hinz 1995: vii). In 1933 Japan withdrew its membership in the ‘League of Nations.’ Her intent was to expand further into Southeast Asia and the southwestern Pacific. On the morning of December 7, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy deployed two waves of Japanese war planes from its six carriers positioned 275 nautical miles north of the Hawaiian Islands and attacked Pearl Harbor. Following the attack on Hawai‘i, the Imperial Japanese fleet initiated attacks on Singapore, Guam, East Indies, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and the Philippines (Hinz 1995: vi-5).
As the American military forces marked the closing of WWII in the European theater the United States Marines began its history in the Pacific. For the Americans, the Pacific Islands became the scene of some of the bloodiest battles in which the U.S. was involved in World War II. Many of the names of these battle-stricken areas are today, proudly displayed on U.S. Naval vessels, like the USS *Coral Sea*, USS *Iwo Jima*, USS *Tarawa*, USS *Midway*, USS *Peleliu* and the USS *Saipan*, to name a few (Hinz 1995: 2-3). America spread throughout the Pacific Islands befriending the natives of the Pacific, who became observers, soldiers, scouts, coast-watchers and laborers. With assistance from the Islanders, the U.S. and its allies – Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand – defeated the Japanese Imperial army and halted their expansion into the Pacific (White and Lindstrom 1989: 30).

As the war edged closer to Japan’s doorsteps, a squadron of American B-25 bombers launched a surprise attack over Tokyo on April 18, 1942. They bombed the city of Tokyo and demoralized the Japanese military and its peoples (Hinz 1995: 13). With the release of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and by means of the gallant actions of the Americans, allied forces and the native Pacific Islanders, the Japanese surrendered to General Douglas Macarthur on 2 September, 1945 aboard the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, Japan (Hinz 1995: 5 & 15).

The islands and peoples of the Pacific Islands witnessed some of the most prolonged and ferocious fighting. The allied and Japanese forces poured hundreds of thousands of troops and millions of tons of materials onto these Pacific Islands. Scores of ships were sunk and heavy personnel losses colored red the lagoons, beaches and hills. Postwar, these areas were filled with massive iron structures of concrete barricades of war weaponry, rusting landing crafts, sunken vessels, and aircrafts that grave the ocean’s floor. The Pacific Ocean became a refuse site for the
future. The military powers and economic resources of America and its ally’s forces and Japan left deep and enduring marks on postwar history and culture of these island nations in the Pacific (Hinz 1995: 2, 56; White and Lindstrom 1989: 3-4).

The United States throughout the WWII in the Pacific posed as a “liberator” gaining the hearts of native islanders exhausted by Japanese colonialism (Camacho 2011: 60). After the long anticipated recapture of Guam by the Americans from the thirty months of Japanese occupation (White 1991: 136), the Guamanian peoples embraced the American combatants. These Guamanians lived and died under harsh Japanese conditions. (Camacho 2011, 63-68).

However, in spite of the rhetoric of liberation in the Pacific Islands, not all viewed the Americans as “liberators” (Camacho 2011: 68). America’s pandemonium on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 proved effective against any opposition (Camacho 2011: 59). The United States, France and Great Britain developed atomic and nuclear bombs, which they tested in parts of the Pacific far away from their homeland. One of the places used for nuclear bomb testing was the Marshall Islands. This newly acquired region of the Marshall Islands by the United States from Japan became the noxious atomic proving grounds for America.

After World War II the United States assumed responsibility of the colonial rule over parts of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. The Americans were faced with vast cultural diversities and political entities within these regions (Fitzpatrick 2001: xiv; Howard 1989: 30; Linnekin and Poyer 1990: 259-260; Oliver 1989: 26-27). The second half of the 20th century has seen the U.S. involved in a number of conflicts and established itself as a global military, political and economic power. Its involvement in and defeat of Japan in WWII quickly saw the U.S. embroiled in the ideological tensions between the East – represented by communism in the
Soviet Union, China, North Korea, East Germany – and the West – represented by capitalism in the U.S., Great Britain, France, West Germany, etc. The tension between communism and capitalism – between the East and the West – dominated international relations for more than four decades after World War II. This period was commonly known as the Cold War period. The U.S. and its Western Allies established strategic dominance in the Pacific Islands region. They adopted a policy of “strategic denial”, denying communist countries, especially the former Soviet Union and China, access to the region. By the 1950s, they had turned the Pacific Ocean into Anglo/Franco/American lake. But, the frontline in the battle to prevent the expansion of communism was in Asia. This was demonstrated first in the Korean War and then in the Vietnam War. These were part of the Cold War.

**The Korean War**

Prior to World War II, Korea was occupied by Japan for thirty-five years. At the end of WWII the U.S. and the Soviet Union divided Korea at the 38th parallel resulting in the birth of North and South Koreas. Both sides wanted to rule Korea as a unified nation-state. American forces occupied the southern half of Korea and established a democratic system of government with a capitalist economic system. The Soviet Union and China maintained influence over the northern half and established a communist system of government (Baldovi 2002: xv). Korea represented the global tensions between capitalism and communism that characterized the Cold War period.

On 25 June, 1950, the North Korean People’s Army, supported by Soviet Union tanks over-ran the South Korean defense position at the 38th parallel and captured the South Korean capital city of Seoul. News of this invasion prompted United Nation (UN) to request the
withdrawal of North Korean troops back to the demarcation line. North Korea ignored the UN request.

The U.S., which has a strategic and economic interest in Southeast Asia, especially vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, stepped in. The then U.S. President, Harry Truman, acting independently of the UN, authorized General Douglas MacArthur to take military actions against the invading North Korean forces. Under-strength and ill-fitted for combat, U.S. forces struggled to defend positions in South Korea. By late August 1950, additional U.S. troops aided by South Korean soldiers liberated Seoul. U.S., South Korean and UN forces then linked together and drove the North Koreans back to the demarcation line. China entered the limelight and warned the UN forces not to cross into North Korean territory. General MacArthur ignored this warning. In October 1950, Chinese forces attacked and drove the U.S. and allied forces south below the 38th parallel. The war along the 38th parallel continued until July 27, 1953, when a cease-fire was agreed to and ‘prisoners of war’ were exchanged (Baldovi 2002: xv-xviii). In spite of this, the tension between North and South Korea continues to this day. In fact, the two Koreas are technically still at war.

On July 24, 1994, in honor of the 456 of Hawaii’s soldiers that died and those that fought in the Korean War, the State of Hawai‘i erected a monument on the grounds of the State Capitol in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. Hawai‘i soldiers suffered three times as many wounded and three and a half times the total number of casualties in comparison to the overall population of the United States. Excluding America, sixteen other nations sent ground combat troops to Korea, only Turkey and the United Kingdom had more soldiers killed during the Korean War than Hawai‘i writes Baldovi in his book *A Foxhole View* (Baldovi 2002: ix).
The Vietnam War

Vietnam, like other Southeast Asian countries, has a long history of interaction with Europeans. It was part of French Indochina and a colony of France from 1887 to 1941. In 1887, the French established the Indochinese Union, which consisted of Annam, Cambodia, Cochin China and Tonkin (or Vietnam). In 1940, in an attempt to curtail German influence in the region, France allowed Japan to station troops and use airfields in Tonkin. In July 1941, France ceded control of Cochin China to the Japanese in July, but remained responsible for the administrative affairs.

The Vietnamese people were not happy with this arrangement. Consequently, the Viet Minh – a communist and nationalist liberation movement – emerged under the Marxist Leninist revolutionary, Ho Chi Minh, who sought independence for Vietnam from France and the end of the Japanese occupation. Following the military defeat of Japan and the fall of its puppet Empire of Vietnam in August 1945, the Viet Minh occupied Hanoi and proclaimed a provisional government, which asserted national independence on 2 September, 1945. In November 1946, French vessels bombarded the port city of Hai Phong in an attempt to re-establish French control. The Viet Minh’s guerilla campaign against the French began soon after. That was the beginning of the first Indochina War that lasted until July 1954 (Taylor 2003: viii, ix).

Following the end of the Korean War on 27 July 1953, the U.S. aided the French in Vietnam with provisions of military and economic assistances (Baldovi 2002: xix). This was part of the attempt to stop the expansion of communism as represented by the Soviet Union and China who supported Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh guerilla forces. Despite U.S. assistance the French suffered a decisive defeat in May 1954 from the Viet Minh forces. In July, at a Geneva conference, an agreement was reached between North and South Vietnam to divide Vietnam at
the 17th parallel, creating North and South Vietnam. The Viet Minh took control of the north, led by Ho Chi Minh, while the South had a U.S. supported government headed by Ngo Dinh Diem. As part of the agreement, refugees were allowed to cross the demarcation line in either direction. The U.S. Navy assisted with the relocation of over 900,000 Vietnamese to the south, while about 90,000 transferred to the north, leaving a small band of Viet Minh still within the confines of the South (Lewy 1978: 1; Sanders 2002: 30-36; Taylor 2003: ix, 7 and 74).

According to Taylor (2003), the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War was a result of fear, misunderstandings and arrogance. The U.S. leaders were afraid of the prospect of communism expansion, especially given their experiences in the Korean War. The U.S. was afraid of losing dominance if any of the Southeast Asian countries succumb to communism and the control of the Soviet Union and China. It saw a “domino effect” – if one country fell to communism, then others would follow.

Initially, the U.S. was reluctant to be directly involved. Instead, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower supplied the French with military aid and other forms of support. They wanted the French to settle matters in Vietnam. In March 1950, President Truman authorized a modest financial aid of $15 million and military advisors to the French, who were trying to maintain their control and interest in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam (Lewy 1978: 3; Taylor 2003: 74; Ybarra 2004: 3-4). Fearful of a communist takeover supported by Russia and China, Truman involved the U.S. in the crisis in Vietnam and prompted further plans to assist the French Government with increased American aid (Sanders 2002: 15-17). Their successors, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s, took further actions to strengthened ties with South Vietnam, in the hopes that the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Communist North Vietnam) and their small band of Viet Minh loyalist in the south might back down. However, the
North Vietnamese were committed to an independent Vietnam. They were convinced that the Americans would eventually give up their military assistance to the South and go home. As the U.S. aid to South Vietnam increased substantially, America’s leaders were determined not to accept failure. They wanted to win (Taylor 2003: 6–8).

The U.S. involvement in wars in the Pacific and Asia had obvious rapid starting points. The attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the invasion of South Korea by North Korea in June 1950 prompted the Americans to dispatch thousands of troops into the war-stricken areas (Lewy 1978: 4). But, there was no fixed beginning of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Instead, it was a progression of involvements that began with tacit support to the French in the mid-1950s. By the 1960s the U.S. was involved in full-scale military invasions. It became the longest war in the U.S. history, the most brutal, and the most unpopular American war in the twentieth century. It resulted in over 58,000 American deaths (Ley 1978: 451; Sanders 2002: 145-146; Taylor 2003: 8; Ybarra 2004: 4; Military Casualty: The Vietnam Veteran Wall Memorial. (http://thewall-usa.com/summary.asp. accessed 6 February 2012).

Every U.S. President since the 1950s regarded North Vietnam and its leader, Ho Chi Minh, as a communist aggressor. In contrast, the North Vietnamese leader, Ho Chi Minh, in a statement to his peoples in 1965 suggest differently:

“Over the past ten years, the US imperialist and their henchmen have carried out an extremely ruthless war and have caused much grief to our compatriots in South Vietnam…US aggressors are blatantly encroaching upon our country…our country has the great honor of being an outpost of the socialist camp and of the world’s peoples who are struggling against imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism.” (Gettleman et al 1995: 274–276).
The Geneva Agreement of 1954 divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel, after the defeat of the French forces at Dien Bien Phu. This was a concern for U.S. President, Dwight Eisenhower, for he had given the French $385 million worth of military armaments for the offensive against the Viet Minh. Eisenhower wanted France to be a strong North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member to help defend Western Europe against the Soviet Union and China, and stop the spread of communism. He also believed that Southeast Asia was vital to U.S. security and found it less expensive to pay other countries, like France, to help defend U.S. interests. More importantly, Eisenhower felt that the loss of Vietnam would affect the balance of global power and feared that if the U.S. allowed Vietnam to fall to Communism; other Southeast Asian countries would follow. He also pointed out that the Viet Minh were trained and equipped by the Chinese and the Soviet Union. To help defuse the loss at Dien Bien Phu, he compiled a resolution to begin support for an independent government for the South Vietnamese people and took over the controls from France. He ordered U.S. military advisors to integrate, train and equip the new South Vietnamese Army (Lewy 1978: 6, 7 and 11; Sanders 2002: 22, 23, 26 and 30; Taylor 2003: 74).

President John F. Kennedy in early 1961, secretly sent Special Forces (Green Berets) soldiers to South Vietnam in the hopes that these Special Forces would be the answer to the mounting aggression of Communist insurgents and to teach South Vietnamese war tactics on how to fight and defend themselves against communist guerillas in South Vietnam (Lewy 1978: 20-23; Sanders 2002: 49; Taylor 2003: 3, 35). At the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, there were more than 16,000 military advisors and Green Beret soldiers stationed in South Vietnam (Taylor 2003: 74).

President Lyndon Johnson stepped in to further commit to the buildup of U.S. troops in
Vietnam. Having secured from Congress a declaration of war, as contained in the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, in August 1964, he ordered bombing targets north of the 17th parallel and ordered the first ground combat units of Battalion Landing Teams 3/9 and 1/3 – which consisted of 3,500 U.S. Marines – to the shores of Da Nang, South Vietnam (Karnow 1997: 431-433; Lewy 1978: 42; Sanders 2002: 67-73). A year later in July 1965, President Johnson addressed the American Nation and stated that he would support the needs of General William Westmoreland (Commander of American Forces in South Vietnam) for additional troops to defeat the communists and formulate an independent democratic South Vietnam. Thus, he had permitted an open ticket requests for more American troops to be sent to Vietnam (Lewy 1978: 51).

The Richard Nixon administration which assumed office in January 1969 was the key ingredient to the final outcome of the Vietnam War. He made known his plans to withdraw 25,000 American troops by 31 August 1969 and proclaimed this to the American public with preparations to completely withdraw all U.S. combat forces from South Vietnam. In addition, he granted measures to train the South Vietnamese government soldiers to defend themselves while assisting them in skirmishes with the North Vietnamese Army in Laos and Cambodia (Lewy 1978: 166; Sanders 2002: 125-129;)

The collapse of the South Vietnamese Army and the fall of Saigon – presently Ho Chi Minh City – on 30 April 1975 by a large scale invasion from the North was attributed by drastic cuts in U.S. aid to South Vietnam imposed by negotiated agreements at the 1973 Paris Agreement (Taylor 2003: xiii). Undoubtedly, the U.S. would have won the war in Vietnam had it not been for political constraints on U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers and the collapse at the home front of America with its widespread anti-war reactions (Sander 2002: 139; Lewy 1978: vi).

The U.S. involved about 4 million men and about 5000 women in the Vietnam War. The final death toll of U.S. troops was more than 58,000, with approximately 300,000 wounded and about 1000 still missing. It spent $150 billion and dropped seven times more bomb tonnage in Vietnam than all the powers involved in World War II. In addition, the U.S. sprayed over 30 million gallons of herbicides such as Agent Orange to kill plants and foliage (Egendorf 1985: 20-21; Lewy 1978: 451; Sander 2002: 145-146; Taylor 2003: 8; Ybarra 2004: 4).

Other countries who allied with the U.S. also suffered casualties in Vietnam:

- Korea
  - Death: 4,407
- Australia and New Zealand
  - Death 469
- Thailand
  - Death 351
- South Vietnamese Army
  - Death 137,000

North Vietnam casualties:

- North Vietnamese Army
  - Death 600,000-800,000
- Communist Vietnamese (VC)
  - Death 1,000,000
- Allied nations with North Vietnam
  - Death 282,000

Pacific Islanders:

- Guam (70)
- Hawai‘i (276)
- American Samoa (4)
Map of North and South Vietnam

(Reproduced from Lewy 1978: 44, 45)
Chapter 2

Samoa and Samoans

The Pacific Islands region was the last to have been colonized by European and American imperial powers, and the last region to have been decolonized. This began in 1962 when Western Samoa (presently Independent Samoa) gained independence from New Zealand, followed by Nauru which gained independence from Australia in 1968. Most of the Pacific Island countries gained independence in the 1970s and 80s. In spite of this, some Pacific Islands are still colonial territories. Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas and American Samoa are, for example, U.S. territories, while France has control over New Caledonia, Wallis & Futuna, and French Polynesia. Rapanui (Easter Island) is controlled by Chile, while West Papua is a province of Indonesia.

The United States is an important and dominant power in the Pacific Islands region. In 1898 the United States expanded its interest into the Pacific Ocean. It began its rule with eastern Samoa, Hawai‘i and the Philippines. These places were (and still are) vital to U.S. strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S. Navy began construction of coal stations in Guam (already in U.S. possession) and eastern Samoa, Hawai‘i and the Philippines (Camacho 2011: 23). The U.S. military viewed these regions as important for economic exploration, military maneuvering, and political bravado. Consequently, as Keith Camacho points out, the military used terms such as “Liberation as a code for ‘occupy,’ and ‘pacify’ for ‘conquer’” in their description for American colonial activities in the Pacific (Camacho 2011: 24). The Samoan Islands, like other Pacific Islands became colonial territories and whose resources were important to the colonial powers’ economic and strategic needs. The West in particular has a lot of influence on Samoan societies, like they do in other Pacific Island societies.
The Samoa archipelago is located in the South Pacific Ocean at the southwestern end of the Polynesian Triangle, about halfway between Hawai‘i and New Zealand. It is divided into two political units: the U.S. Territory of American Samoa and the Independent Nation of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa). Independent Samoa consists of two large islands (Savai‘i and Upolu) and two smaller islands of Manono and Apolima with a few smaller uninhabited islands added to its chain of ten islands. The capital city of Apia is located on Upolu.

American Samoa is made up of seven islands which includes Tutuila (the largest island) and the Manu‘a group of islands (‘Aunu‘u, Ofu, Olosega, Ta‘ū and two atolls, Rose and Swains). The capital city of Pago Pago is located on Tutuila Island (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 2-4; Lay, Murrow and Meleisea 2000: 1-3; Talbot and Swaney 1998: 9-11).

The fa‘asamoa, or “Samoan way” is the foundation of Samoan society and plays a vital role in the villages, society, culture and heritage of both American and Independent Samoa. The heads of the family are matai (chiefs) who are respected and honored. The ‘āiga (extended family) stays close and loyal within their village and to their matai. Each family member has a significant role to play in their tautua (service to the extended family). A village council consisting of the high chiefs and other village chiefs assist with the laws for their respective villages. The language in both Independent and American Samoan is Samoan. English is their second language and is expertly switched from Samoan to communicate with Europeans. All instructions in schools and formal government communications are in English. (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 1, 5; Lay, Murrow and Meleisea 2000: 27; Talbot and Swaney 1998: 32).

In Samoa, whites or caucasians are called papālagi (or in short, pālagi) which literally means “Heaven-Busters”. The name was given when Samoans saw strange white men with their
large ships and thunderous cannons, and thought perhaps they were men from the heavens, or “Heaven-Busters” (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 61).

The arrival of European explorers, traders, missionaries, beachcombers, colonial administrators and the introduction of European goods and tools impacted Samoa, like it did in other Pacific Island countries. Although Samoans have maintained aspects of their ancient beliefs through storytelling and songs, the introduction of Christianity greatly influenced their daily lives. Today, Samoa is largely a Christian country with several different denominations. The initial goal of the missionaries was to teach people to read the Bible and learn general knowledge about the world, especially the Western World. Christianity preached against many of the old customs and even challenged traditional authorities. Chiefs were, for example, forced to discard polygamous practices. The covering of female bodies was made essential, and so shirt and dresses replaced traditional clothing with the covering of women’s breast made mandatory. Women were also taught how to sew and cook, slowly replacing the men of the village in food preparations. Moreover, the role of the missionary’s message of peace brought confusion to even the chiefs and warriors who protected their homeland for decades in rivalry against other island nations (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 85, 86).

Today, family and village life centers on the churches. Christian values influenced many of the Vietnam War veterans. Some for example, on returning from Vietnam isolated themselves from their ‘āiga (family) and village, because of guilt feelings for what they did in Vietnam and how it was perhaps unchristian. However, they were encouraged by their village elders to once again become part of the community and live in reverence to God.
Increased American trading, whaling and shipping prompted the need for a coal station to supply the American ships in the South Pacific. There was also recognition by the U.S. authorities of the strategic advantage of developing a naval support base in Pago Pago. In 1872 the U.S. was given exclusive rights to a naval base in Pago Pago Harbor by the high chief of Tutuila for protection from other European countries (Talbot and Swaney 1998: 15).

In 1890 the American government appropriated monies to permanently construct a coal and supply station for its navy and commercial trade industries on Tutuila. The U.S. government sent Navy Commander Benjamin F. Tilley, as Commandant, to begin the project construction. Relying on his military experiences and two powerful and established Samoan institutions – the matai (chief) and the churches – Tilley took control and established instructions to complete the project. By order (Executive Order 540) of President William McKinley and The Secretarial Order of the Navy Department, Tilley was appointed authority over Tutuila and its outer islands east of the 171 degrees west of Greenwich. Tilley’s announcement and takeover of Tutuila under “Executive Order 540” delighted the chiefs of Tutuila, as author (Fofo Liga I.F. Sunia Petesa Uta) writes:

For they had longed for years to be annexed by America. Tutuila chiefs had made clear throughout the period of the three powers involvement in Samoa that they preferred to be under the rule of the United States. They had made treaties with America and even asked to be annexed. (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 141).

Tilley then wrote a “deed” that reflected the peoples willingness to be governed by the United States. On April 17, 1900, the ‘Deed of Cession’ was signed by all the chiefs of Tutuila and the other islands of what became American Samoa. During the small ceremony on a hill
above the new wharf and coaling station in Pago Pago Bay, Tilley read the proclamation of the President of the United States, which affirmed American sovereignty of the islands. This ‘Deed of Cession’ ceded to the U.S. the power to form legislation with complete control of the islands. No longer will the new “Nationals” to America be subjects to Western Samoa. This historic moment brought end to years of yearning for association with America and the beginning of a new era in the archipelago, as Tutuila was named U.S. Naval Station Tutuila (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 143). On July 7, 1911, the U.S. Navy Department granted the approval of the traditional leaders and proclaimed the new territory to be named “American Samoa” (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 190).

American Samoa is an unincorporated territory of the United States. This means that although it has its own constitution, it is directly supervised by the U.S. Department of Interior. American Samoans are not U.S. citizens, but instead are “Nationals” of the United States. It was the American Samoan leaders who opted not to obtain citizenship nor acquire an organic act. This was primarily because they wanted to keep their traditional land tenure. Under U.S. federal law this land tenure system would be declared unconstitutional because of its system’s racial preference.

The military commander of Tutuila in 1905 was granted the title of “Governor”. All of its governors and lieutenant governors between 1951 an 1977 were appointed by the U.S. Department of Interior. On November 1977, the peoples of American Samoa were allotted to elect their own governor and lieutenant-governor. On May 24, 1956, Peter Coleman became the first native Samoan to be appointed as Governor. In recognition of his good work, on November 1977 Coleman became the first to be elected Governor. In 1980, American Samoans were granted the right to elect a “non-voting delegate” to serve a two-year term in the U.S. House of
Representatives or Congress. The congressman can participate in discussions in the House of Representatives, but cannot vote to nullify or revise laws.

Vietnam veteran, Eni Fa‘aua‘a Hunkin Faleomavaega was elected in 1989 to represent his people in Washington. A post he still holds after two decades (Lay, Murrow and Meleisea 2000: 63; Talbot and Swaney 1998: 144, 145). Congressman Faleomavaega served in the U.S. Army in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968 in Nha Trang with II Corps Headquarters (G-2). Lieutenant General Stan “The Swede” Larsen was his Commanding General. His diligent service to his native American Samoa and the United States is beyond the hallmark of excellence. One of Faleomavaega’s achievements in Congress was his introduction of a legislation in 2003 to increase American Samoa’s military academy appointment from 1 to 2. As a result of this legislation, two students from American Samoa are now awarded a scholarship each worth over USD $320,000 to attend the American military academy of choice provided they meet the qualifications.

Construction of the coaling station, military base and other facilities at Pago Pago Harbor required the assistance of local laborers and additional security for equipment and supplies. Tilley’s ship the USS \textit{Abarenda} served as a government office until such time a new government building could be erected. The living and working conditions aboard his ship were unbearable, due to limited space and intense temperatures with extreme humidity. Commander Tilley sent off a message to the navy department requesting to build suitable housing for his officers and to establish a Samoan military to execute the duties as both Marines and law enforcement authorities. Having received approval from the Secretary of the Navy, Tilley ordered the recruitment and training of the first elite force of young Samoans called the \textit{Fita Fita} (courageous) (White and Lindstrom 1989: 373). The \textit{Fita Fita} became the integral part of the
Samoan society. In 1903, Captain Ulyses Sebree who succeeded Commander Tilley (after the serious illness of Commander E.J. Dorn) was astonished by the musical agilities of these *Fita Fita* soldiers, that he obtained band equipment and started the *Fita Fita* Band. In black colored shorts, white t-shirt, red sash and barefooted the *Fita Fita* soldiers and their band became the pride of the Samoan populace and the inspiration of all youth (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 154; White and Lindstrom 1989: 373).

During World War II, the U.S. was concerned about the capture of New Zealand and Australia as the Japanese Imperial Navy increased its operations in the Pacific, because of this, the U.S. Navy augmented its operations in the Pacific and was ordered by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, USN to protect Hawai‘i, Samoa, Fiji and New Guinea at all cost. *Fita Fita* guardsmen were trained in defensive situations and later utilized to instruct Samoan civilians in military defensive measures and techniques. Adding to this elite Samoan unit was the authorization to form the first Samoan Marine Corps Reserve Battalion of 500 men. The Samoan peoples came to name these Samoan Marines the *Malini Samoa*. Young men unable to succeed into the *Fita Fita* came to join the *Malini Samoa* (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 237, 238).

Over the course of WWII, thousands of U.S. Marines and Navy personnel arrived in American Samoa. This enhanced the local economy as hundreds of Samoan civilians not in military servicemen status were employed by the Navy to upgrade and fortify their islands for a possible attack by Japanese forces circulating within the Pacific. In addition, contract workers were brought in from Western Samoa and thousands of U.S. Marines and Navy servicemen arrived to assist with the protection and fortification of Tutuila and Manu‘a islands in American Samoa, and Upolu, and Savai‘i islands of Western Samoa. Widespread road construction, mining of Pago Pago Harbor and several pillboxes were implanted throughout Tutuila. Three airstrips
were built. One located at the present Tutuila International Airport and a U.S. Marine Corps 
fighter airstrip at Leone on Tutuila. The third was built by American Marines on Upolu at the 
present site of Faleolo International Airport. By October 1942, there were 14,371 American 

At the height of the fortification the only threat from the Japanese military to both 
American and Western Samoa was aircraft surveillances and the sighting of a Japanese 
submarine on January 11, 1942 fronting the entrance to Pago Pago Bay. The Japanese submarine 
fired fifteen projectiles in the direction of Pago Pago Harbor that sustained minor damage and no 

The end of World War II was economically disruptive for Samoa. With the American 
servicemen no longer present in Tutuila, the disbandment of the Samoan Marine Corps Battalion 
and Fita Fita guardsmen along with the decrease in civilian labor, cash flow declined 
dramatically to almost non-existent. To worsen matters, the American navy closed its base in 
1951, relinquishing all authority to the Department of Interior. Former Samoans of the Fita Fita 
guard, U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Battalion were relocated with their dependents 
to Hawai‘i. The enlistment of young Samoans into the U.S. military was hindered by war’s end 
and the departure of the U.S. Navy administration on Tutuila. They soon had to travel to 
Hawai‘i and the U.S. mainland to enlist into the American military. Courageous and bold the 
Samoan young men ventured to enlist. The Honolulu Advertiser reported on August 9, 1951, that 
11 Samoan youth paid their own airfare to enlist in the U.S. Army in Hawai‘i. (Honolulu 
Advertiser, 9 August 1951: 1).

The Samoan laborers who gained skills and experience during the fortification of Tutuila 
during WWII soon found opportunities in other places like New Zealand, Hawai‘i, the
continental United States and elsewhere. Consequently, after WWII there was a migration of Samoans out of Samoa that led to the establishment of Samoan diaspora communities in the West Coast of the U.S. mainland, Hawai‘i and New Zealand. The Samoan perception of work and their labor force opportunities overseas were shaped by their experiences of World War II. Still, after WWII the Samoan chiefs requested from the U.S. naval administration to give all the former *Fita Fita* guardsmen and Samoan Marines “American citizenship.” This was denied (Amerika Samoan Humanities Council 2009: 237, 242; White and Lindstrom 1989: 373-382).

The closure of U.S. Tutuila Naval Station in 1951 saw former Samoan guardsmen and their dependents (nearly a thousand) relocated to Hawai‘i. Since the 1940s, Samoans have volunteered to serve in the U.S. armed forces and have been stationed in Hawai‘i, the continental and other U.S. worldly military bases (White 1991: 174).

The present generation of young Samoans is discovering the benefits of the U.S. military inspiring. The decision to enlist into the U.S. military is personal and influenced largely by the limited choices in terms of employment in American Samoa today. Their decision to enlist will make a colossal impact to their families, their culture, their religion and the world we live in.

Chapter 3

**Veterans, Reflections and Memories of War**

United States Vietnam War veterans were not greeted home with parades until a decade later following the end to this controversial war. American Samoan Vietnam War veterans were also not welcomed back with celebrations and funfair. Their efforts and sacrifices in protecting the American ideal were not appreciated and publicly recognized. They did not receive favorable media coverage either. After harsh experiences in Vietnam, these soldiers came back
to a nation and society that was unwelcoming and did not appreciate their sacrifices. Consequently, many Vietnam War veterans became reclusive and succumbed to depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, nightmares, isolation, apathy, illnesses, drugs and alcohol dependency, and run-ins with the law, and other challenges. They overcame debilitating injuries and persevered over the years. Some chose to conquer their adversities on their own, while others were supported by family and friends. They went back to school, create a carrier, or became special guest who gave speeches at honorary meetings.

Others returned wounded and felt cheated by society. They, therefore, gave up on life. These were soldiers who suffer from chronic pain, depression and angry about losing buddies in the war. Many were left in the solitary world of hospitals and rehabilitation centers. They struggled to come to terms with a civilian society where many people did not seem to understand the war and how and why they were involved. For some, the quality and type of medical care required to help them did not exist, was limited, or was not offered on a long-term basis. Many died from physical and psychological wounds of the war.

Through the stories of the war veterans, we can have a glimpse of, and perhaps begin to understand what veterans experienced and the physical and psychological conditions that they endured. This will help in coming up with appropriate care and treatment that the veterans deserve in our society.

Vietnam veterans shared a persuasive concern with survival. They developed complicated means of behavior and attitudes. Some came to accept the war, feeling a sense of power from being attracted to its dangers and excitement. Others simply rejected as much as possible about the war to shield themselves from troubled memories. Still others were brutalized, calloused, revengeful and developed uncontrollable rage. On their own they struggled with these
issues until the Veteran Affairs of the United States formulated an investigation to assist these veterans.

As stated above, many Samoans are devout Christians. It is in Christianity that many Samoan Vietnam War veterans found solace. All of the Samoan Vietnam War veterans that I interviewed for this project are devout Christians. It was, therefore, difficult for them to go to war, knowing that they might have to commit “unchristian things” in the cause of the war. It also changed them when they returned home.

In 1971, after returning back from Vietnam I got stationed at Naval Air Station (NAS) Barber’s Point on Oahu, Hawai‘i. The Marines were tasked with manning the gates to the entrances of the base. Here I met Vailale “Val” Fuiava Jr. a Samoan Marine and one of the few Pacific Islander Marines serving our Country in Hawai‘i. Val was an impressive Marine, dedicated to God and Country. I was a clear opposite of Val when it came to socializing. My dependence on alcohol was leading my life. Val often times tried desperately to save me from my “heathen ways” and persuaded me to attend Sunday mass and Bible studies. It was not my time in faith to any deity. Born into the Catholic Church, I wanted at the time to be left alone to fight the demons I encountered from Vietnam.

Unbeknownst to me, Val was also in Que Son Valley, Vietnam in 1970 to 1971. I recall having to call for ‘fire support’ for his Reconnaissance Unit that was being attacked by Communist North Vietnamese soldiers. For valor and heroism he was awarded the Bronze Star with combat “V” for saving several of his fellow Reconnaissance Marines’ lives and his platoon commander, while himself being wounded. On February 5, 1972, Val was an usher to my wedding and the greatest non-biological uncle to my two sons.
We both departed NAS Barber’s Point for Drill Instructor School at San Diego, California and successfully completed our two years molding young men into Marines in 1975. Soon thereafter, we drifted apart while continuing our career in the Marine Corps. In mid 1980, Val and I returned to Hawai‘i to spend our twilight tour with the Corps. Shortly after moving to Oahu, Hawai‘i from Maui in 2001, I reunited with Val. He was employed as a range officer for the United States Army at Schofield Barrack, Hawai‘i. He was also a pastor at the Hale‘iwa Evangelical Mission. We shared and had a lot in common, more so for being Vietnam War veterans, retired Marines, surfers and survivors. He was killed on 31 March, 2007, when a drunken driver smashed her car into the back of his motorcycle a short distance to his home. Often, I would vision him giving me piano lessons at my apartment in Waikiki. His legacy lives on in the hearts of so many that he touched and saved.

Our seasoned memories are rekindled through songs, words, pictures and camaraderie whether ambivalent or supportive of the war. They reopen the channels to the nature of the war experiences that lay dormant within veterans’ lives. Along with the veterans I interviewed, first and foremost, we all attest to being angered by gunshots, fireworks and other explosions.

For veterans like me, noise discipline was enforced repeatedly at night and especially on patrols in the jungles of Vietnam. After returning home from Vietnam, I found it difficult to withstand loud, constant or erratic noises. Frustrated with this context, I would constantly wear earplugs or simply avoid the area.

When I bought my apartment in Waikiki in 2002, it was difficult to adjust to the fireworks display illuminating the skies on Friday nights. Oftentimes, I would take a drive in my vehicle to avoid being overtaken by this pyrotechnic event. As for non-veterans and visitors alike this weekly event is grandeur. Since 2002, I had to readjust and strengthen myself in discovering
ways and means to keep positive, while striving with uncertainly to college curriculum. I often considered relocating to another part of the island to a quieter neighborhood with fewer complexities. But with the high medium price of over half a million dollars for single family home in Hawai‘i, this would be daunting.

In preparing for this project, I interviewed a retired Samoan army veteran in Hawai‘i, who decided not to participate in my project. He asked to remain anonymous and granted me permission to utilize our conversation in reinforcing relevant issues. He told me that the reason he wanted to remain anonymous was because Samoans in the community still consider him a “bad person” because of his involvement in killings during the Vietnam War. I honored his request and refer to him here as “Joe”.

I asked him, what triggers his memories of the war? Joe stated “my scars from my wounds, loud noises, even children screaming, airplanes and the smell of airplane fumes, veterans’ stories, the Vietnamese barbershop lady, *taro* fields, people burning leaves or rubbish (quite common in American Samoa) and helicopters that frequent the skies in Hawai‘i.” Joe continues, “Soldiers today in uniform, they are fat, especially the women.” “You know, back in my days Pete, the women soldiers were slim and trim, falling out of runs every so often, but they hung in there. Today, I wonder how they can keep up at all on a run. I think this Iraq and Afghanistan war is feeding them too much.” I had to stop Joe and redirect him back to the question. He continued by saying, “Well, other things that get me going are war movies and the politicians today. These politicians are no different than in our “Nam” days, they screwed up things there and still screwing things up in Iraq and Afghanistan.”

I next asked Joe why he decided to reside in Hawai‘i instead of American Samoa, choosing only to visit his place of birth intermittently. Joe replied “Pete, when I left Samoa, I
knew my village will never forgive me when they find out I joined the military. The Samoan people are very religious since the Christian days. They have great faith in God and expect us young kids in those days to be angels and abide to the Ten Commandments. But our family and most of the people were having hard times. Like me, many young guys left for Hawai‘i to find a job or join the military to send money home. The military gave me both and that is why I stayed for twenty-two years in the Army. I go back to American Samoa just to find some peace and quiet and to check on my sister and her family. I also send her money and some food with other family members here in Hawai‘i that visit American Samoa from time to time. I try to send more, but I have grandchildren and my son is in the Army serving in Afghanistan, while his wife and children are staying with us. My son is only a Private First Class and doesn’t make much. Another reason for just visiting Samoa is because they have nothing there and if they do, it is so expensive. Here in Hawai‘i, even though it is expensive too, at least I have a home and between my wife and me we can take care of our grandchildren until my son returns from Afghanistan and attend college”. Joe has mentioned several of the effects of being frustrated, along with having triggers that are significant to countless Vietnam War veterans. His care and generosity to his immediate family in Hawai‘i and extended family in American Samoa is a leading trait that reflects upon the culture of Pacific Islanders.

Some veterans are affected by the war stories of other veterans, especially from those that they converse with at the VA Centers, or during their recuperative sessions at the VA PRRP program. It is not easy for Vietnam War veterans, especially when they have to disclose their war experiences to justify, or validate their claims for compensation. It was also difficult for the veterans that I interviewed to voluntarily reveal incidents and experiences that were personal and deeply embedded in their minds. I was to them an outsider/insider. Fortunately for me, they
trusted me and I understood and respected their cause of wanting another avenue to express themselves and record their experiences for others to understand them while in convalescence.

For these veterans, the war is not over. It will never be over until they pass on. There are daily and countless reminders of Vietnam that trigger memories that they can never subdue, or experiences that they would rather never express. Every veteran has his or her own trigger and encounters that are reminiscent of their war experiences.

Still, tidbits of other Vietnam veterans’ experiences are distinctive and identical to those that I interviewed in Samoa, as well as, my own. With such, I hung on to my zeal that this is for my Samoan brothers and their families and that I am responsible for such.

Chapter 4

The Boundaries of Choice

It has been three and half decades since the last American soldier returned home and the end of the war in South Vietnam (Murphy 1997: 337-341). Many are still missing and the efforts to locate and bring them home still continue. For those soldiers that did return home, authors (Egendorf 1985; Sanders 2002 and Ybarra 2004) expressed how these soldiers lives were marked by multiple physical and psychological challenges. They lost friends, buddies, superiors and other comrade-in-arms. These losses will forever haunt them. Many soldiers for the first time in their lives experienced “survivor’s guilt”. They felt that they betrayed their fallen comrades by returning home alive.

However, for them the war was far from over after their tour of duty and departure from Vietnam. They came back to another battle at home; a battle with a country and population that seemed unappreciative of their sacrifices on the battlefields in Vietnam, nor honor their services
and those of their fallen comrades. They were labeled “baby killers” and other derogatory names while attempting to readjust back into the unwelcoming society they once called “home”. Here in their books, authors (Appy 1993 and Ybarra 2004) reflect upon the unwelcoming atmosphere Vietnam veterans received upon returning home and the verbal assaults they withstood at the home-coming. This was a battle with anti-Vietnam War protestors as Michael Foley identifies in his book, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* and the growing national sentiment against the war in Vietnam. It was difficult for the returning soldiers to believe that they had served honorably (Foley 2003: 296-332; Weiss and et al 1986).

My four brothers and I served a combined total of ninety-one years of honorable service in the American military. My two elder brothers, James and Richard, also served during the latter part of the Korean War. We all served in Vietnam, aside from nephews, cousins and other biological relatives.

I grew up in the tiny village of Keanae along the rocky eastern coastline of Maui, Hawai‘i and I was born in 1951, just two years prior to the armistice signed to end the Korean War. I am the youngest of sixteen children. Our mother was pure Hawaiian and our father Hawaiian-Chinese. The majority of the populace of our village were either pure or part-Hawaiians. There was a small Chinese population, which was treated with the same *aloha* (care, love, respect). My parents raised six boys and ten girls in the village and throughout the difficult era of the great depression and World War II. Being the youngest had its pros and cons. We were hunters and gatherers subsisting on the natural resources available. Our antiquated refrigerators and freezers were filled with provisions from the Pacific Ocean, freshwater streams and forest slopes of dormant Haleakalā volcano, where feral pigs and mountain goats were abundant. Hunting these food sources braved my brothers and me to prove our manhood and skills as do young men
throughout parts of Oceania. Canoes, seine, guns, knives and other western weaponry and 
equipment were used to catch, detain and kill. Added to our food source is the main staple of *poi*, 
a nutritious staple of the Hawaiian diet, made from the cooked corms of the *kalo* (taro) plant.

Most of the children attended Keanae Elementary School, a single wooden building 
consisting of three classrooms and restrooms for both genders. There were only two teachers for 
grade-levels one to eight. The average student population during my tenure at Keanae School 
was between twenty to thirty students. After graduation from eighth grade, nearly all of the 
students departed the village to attend high schools elsewhere on Maui or other islands within the 
State of Hawai‘i. Others that could afford the travel and expenses ventured further to the 
continental United States. Though, there were a few who remained in the village to work in the 
*kalo* fields instead.

Upon graduating from Keanae School in 1965, I traced the footsteps of both my brothers, 
Patrick and Alexander and went to Lahainaluna High School (LHS) located on the western end 
on the island of Maui. Patrick graduated from LHS that spring and enlisted into the United States 
Army, now joining both James and Richard in the military. Alex was a senior at LHS and me 
struggling to adjust to this new school with its large student population as compared to Keanae 
Elementary. At Lahainaluna High School I read about the heroic deeds and valor of soldiers 
fighting in World War II and the Korean War.

I once asked my brother Patrick on his return to the island after recruit training why so 
many Hawaiians join the military, and he explained “As a result of culture, pride and heritage of 
being Hawaiian, having to enlist in the military is an integral part of patriotism of being 
American and the willingness to fight and die for our country.”
With majority of the male high school graduates from LHS enlisting into the United States Army I decided to be different and enlisted into the United States Marine Corps on 8 June 1969 at the age of seventeen years old. Appy notes that American youth (teenagers), not even old enough to vote, served in the Vietnam War (Appy 1993: 27-28).

The departure of a loved one to any war always causes anxiety among family members as wars are brutal and deadly and there is no guarantee that those who deploy will return alive. This kind of anxiety characterized the departure of soldiers destined for Vietnam, a war that proved to be cruel and dangerous for many Americans. The fear about the fate of their sons, nephews, uncles, or husbands departing for Vietnam caused many families to never be the same ever again.

Fearful of the fate that awaits her son in Vietnam, for example, a woman clings to her sorrows and pain and keeps them close to her soul. The tears carry the pain as she watches her son board a bus, airplane, taxi or train and heads off to recruit training only to be dispatched to Vietnam (Egendorf 1985: 1; Sanders 2002: 145-146).

Basic training during the Vietnam era was conducted at various places throughout the continental United States and Hawai‘i. The military methodology in basic training is structured to demoralize its recruits from all forms of civilian life. Their lives are regulated psychologically and physically. Whether officer or enlisted, all personnel must complete and pass an extensive military physical examination to satisfactorily complete basic training, be capable of performing duties without aggravation, or limited geographical assignments. In (Appy 1993) we discover basic training as expressed by the author in chapter three of his book, Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam. In addition, the electronic website: Marine Corps Boot
Camp: Recruit Training. (http://www.recruitparents.com/bootcamp/ accessed 21 February 2012) is another valuable source that provides an input to Marine Corps recruit training.

All of the U.S. Army Samoan Vietnam veterans interviewed for this project received their basic training at Fort Ord, California. The Marines all received their recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California.

**Marine Corps Boot Camp: San Diego, California**

My arrival at Lindberg Field in San Diego, California on June 1969, brought an end to my freedom for the next thirteen weeks. A Marine wearing a campaign cover (Smokey the Bear Hat) started grouping all the young men arriving for boot camp near the airport’s entry/exit into a formation and started checking off our names on a roster as we waited for the arrival of other inductees. Soon a green colored military bus pulled alongside the curb as we hurried into the bus and remained silent. The trip was short and tensions of uneasiness, uncertainty, and other mental worries could be seen on the faces of everyone within the bus—we all knew this was the calm before the storm.

An avid surfer all throughout high school, I thought about surfing in Malibu Beach and other famous surfing sites along the west coast surfing Mecca of California as I sat motionless in the bus filled with future Marines. Needless to say, the only beach I saw for the next thirteen weeks was the sand area around the Quonset huts we were billeted and the sand we threw upwards in the air as mass punishment for infractions we warranted individually, or as a platoon. Aside from this hazing, other monotonous painful exercises were pushups, side straddle hops, bend and thrusts, and rifle exercises, let alone running in circles with your rifle lifted high above your head.
Upon arrival at the training depot the new Marine recruits of platoon 3107 swiftly stumbled over each other while exiting the bus. I thought I had heard every vulgar word in my short life until I heard words disturbing to any deity from this Drill Instructor (D.I.). Among the airborne spit and sharp verbal commands from the D.I., I exited the bus with lightning speed hollering, “Yes Sir, Yes Sir, Yes Sir.” The yellow footprint markings on the cement surface of which we adjusted our feet into were soon showing signs of urine and other human excretions.

My experience in boot camp was what I had expected. It was harsh, but it molded me into a man and killing machine. I am a Marine qualified and depended upon to secure the freedom of all Americans and to defend our Country against all foreign and domestic foes. Patriotic as it may seem, this becomes a soldiers’ oath and the heyday of his once uncertain life. My indoctrination into the Marine Corps will forever be a part of my life, similarly to those Marines who preceded me, as well as to those who will adjust their shoes into the same yellow footprints for their first time at “boot camp” (Appy 1993: 86-110).

Four years later, I would return to those same yellow footprint markings at Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) San Diego, California, in June of 1973 as a Drill Instructor. Marine Corps Drill Instructor School at MCRD graduated the “The Best of The Best,” instilling pride and honor upon being issued the U.S. Marine Corps Drill Instructor’s campaign cover (Smokey hat). It is a well-earned added distinction to the proud uniform of a Marine Drill Instructor and is noted in this electronic website: (Marine Corps Drill Instructor Duty (http://usmilitary.about.com/cs/marineassign/a/marinedrill.htm/ accessed 21 February 2012).

After graduating from boot camp, I was assigned a field artillery fire direction control (FDC) military occupational specialty (0844). A part of the field artillery team, the FDC is responsible to control indirect artillery fire by computing firing data for the artillery guns on the

I arrived at Camp Pendleton, California, for schooling for this occupational specialty, but I failed this artillery assignment on purpose, because I wanted to be in the infantry with a future ambition of becoming a Reconnaissance Marine (The Marine Corps Special Forces). My only regret in failing the field artillery training was that I had to leave a couple of close boot camp buddies behind who were also assigned to the FDC School.

While desperately trying to be assigned to the infantry, one of the instructors at the FDC School had just returned from Vietnam. He had a grudge against the infantry while serving in Vietnam. He complained that the infantry in Vietnam was always keeping the artillery team up all night with requests for illumination above their (infantry) positions. Because of his ill-feelings towards the infantry, this instructor thought best to reassign me to the artillery cannoneer school (0811). Sadly enough, I went to artillery school across the street and met my new section leader (Sergeant Frenchy), who I would later meet again in Vietnam a year later. Sgt. Frenchy was a tall caucasian marine from Texas, a former infantryman who was wounded several times during his two tours in Vietnam and rather than accepting a disability retirement, due to the extent of his injuries, opted to remain in the Marine Corps and teach artillery. He knew my brother Richard in Vietnam and understood my predicament. He told me to go to Camp Christianos (home of the Recon Marines) and see a Lieutenant friend of his. I do not recall the Lieutenant’s name, but I met the officer and he instructed me with the procedures and training needed to be in Recon.

At the age of eighteen, in October 1969, I graduated from artillery school and was ordered to deploy to Vietnam. I was ordered to report to Staging Battalion on November 1, 1969. I went home on leave and denied to my mother that I was going to Vietnam. I regret lying to her,
but she had gone through a lot when my brother Richard was injured in Vietnam and having barely survived. Further, my brother Alexander was still in Vietnam. The thought that I—her youngest son—would also be going to Vietnam would have been devastating for her. I wanted to go to Vietnam, but did not want my mother to worry over it. I cut short my leave and went back to Camp Pendleton and tried out for recon assignment on my own with the Lieutenant and his platoon of elite warriors. They trained me and others well and hard. I enjoyed every bit of it and planned my reassignment to the infantry after passing the grueling test in hopes of being reassigned to this reconnaissance outfit in the future.

Things were looking good for me, so I thought. During a helicopter repelling exercise we were moving through a thick grassy area and as we hit the ground, I started having blurred vision and sharp pains in my right eye. I was extracted and sent back to the camp dispensary. They diagnosed my ailment as having glaucoma in my right eye. I spent four months at the Camp Pendleton Naval Hospital with numerous optomologists trying to assess my medical condition. While in the hospital, my buddies who were leaving for Vietnam came by to see me on their last weekend of liberty, which was restricted to the base only.

One of them (Chris), a Californian from Los Angeles, who I knew from boot camp and artillery school, was back in the hospital within two months. Chris’ brother Danny was a member of the Hells Angels motorcycle club in L.A. I do not recall their last names, but recall meeting Danny and other members of the Hells Angels Club in Oceanside, California, when Danny and several club members were riding their motorcycles pass Camp Pendleton via Interstate Highway 5. When I realized Chris was now in the same hospital with me, I met up with him every morning after our doctors’ evaluations and I took him outside onto the hospital grounds in a wheelchair to catch some fresh air. He was severely wounded having his jaw wired shut and both
legs amputated. I would feed him liquids (food and juice) through a straw as we communicated
by writing on a note pad. I tried desperately to cheer him up, but to no avail. He was different;
not the Chris I knew anymore. When we graduated from boot camp he was jubilant and talked
about college and becoming a doctor after his tour in Vietnam. While Chris made it back from
Vietnam alive, he seemed lifeless in so many ways. On my last day in the hospital, Chris wrote
me a letter (which I lost in transit to Vietnam) describing how he got wounded and how he too
felt he let the guys we both knew down. He also mentioned that several others were wounded
and some died on the medical evacuation (medivac) helicopter that removed them from the
battlefield.

After discharged from Camp Pendleton Naval Hospital, I was assigned to Mike Battery
4th Battalion 12th Marines at Camp Las Flores also located within the confines of Camp
Pendleton. Checking into this new assignment, I met one of the Corpsman (Navy medic) I knew
from the hospital. He had just received orders for Vietnam. More importantly, he knew Chris and
a couple of weeks later as we were doing our after-work exercise of running, mentioned that
Chris had died. He stated that Chris had a relatively good chance of survival, but simply gave up,
possibly due to immense emotional pains. When I perceived this, I was more determined to go to
Vietnam, because I wanted to avenge the injuries to my brother Richard and the death of Chris
and others I knew.

I spent another seven months at Camp Las Flores and hated every bit of it, but I kept my
feelings to myself. My commanding officer praised me and my endeavors and would not release
me to Vietnam. Week after week orders were being handed out every Monday morning for
others, even to Marines who had just returned from Vietnam. I started to figure out the system—I
had to change my persona and instead, be a mediocre Marine on purpose to receive orders for
Vietnam. It worked and I also got promoted to corporal (E4). My commanding officer handed me my orders on that bright Monday morning and said, “I knew you were pulling that shit just to get to Vietnam.” All the while, he kept a secret from everyone including myself. After my promotion ceremony we chatted and he revealed to me why he refused my repeated request for assignment to Vietnam. He was in my brother Richard’s platoon at Kaneohe Marine Corps Base in Hawai‘i just at the dawn of being sent to Vietnam and Richard had a lot to do with his acceptance to Officer Candidate School (OCS). He, therefore, eluded being sent to Vietnam. He also knew about the innumerable amount of Marines getting killed in 1968 and 1969 and he promised himself, should he someday have the chance to repay Richard, he would do it. He found out that I was Richard’s brother.

My Tour in Vietnam

I went home on leave and then reported to staging battalion on October 1, 1970. In spite of President Nixon’s address to the nation regarding his intention to withdraw troops from Vietnam, there were over two thousand Marines that left Norton Air Force Base, California, that eerie morning in November 1970 for Okinawa. On the trip to Okinawa, I befriended another Corpsman and he was so proud of owning his own home four days before being on that flight. I never knew his name, but as customary for all Marines, I called him “Doc”.

I spent four days in Okinawa being processed and retrofitted with camouflage uniform in preparation for my tour in Vietnam. I met “Doc” on the same flight and we both made plans to see each other home, no matter what happened. I was assigned to 3rd 8 inch Howitzer Battery close at the outskirts of Da Nang and met up with Sgt. Frenchy who was my section leader in artillery school at Camp Pendleton. He had just gotten a divorce from who he called his “Hippie wife” and said he had nothing else to live for and the whole world was going to “shit”. Sgt
Frenchy helped me get out to a field observation post (FO) in Que Son Valley near the demilitarize zone separating North Vietnam from the South (Arnold 1987; Murphy 1997: 284-311).

I got on board the helicopter with three other Marines and headed to my home for the duration of my tour in Vietnam. As we were approaching the hill, the crew-chief yelled out “we are not touching ground, the zone is hot!” meaning they were taking enemy artillery fire. After circling for what seemed to be an hour, we came in at a steep bank and hovered for less than a minute before all hands, with the exception of the pilots and crew-chief, the mail and ammunition bailed out at the rear of the chopper landing in thick elephant grass. I whispered to myself, “Welcome to Vietnam.”

Our home was on a little hilltop with a telescope that could view a distance of three to five miles, weather permitting. It was manned by thirty marines from various military occupational specialties, with three forward observers (FO) calling in airstrikes, naval gunfire and artillery in support of the infantry fighting below us in Que Son Valley. In *Vietnam Veteranos*, Lieutenant Marcello describes his experience as an artillery officer and as a forward observer in Vietnam (Ybarra 2004: 164-165). The Communist Vietnamese (VC) also knew the significance of this hill and desperately tried to blow us off the hill. But with all the firepower at our finger tips, we need only locate where they fired from and responded with our U.S. firepower. It was a game of cat and mouse.

I met up with Sgt. Britt, who was in charge of two squads of infantry marines assigned to protect the hill. His first question to me was, “How long have you been a corporal?” “A couple months,” I answered. “You better learn fast, because you are my replacement and I am out of here in two months,” he said as he shook his head. “I am a forward observer,” I yelled back.
“Out here everyone is a grunt” Britt replied, then sarcastically stated, “By the way, welcome to Nam.”

Sgt. Britt and I got along fine for the next month and I learned a lot from him on patrols every week down the hill, sometimes for days. I shared a fighting hole previously constructed with a half metal culvert for a roof with Lance Corporal (E-3) Batrowski, a feisty fellow from New York. The Lieutenant we hardly saw, because he stayed hidden and out of sight for fear of dying and Sgt. Britt left the hill in February. I took over the weekly patrols. It was around that time that I received word from the rear that my friend “Doc” had died during a rocket attack on our rear base on Marble Mountain.

A lot happened. The stench of dead bodies filled the ambient air, Marines were dying, crying, and falling into deep trances like zombies. Back on the hilltop, Marines wished for a letter home in hopes of hearing from their loved ones. They shared their personal stories about their families, their future and even stories of break-ups with wives and girlfriends just to pass the time away, and to forget the horror of death.

In May 1971, we received word that U.S. Marines were being withdrawn out of Vietnam. Edward Murphy presents the full story of the Marine Corps infantry from their arrival in 1965 to their departure in 1972 and of the gallant men who fought the battles and took the casualties (Murphy 1997). We had to clear all the debris from the hilltop and before dismantling the telescope, we saw countless enemy vehicles all staged along the hillside-road across the valley from our position. Over night they appeared as hundreds of Vietnamese peoples now scurrying across the rice fields below, where once you could only guess their location. I and four other Marines were the last to leave the hill. Our final night on the hill was lonely and long. We anxiously waited for sunrise. That night, minutes turned into hours and the quietness that loomed
over our hilltop was nerve-wrecking to withstand. For in Vietnam, quietness signified trouble. We knew that the Vietnamese were making their way up the hill. Where they VC? Who cares! We just needed to stay alive for one more night in the bush. The next morning, we were relieved to hear the sound of a helicopter coming to retrieve us. It was still dark but this helicopter crew knew we were out there and wanted to pick us up at the earliest possible. We quickly climbed aboard and held our breath until we were high above the hills. We landed back on Marble Mountain, thanked the helicopter crew and were greeted by others who were retrieved the day before. We now were one step closer to home.

For the next week or two it was chaotic in Da Nang, as Marines from all over Vietnam swarm to board awaiting ships that were anchored in Da Nang harbor, away from harms way. I was assigned to fly back to the continental United States (CONUS), but gave up my seat aboard the aircraft to an African American buddy whose wife was giving birth to their first child and took his place aboard the USS Barbour County (Murphy 1997).

As we departed Da Nang harbor in late June 1971, I looked back at Vietnam, still smoldering from intermittent enemy artillery and the chaos at the harbor. I finally thought about myself and questioned why after great lengths, I did not arrive here in November 1969, but instead a year later and now I was heading home. Immediately after that thought and for some unknown reason, I felt an emotion of serenity descend upon me. I started shaking out of control and sobbing profusely. About a month later after several port-stops in Hong Kong, Philippines, Australia and Hawai’i, we arrived at Naval Base San Diego, California and were transported in enclosed tractor-trailers (cattle-cars) to Camp Pendleton. We had made it home.
Vietnam veterans like me became the first refugees to leave Vietnam. We were desensitized by a war that made us become animals of the jungle. Many of us remained as such for decades after our return from Vietnam.

The soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War came from across America, its territories in both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, as far off as Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (Appy 1993: 15). The stories from these gallant men and women (returning veterans) that placed their lives in infamy are limitless. Some stories developed into sources of public awareness as they circulated amongst the few trusted individuals and especially those draft resisters who later countered their actions to the killings of many civilians in Vietnam.

Hollywood portrayed the Vietnam War with countless movies; from John Wayne in the Green Berets, to Mel Gibson in We Were Soldiers. Many of these representations did not pay tribute to Pacific Islanders, who sacrificed their lives to the uncertainty of the Vietnam War.

Prior to my tour in Vietnam, I befriended several Pacific Islander soldiers from Guam, American Samoa and my home state of Hawai‘i. Throughout my career in the military I met other Pacific Islanders who also served in Vietnam, especially those who set out to establish a career in the military in hopes of receiving a retirement after twenty years of honorable service. Some of their names I remember from American Samoa are: Ilaua, Masoli, Lafefe, Tuia and Polu, and from Guam: Leong-Guierro, Parke and Ferreira. These are some of my Pacific Islander comrades who I had the honor of serving with in the U.S. military. I stayed in touch with a few of them until time took its course and separated us indefinitely. This project allowed me to continue that connection with Pacific Islander Vietnam War veterans.
Hierarchy in the Armed Forces

Innumerable service members were promoted throughout the Vietnam War and countless others during combat in Vietnam. The armed forces are made up of three general categories of rank/rate within its uniform services: Commissioned officers, Warrant officers, and enlisted personnel. An officer is a member who holds a position of authority and commands responsibility. They receive training in leadership and management in addition to their specific military occupational specialty (MOS) or function in the military. The U.S. military requires the prerequisite of a university degree in order to be a commissioned officer. Though officers are also commissioned under certain circumstances, they are required to earn a university degree before the rank of captain. All commissioned officers out-rank warrant officers and enlisted personnel. These officers hold presidential commissions and are confirmed by the Senate.

Warrant officers are former enlisted personnel commissioned into the officer ranks based on their expertise or specific demands of their branch of service. They are tasked with similar responsibilities as commissioned officers, but lack the authority to be commanding officers. Warrant officers hold warrants from their respective branch secretary within the Department of Defense. However, there are no warrant officers in the United States Air Force.

Enlisted personnel are enlisted grades below the rank of a warrant officer and can be inclusive of a noncommissioned officer (NCO). They also perform specific jobs to their own MOS as opposed to the command responsibilities of a commissioned officer. They are governed to adhere to all orders issued by an officer or superior in rank. All enlisted personnel are required to salute all commissioned and warrant officers foreign or domestic and the President and Vice President of the United States and other dignitaries within the Department of Defense. Salute is not rendered amongst enlisted personnel unless the enlisted person was awarded the “Medal of
Honor.” The bars and stripes worn on the military uniform signify a person’s rank/rate and are called ‘insignia’.

**Decoration and Medals**

American soldiers in all wars are decorated heroes. Some were individually decorated for heroism beyond the “call of duty”. The highest military award presented to an American soldier is the “Medal of Honor”. Military decoration and awards recognizes service members for their distinctive accomplishments, while serving in the United States armed forces. Such awards are means to display and highlight the member’s career. I have included this in my thesis project to amplify and make public the decorations that were awarded to the Samoan Vietnam War veterans. Though none of the Samoan Vietnam War veterans that I interviewed was awarded the “Medal of Honor”, I included this award as a reference to identify the significance and precedence of the awards to which they were awarded. Each interviewee was asked to present their three highest award or decorations. For validation and authenticity to these awards, I requested that they provide a copy of the award(s) or a copy of their DD 214 (discharge certificate). For verification purpose that was satisfied, I noted such above the award won by each veteran.
The “Medal of Honor” is the United States’ highest military decoration. It is bestowed by the President of the United States to members of the armed forces who distinguished themselves through conspicuous gallantry at the risk of his or her life above and beyond the call of duty, while engaged in an action against enemy forces of the United States above and beyond the call of duty.

http://www.homeofheroes.com

The Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) is the nations’ second highest military decorations awarded to service members of the United States armed forces for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with enemy forces of the United States that does not meet the criteria for the “Medal of Honor.” Each separate branch of service has its own DSC, with the exception of the Navy and Marine Corps having the same DSC medal. Its precedence is below the “Medal of Honor”.

The Silver Star is the third highest combat decoration that can be awarded to a service member of the American military for valor and gallantry actions in the face of the enemy of the United States. It is below the DSC.

http://www.homeofheroes.com/silverstar/
The Bronze Star is awarded to all branches of service for heroic acts of merit, meritorious service. With a “V” for valor device, it is awarded for heroism. It is the fourth highest combat award of the United States armed forces and is below the “Silver Star” in the order of precedence of the U.S. military decorations.

http://www.homeofheroes.com/medals/pages_wh/10_bronzestar.html

The Purple Heart is a United States military decoration awarded in the name of the President of the United States to those wounded or killed in any action against an enemy of the United States.

http://www.purple.com
Chapter 5

The Stories of Samoan Vietnam War Veterans

This was my first trip to American Samoa. The interview process went exceedingly well for the first few days. Unbeknownst to myself, I was succumbed by my own demons of my experience in Vietnam. After cognitive consideration of my plight, I elected to return to Hawai‘i in anticipation to rejuvenate myself and return later to continue and finalize my research project.

The project itself chronicles the experiences of Samoan Vietnam veterans who served in the American military during the periods of 1954 to 1975. More importantly, each veteran is a native Samoan (full or partial) from American Samoa. In addition, they had to formerly reside in American Samoa and be a United States National prior to their induction into any of the American military branches of service. A few veterans chose to withdraw for an assortment of reasons, some due to being emotionally remorse, eternally concealed or geographical impossible. It would be appreciative to take into account that these Veterans’ stories are based on recollections years after the war and certain of the United States military services did not keep accurate record of awards distributed to soldiers in the combat theater. Attempt to validate them was difficult as some veterans tried desperately to recall names, places, and dates. The years that separated them from the conflict dimmed their collective memory. Several of the veterans produced copies of their Certificate of Release or Discharge Form (DD-214) as documented proof, while others produced photocopies of their awards or took desperate measures to locate them. Thus, an extensive research was attempted in seeking validity and relevancy of their stories. However, all were cooperative and candid throughout the interviews.

They served in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, with grave lengths taken to identify other Vietnam veterans from other branches of the American military. All of the veterans
interviewed were primarily infantrymen with Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) of 0311 for Marines and 11B for Army soldiers. There were additional MOS assigned to several of these veterans, which was excluded for being insignificant to the context of this project. All were enlisted men with over half being high school graduates and their age range from seventeen to twenty-three years old at enlistment. Upon entering the battlefield their average age was 24. Their high regard for family and finance calculated half joining the military for remittance, while the remaining for a variety of other reasons. Their service dates in Vietnam ranges from May 1965 to August 1971. Several did not spend their entire tour of thirteen months for reasons of being severely wounded and had to be medically evacuated (medivac) back to the United States for ample treatment. Two of the veterans spent three tours in Vietnam and one extended for an additional four months. The heroism of these Pacific Islanders pertinent to their awards is declared in their notable war biography.

As part of my MA studies, I acquired funding from the Kamehameha Schools and the Na Nei Tou I Loloma Foundation which enabled me to travel to and interview Vietnam War veterans in American Samoa in summer 2011.

On May 23, 2011, at 4:40 p.m., I boarded Hawaiian Airlines flight 465 at the Honolulu International Airport, Hawai‘i, for the five hour flight on my first trip to American Samoa. With limited daylight remaining, we taxied pass the Hickam Golf Course with coconut trees dancing in the wind. Heading into slight trade winds with clear skies, our aircraft lifted off as we headed south, having Diamond Head crater at our left and with the beautiful setting sun on the right side of the aircraft. We climb to an altitude of about 39,000 feet and leveled off. All is well as our aircraft cuts through the invisible mass of air displaying its awe-inspiring strength. There were about 200 plus passengers on board, most of who were Samoans. In the seat next to
me is a female undergraduate student at the University of Mānoa in Hawai‘i, majoring in film production. She is returning home for the summer and will be a study-abroad student in England in the fall. Her mother is the Commanding Officer for the National Guard Reserve unit in American Samoa. Amongst other passengers I also noticed a papālagi female soldier in U.S. Army fatigue uniform. I was curious as to why she was traveling to American Samoa. Was it because of a family emergency, or on specific military assignment? I was determined to unravel the mystery of my curiosity upon reaching Pago Pago. About four and a half hours into the flight we buckled up for the descent to Tāfuna International Airport. All are anxious and braced for landing. It is night and house lights appeared on the left side of the aircraft, with a slight jot from the aircraft that confirms our safe landing. There was a loud cheer and many of the tired and half-asleep passengers were stretching their arms skyward, replacing their sleepy faces with cheerful and enthusiastic smiles in jubilation as the aircraft came to a stop.

We disembarked down the aircraft’s stair ramp to the asphalt tarmac and walked to the airport terminal that was filled with awaiting passengers for the turn-around flight back to Hawai‘i. The ambient air was humid and sticky with slight winds as we transient through customs. The customs process was slow, but I managed to be patient and finally cleared customs. Thankfully the Avis rental car cubicle was located in close proximity to the entry/exit of the customs inspection station. After informing the Avis representative that I was Hawaiian and could not speak Samoan, she switched from Samoan to the English language. I found relief from the humidity through the vehicle’s air conditioner as I oriented myself to locate “Sadie’s By the Sea Hotel”, which will be my billeting for the duration of my research period here in American Samoa.

As I exited the airport parking lot area, I felt nervous about my direction to Sadie’s Hotel,
since I was unfamiliar with the island. I saw a McDonald’s Restaurant and stop in to get something to eat with hopes of confirming my directions to Sadie's Hotel. I finally located my Hotel, took a nice shower, and relaxed on the patio, listening to the sound of lapping waves along the sandy shoreline fronting my hotel room. Exhausted I went to bed having thoughts about my research project as I slowly drifted to sleep. I had a difficult time sleeping due to being unfamiliar with my hotel room and the environment.

Soon vehicle noises echoed within the room, I glanced at the clock that reminded me of five hours of sleep. I made a cup of coffee and sat out on the patio, enjoying the cool Pacific breeze that reminded me of my home village on Maui. This is paradise with beautiful Pago Pago Bay at my doorstep. The leaves of the coconut palms begin to move gracefully with the wind, like maidens performing a traditional Polynesian dance. A group of young adults were swimming and playing in the ocean waters enjoying the beginning of summer. I was curious about what it was like for the young Samoan lads, some forty plus years earlier, taking their last swim as they set out to join the American military.

With permissions from the Veterans Affairs office (VA) in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, I drove back in the airport direction where the Veterans Affairs Center on Tutuila is located to meet with the administrator Johnny Mapu. Mr. Mapu is a former United States army captain, whose father was also a Vietnam War veteran. He assisted me with the research interview process at his VA clinic, as we discussed my itinerary for the next couple of days. I was also introduced to Dr. Uhrle, a native Samoan and the clinics only physician, and other staff members who were hospitable and enthusiastic about my "thesis project". Mr. Mapu instructed me to return at 8:00 am the following morning and requested a short presentation about the significance of my project to all the veterans scheduled to attend.
As I exited the VA clinic I discovered a U.S. Military Post Exchange (PX) adjacent to the clinic and patronized it for some bottled water and other personal items. This PX facility confirms the support by the United States government to assist our active duty, reserve, and retired military personnel and their dependents with such privileges they deserve far south of the equator.

Departing the VA complex I headed back to my hotel, catching sight of a Kentucky Fried Chicken establishment and took advantage to grab some food for dinner. I drove pass Sadie’s Hotel to view first hand beautiful Pago Pago Bay. As I continued driving along Pago Pago Bay, I came across the Star-Kist Tuna Factory. The stench of fish filled the ambient air as a hundred or so employees casually crossed the roadway. It appeared that a work-shift change was in progress. From my inquiry with an employee of the factory, this Star-Kist Tuna Factory is one of the two main employment opportunities for Samoans of both Samoas and is the only fish cannery in existence today in American Samoa (Howard 1989: 30). I returned to my hotel room to do report writing and prepare myself for the next day’s impromptu presentation.

The following morning I was introduced to the veteran group, which consisted of veterans from the Korean, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf Wars. There were no uniform, no rank and no formation, just casual atmosphere of social gathering. At a glance across the room I felt as if I knew them all along. We needed no one to stand in front or instruct us as to what to do. We knew what had to be done, what must be done and why it needed to be done. These were experts in their own field, survivors of three wars and soldiers that replicated their ancestral warrior-ship traditions. These are soldiers that without a doubt volunteered to defend their native land. At the completion of my short presentation regarding my “thesis project”, someone yells
out "finally someone cared enough to document our experiences in America’s military and Vietnam.” “This is for you, your family and for all Samoan soldiers of yesterday, today and tomorrow,” I replied.

After completing the interviews on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, it was difficult to sleep at nights from the effects of war trauma. I over looked the fact of being affected by the veterans’ war stories. I needed to get some sleep and pull through from this unexpected distress. Without questioning the better part of my judgment and recollecting on the lessons of the Post Traumatic Stress Residential Rehabilitation Program (PRRP) at Hilo, Hawai‘i in 1999 and 2001, a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) rehab and treatment program established and conducted by the Veteran Affairs for those suffering from war trauma in Vietnam, I decided to cancel all future research activities. Unaware as to the extent, nature and cost of this complexity, I stood firm with the decision to return to Hawai‘i. Before departing American Samoa on Memorial Day I made plans to pay reverence to the “fallen soldiers” buried at Satala Cemetery. After the ceremony I toured the western end of Tutuila Island before returning to the airport for my return flight to Hawai‘i.

On July 4th, feeling rested and in control of the demons within me, I ventured back to American Samoa to finish my research project. Upon completion of my research interviews in American Samoa, I traveled to Independent Samoa on 8 July to interview two other Vietnam veterans. These veterans did not show up, so I took a scenic drive around Upolu to relax and enjoy the remainder of my stay. I returned to Tutuila, American Samoa on 11 July and waited patiently for ten hours for my return flight back to Hawai‘i.
After that trip, and requiring some rest, I took time off from my studies and travelled to Rapid City South Dakota on 6 August 2011. I went with some friends from San Francisco, California to assist another friend relocate to California. We took advantage of our time there to visit the Black Hills scenic points and the Harley Davidson motorcycle Mecca at Sturgis, where thousands of motorcycle enthusiasts lined the streets of Sturgis all displaying logos of their motorcycle clubs and cities of origin. Several displayed logos depicting the Vietnam War engraved on their denim, or leather jackets. Brilliant and luster Harley Davidson motorcycles were parked within the main and adjacent streets of the city. My attention was drawn to the sexagenarian group and the display of miniature “American and the black and white POW/MIA” flags attached to many of the motorcycles. These motorcycle enthusiasts were there, not only to enjoy the scenery, but also to show off their patriotism towards our great American Nation. Perhaps many of them still carry troubling memories of the Vietnam War.

We then visited Mount Rushmore, where the walkway was lined with the flags of every U.S. state and territory. Being a Native Hawaiian, I was proud to see the Hawai‘i State flag flatter in flamboyant display. I also saw the American Samoan flag. Also there, on this expedition were numerous motorcyclists who joined us at the outskirts of Sturgis. Together, we were awed and enjoyed the giant sculptures of former U.S. Presidents, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln.

We departed South Dakota en route to California. The breathtaking view of widespread farm lands captivated my spirit. I thought about how fortunate we were as Americans to have such beautiful landscape. I also reflected on how thousands of young men and women died in wars to protect this landscape and the ideals that come with it. I could only imagine how difficult
it must have been for young men to leave this beautiful landscape to fight in Vietnam and never to return.

As we crossed the border into Utah, I thought of what Johnny Mapu in Tutuila, American Samoa, told me about how many American Samoans had migrated to Utah in the hopes of finding employment, or attending college at the University of Utah. I was hoping to meet some Samoans along the way. Instead, at a rest-stop, we met a Tongan couple who was also traveling to California. I was curious as to why and how this Tongan couple was in Utah. They were probably in the U.S. to live the American dream. We bid them farewell and continued our journey to California.

On August 24, I farewell my friends with hopes of seeing them again and made my way through the customs screening at San Francisco International Airport. Once inside, I readjusted my Vietnam War Veteran baseball cap and scanned the concessions for something to eat, while awaiting my flight to Hawai‘i. At the restaurant I was greeted by another Vietnam War veteran who was from Texas. As we talked, I found out that he had just returned from a trip to Vietnam. I asked him why he went back to Vietnam. “To put closure to the suffering and pains that I had for years from my tour in Vietnam,” he said, with deep reflection on his face. We shook hands and ‘welcomed each other home’, while reflecting on the many others who never made it home. Shortly afterwards, we bid each other farewell and went our separate ways. As I sat alone and reflected on my trips to American Samoa, Independent Samoa, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah and California, it made me feel indebted to those who sacrificed their lives for the freedom that I and the rest of all America now enjoy.
For this project, I interviewed nine Vietnam War veterans: (i) Saofaigaoalii Saofaigaoalii Jr.; (ii) Maanaima Lang; (iii) Kilikiti V. Aulaumea; (iv) Mataio S. Tiapula; (v) John F. Pedro; (vi) Ketesemane M. Meaole; (vii) Fanuatanu F. Mamea; (viii) Moses L. Katina; and, (ix) Navy M. Suiaunoa.

I am privileged to have had the opportunity to document the oral stories of these veterans of the same war that I participated in. Regardless of being an insider/outsider, I sincerely wanted to prevent being too aggressive and demanding in obtaining information for my thesis project. The project itself is a small contribution to Samoan history. Nevertheless I hope that it will contribute to Samoan reflection and participations in the Vietnam War.

Prior to the interviews, all the veterans interviewed for this project were unknown to me with the exception of Master Gunnery Sergeant Navy Suiaunoa. Each veteran’s story was based on recollections years after war’s end. The span of years from the war dimmed their collective memory. Most were able to recall the details of their experiences with specific names, dates and times. Relying on the approximate was sufficient. They tried their utmost to reveal their experiences at best with dignity and honor.

**Saofaigaoalii Saofaigaoalii Jr.**

No Photograph

Awarded the Purple Heart (Confirmed)

Born into the world of *fa‘asamoa* (the Samoan way) Saofaigaoalii Saofaigaoalii Jr. found his way to San Francisco, California from his village of Afono on Tutuila Island in American
Samoa in hopes of finding a good job. However, even with a high school diploma he discovered it was difficult to land a job in San Francisco. During my interview with Saofaigaaoalii I did not determine what year he departed American Samoa for San Francisco, California.

He was 23 years old, and having heard about the Vietnam War, decided to enlist into the U.S. military. He wasn’t sure which branch of military service to join, but when he went to enlist he noticed that Marine Corps had the shortest line, so he decided to join them. He was then sent to Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot San Diego, California, for the grueling recruit training (boot camp). Having earned the eagle, globe, and anchor emblem of the U.S. Marine Corps at the completion of boot camp, Saofaigaaoalii was assigned as an infantryman (0311). This was the most dangerous specialty in the Marine Corps.

Private First Class (PFC) Saofaigaaoalii Jr. wanted to go to Vietnam. After completion of his pre-war training at Camp Pendleton, California, he arrived in Vietnam in September 1968. He was assigned to Kilo Company 3rd Battalion 7th Marines. In September of 1970 he was shot in the right leg and was evacuated to Camp Pendleton Naval Hospital in California for treatment. In spite of his wound, he was granted another four years of enlistment in recognition of his determination and dedication to continue to serve the military.

On his return from Vietnam, Saofaigaaoalii Jr was troubled by the fact that he left behind other wounded members of his platoon. The memories of the war took a toll on him. He sought the help of family members and other Vietnam veterans to cope with the constant reminders of the war in Vietnam and to readjust to civilian life.

When I interviewed him, he would often pause during our conversation. I could see that this proud Samoan was struggling to deal with the pain of past memories. With a sigh that showed deep reflection, he said, “I was only trying to protect myself and fellow Marines. I had
no choice, either kill or be killed. I had a job to do. God says ‘Don't kill’, but I had to do it. America wanted and ordered me to kill. I am so sorry for my war actions. I killed those people. I even had to re-dig dead bodies to get an accurate count, of which I was ordered by an officer. The stench was bad.” These memories were complicated by the protests in the U.S. against the Vietnam War.

In August 1973 he was discharged from the Marine Corps with the rank of sergeant. Following this discharge he found it difficult to secure a job, and received no assistance from either the United States or the American Samoan government.

Saofaigaoalii Jr. is now retired and lives on Tutuila in American Samoa with his wife, daughter, and three grandchildren. He continues to go to the Veteran Affairs Center to assist other veterans in coping with their issues of combat in Vietnam. He often says to his wife, daughter and grandchildren, “I am sorry for my actions. Don’t think of me as a bad person. I love you.” And he wants the American Samoan government to, “Make sure to take care of veterans. Help them out!” When asked how he felt about the Vietnamese people, he replied, “I felt comfortable. They have the same lifestyle as in Samoa. They also had bananas, bamboo and fishing was common.”

In absence of the President of the United States of America, Saofaigaoalii, Saofaigaoalii Jr. Unit commander awarded him the Purple Heart for injury he sustained while engaged in battle against the indomitable and hostile enemy forces in South Vietnam.
As Maanaima Lang watched some of his friends being incarcerated for law infractions, he decided then that he needed to get away and seek a better life that he deserved. Maanaima Lang is from the village of Leone on Tutuila Island in American Samoa. He traveled to Hawai‘i (unknown date) to visit family and with hopes of seeking a job or enlisting into the U.S. military. He remained in Hawai‘i for a month before moving on to San Francisco, California to reside with his sister. His was eager to join the U.S. Marines and was also encouraged by other relatives already in the Marine Corps. On August 2, 1965, at the age of 20 years old and with a high school diploma, he enlisted for four years into the U.S. Marine Corps. As with other inductees into the Marine Corps residing on the west coast of the United States, he was sent to Marine Recruit Training Depot at San Diego. When I asked him about his experiences in boot camp, he responded, “It changed my whole life. My freedom was taken away and there were lots of yelling from the drill instructors and other recruits, but I made it through. I was so proud of being
a Marine. They made a man out me. I learned how to survive, both in the military, as well as, in civilian life.”

After boot camp, he was assigned to be an infantryman (0311) in the Marine Corps. He received orders for Vietnam in November 1965. He saw it as a great overseas assignment. As with most marines during the initial stage of the Vietnam War, he had no knowledge about Vietnam, or where it was. In 1965 major units of U.S. Marines and Army soldiers landed on the beaches at Da Nang, Vietnam. Arriving by sea, thousand of troops were dispatched to shore in small navy landing crafts, reminiscent to the D-Day landing at Normandy in WWII.

Lang arrived in Da Nang, Vietnam, in December 1965 with India Company 3rd Battalion 9th Marines. Soon thereafter, his unit was reassigned from Da Nang to An Hoa, near the demarcation line that separated North and South Vietnam. Lang’s first impression of the Vietnamese people was quite accepting, as he puts it, “In some ways we all resemble one another.” A month following his unit’s arrival in An Hoa, they encountered fierce constant battles with the enemy. Countless Marines were killed. He said that he saw friends being killed, dead bodies lying around, while Marines were eating chow. Back home these bodies would have been buried. Week after week, month after month countless Marines were dying.

In April 1966, Lang was wounded when shrapnel from an exploding grenade entered his back. He was evacuated (medivac) back to Da Nang Hospital for treatment. After recovering, he requested and was granted permission to return to his unit. On “Labor Day”, September 3, 1966, Lang was assigned as the unit’s point man. Being the forerunner on every patrol he was shot in the left leg and stomach area. He said that during that incident, his best friend, John O’Conner, was also shot and killed. He said it was painful to see his best friend die beside him. He was again medivac to Da Nang Hospital and later rushed to the U.S. military hospital at Clark Air
Force Base in the Philippines. Lang was later transported to Oakland Naval Hospital in California due to the serious nature of his wounds. During the interview, we took a moment of silence to pay tribute to John O’Conner and other Marine brothers we lost to Vietnam. After this brief silence, Lang revealed the scars of his wounds and his amputated left leg.

While on convalescent leave he stayed with his parents and other relatives in Oakland, California, until he received his military medical discharge. Despite his wounds and experiences in Vietnam, Maanaima went on to find a job as a small-arms weapon repairman in Seattle, Washington. This was a job he did for twenty-four years. He told me that after Vietnam, “Life was difficult to handle. I used the G.I. Bill to go to college, but dropped out after a year. . . the United States gave us veterans some benefits, but the Samoan government gave us none. . . Oftentimes, I felt lost, distant and traumatized, but I was happy to be home.”
The following is a copy of his Bronze Star award citation.

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the BRONZE STAR MEDAL to
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS MAANAIMA LANG
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
for service as set forth in the following
CITATION:

For heroic achievement in connection with operations against insurgent communist (Viet Cong) forces while serving with Company I, Third Battalion, Ninth Marines in the Republic of Vietnam. On 3 September 1966, during a search and destroy mission, Private First Class Lang's squad was returning to the Company area from a reconnaissance patrol. As the squad rounded a curve in the trail, it was brought under heavy enemy fire from its front and left flank. In his position as the point element, Private First Class Lang was wounded along with two men who were near him. Despite serious wounds he continued to give suppressive fire and provide effective cover for the two wounded Marines. When corpsmen arrived, he refused medical treatment for himself, continuing to provide covering fire until the other wounded were cared for and the rest of his unit could move up and destroy the ambush. Due to his concern for his fellow Marines and complete disregard for his own safety, the enemy threat was broken with no further casualties. Private First Class Lang's indomitable courage, initiative, and exemplary devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

The Combat Distinguishing Device is authorized.

For the President,

[Signature]
Commandant of the Marine Corps
After countless years in the United States, Mr. Lang returned to American Samoa. However, instead of retiring, he continued to work, this time for the U.S. Post Office on Tutuila. During the interview, Maanaima said that he would never quit, despite years of dealing with his painful memories and wounds. It was determination and his deep faith in God that assisted him to overcome the many obstacles and traumas he faced after Vietnam. In reflecting on his experiences in Vietnam, Maanaima said,

“I often recollect about the war and the close encounters with the enemy. I have no regrets about the war. I have one son in the Army and I am proud of him and want him to make it a career. For all my children, live life to the fullest and pray to God in thick and thin. Life is rough. Pray always, as you ask others to pray for you and believe in: our Nation, our Church and your fellow-Samoans. For my sons: Naima and Roger in Seattle, Maanaima at the University of New Mexico Institute and Pat at the University of Missouri (SMT) ‘Succeed for success and take care of the family.’”

Again in the interview, Maanaima expressed his deep concern for all veterans and said that he wished the American Samoan Government recognize them for their services. For his prowess and gallant service in Vietnam, he was awarded the Bronze Star w/Combat “V” and in absence of the President of the United States of America, Maanaima Lang was awarded two Purple Hearts by his unit commanders for his injuries sustained in combat against the indomitable enemy forces in South Vietnam.

His prosthetic left leg and other wounds went unnoticed throughout all these years. He is now retired and lives with his wife in his native village of Leone, American Samoa. He also holds the prestigious position of Matai Ali’i (High Chief) of Leone village. In addition, he is a
Deacon of his parish. He has become a leader in his community, despite his horrific experiences in Vietnam.

Kilikiti V. (John) Aulaumea

When we sat down for the interview, John Kilikiti Aulaumea reminded me of a friend in Vietnam. His great smile turned serious when he started answering my questions. His answers were candid and reflective. I could tell that John had been through a lot in life, mainly trying to unravel his experience in Vietnam. He, like other new arrivals in Vietnam, feared the potential of being killed at anytime. The flares at night were a constant reminder that the enemy was always lurking nearby, willing and able to kill you, because you are an American. For me, listening to John was a special privilege. I watched him desperately trying to recall incidents, dates, and times. I could see that his efforts were strenuous, and gave his best to recall what happened to him in Vietnam. John had experienced the “silent scare”, death that haunts you for just being in Vietnam. As author Joseph Callaway explained in his book *Mekong First Light*, “this created morbid fear and a profound horror; it also fed our hatred of the enemy and propagated angry inhumane retaliation… I can easily understand why countless men who returned home
experienced severe mental problems readjusting to normal society.’’(Callaway Jr. 2004: 74).

Countless Vietnam veterans can attest to such, but for those that have not experienced combat, or the nature of it, they will never know, nor understand veterans like John and others.

Johnny did not have to enlist in the military because he was a “sole surviving son” of his family (Exemptions for Combat Duty: Sole Surviving Son or Daughter Status, http://usmilitary.about.com/od/army/a/combatexempt.htm.accessed 7 March 2012). But he decided to do so anyway.

Before enlisting, this Scottish Samoan from the village of Leone on Tutuila Island in American Samoa had a choice whether to enlist into the U.S. Marine Corps as with other family members or choose another branch of military service. But, as John confidently stated, “I didn’t want to die early so the Army was my best choice of service.” Out of patriotism and a sense of duty wanting to do his part in the war, he enlisted for three years into the U.S. Army on May 3, 1966 at Los Angeles, California. While being employed at the Army and Air Force Exchange System (AAFES) for 16 months before enlisting. His immediate supervisor, a Marine Captain, told him, as John recalled, “You made the right choice to join and now the right choice to go to Vietnam.”

He fulfilled his basic training at Fort Bliss, Texas, and was assigned as an infantryman (11B). He was transferred to Fort Ord in California for Advance Infantry Training (AIT) as he waited his time to be sent to Vietnam.

On March 15, 1968, John arrived in Vietnam on a plane with other men who were complete strangers. He was then sent to a unit in Quang Tri Province, just south of the DMZ. From the start, things did not look good for John. The transport helicopter dropped John and several other soldiers at an empty landing strip with no one to greet them. They made their way
down a lone path and fortunately ran into friendly American soldiers. Like countless other soldiers, John survived Vietnam and departed in November 1968. He took leave to be with his family, but things started to twist in his life as he began fighting the presence of death that still haunted him, though he was well distant and free from the dreadfulness of war in South Vietnam. In April 1969, John was discharged from the U.S. Army.

The friend that John reminded me of was one, who after two months in Vietnam was fatigued and full of grief from sporadic nightly mortar attacks on our “home on the hill” from the Communist Vietnamese (VC). This was despite us having air superiority. The constant bombardment from our air-support, dropping tons of bombs, seemed unable to deter the invincible enemy. From lack of sleep, not knowing where to hide, and from frustration, you lose control of your faculties and succumb to numbness. Consequently, the journey home and back into civilian life is always long and complicated. From the perspective of Vietnam War veterans, we encountered a lot that civilians take for granted, do not understand and underestimate the value of “Freedom”.

To cope and readjust into civilian society, John took advantage of the G.I. Bill and attempted college, while relying on this small educational stipend to survive. In 1972 to 1974 he was employed by McDonald Douglas Aircraft Industry, providing him with an edge to get on with life. He remained in California until 1988 when he made the decision to return to his home in American Samoa. Having reestablished himself and family, he took an extraordinary trip during the holiday season of 2010 to return to Vietnam. To a time and place in his earlier life that was filled with fighting, fear, and destruction. To find peace and relief from the pain and sorrows that had burdened him over the years.
He is medically retired from the Veterans Affairs and holds the title of Matai Tulafale (Talking Chief) in his village of Leone. John wants his children to, “Remember me always as a kind person. Life is beautiful so make the best out of it and stay out of trouble.” Joining the Calvary of Vietnam Veterans motorcycle enthusiasts, John takes to freedom on his Harley Davidson motorcycle in American Samoa.

Mataio S. Tiapula
Courtesy photo

A soft-spoken soldier, Mataio Tiapula was able to distance himself from the war after departing Vietnam. He concentrated on his skills of soldiering by focusing his attention on the particular challenges of his duties. He remained in the military after his initial fours years of obligated enlistment, earning him a service retirement after twenty years of honorable and faithful service. “My grandfather was a Fita Fita (Old Marine Guard) during WWII and I was
and still am so proud of him. I hope too, my grandchildren will understand and see the values of the military and of why I joined,” he said.

Since there was no recruiting station in American Samoa at the time of his enlistment in 1965, he left his family and friends behind in his village of Aloa on Tutuila Island, American Samoa at the age of nineteen years old. He traveled to San Francisco, California to reside with his cousin and enlist into the U.S. Army. He said he joined the Army because he had a lot of relatives already in the Marine Corps, and more so, admired the army uniform. He enlisted into the U.S. Army on 17 January 1967. He attended both basic training and advance infantry training (AIT) at Fort Lewis, Washington, where he was the only Samoan in the company and got along fine with the other trainees. Assigned an MOS of infantryman (11B), thereafter, he was sent to Fort Hood, Texas for mortar-man training receiving an additional MOS of (11C).

Against the wishes of his father for going to Vietnam, Mataio volunteered for orders to Vietnam. Upon receiving his request for duty in Vietnam, his command immediately assigned him to Vietnam arriving in March 1968. During our conversation and after a deep sigh, I let him recollect his experiences in Vietnam. He took a deep breath, exhaled slowly, and recounted his experiences:

“After arriving in Vietnam, I was stationed close to the Cambodian border west of Saigon with the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry at Tau Tieng. I was always cautious around the Vietnamese people, never putting my guard down. My platoon sergeant (Sgt. Steele) and I were close friends, and I recall him wanting to be a commercial pilot when he returns to the “States,” for he had a bachelor’s degree. The one thing that bothers me the most is that I did not report the burning of 129 bodies of which he refrained to comment and I respected any further comments to this incident, location and circumstances. Since then, I dealt with anger,
drank a lot and stopped going to church. Above it all, I even extended my tour for another six months, rotating out of Vietnam in November 1969. I came home for leave while still stationed in Vietnam and met my wife. I also saw the protesting going on; those people do not understand that we were helping the Vietnamese fight communism. However, they didn’t bother me. What bothered me since Vietnam was the smell of burning grass. It takes me back to Vietnam. Over the years, I have learned how to deal with it, and now it does not bother me as much.”

Staff Sergeant Mataio Tiapula, after receiving his retirement from the military on 31 January 1987, returned to his native island of Tutuila in American Samoa. In addition to his retirement from the military, he now receives 100 percent disability from the Veterans Affairs. He has four daughters; two are currently serving in the U.S. military, and two sons, one of whom is in the Army Reserves in Tāfuna and attending the Police Academy in Pago Pago, American Samoa. He also encourages his grandchildren to understand the values of the military and as to why he joined the military himself. For his heroic action and gallant service in the Republic of South Vietnam, SSG Mataio Tiapula was awarded the Bronze Star.
With family members already in the American military, John Pedro followed their example and enlisted. He had four brothers in the U.S. Marine Corps, one sister and two brothers in the U.S. Army. John joined his family of dedicated and honorable service members in the military, adding to their total combined years of service with three of his own. He completed high school in 1968 at the age of 18 years old. He then bid farewell to his aunty whom he was residing with in Hawai‘i, and joined the “All Hawai‘i Company” of Marines destined for recruit training at San Diego, California. Similar to his brothers that preceded him into the Marine Corps, John endured the strenuous and grueling training that instilled discipline, which he would soon discover that Marines in Vietnam depended upon to survive the war. After graduating from boot camp, John was assigned as an infantryman and sent to test his skill to qualify with the Marines Corps elite Reconnaissance Marines (Recon). Having survived the arduous prerequisites of parachutist and scuba training, John’s endurance earned him the privilege of displaying the
gold parachutist wing and black scuba emblems on his uniform, significant only to the elite Marine Corps recon members with MOS of 8654.

Having completed other vigorous and vital tactics training, aside from his reconnaissance prerequisites, John began training to participate in reconnaissance activities on gaining information on the enemy. Thus, it was no surprise to John and fellow recon members that they would soon be destined for Vietnam.

On January 9, 1971, John and his best friend, Private Howard Peleholani (another Pacific Islander from Hawai‘i), arrived in Vietnam and was assigned to Delta Company of the infamous 1st Battalion 9th Marines, bravado for its combat history in Vietnam and epithet of “The Walking Dead.” His initial encounters with the Vietnamese people were friendly. However, as the carnage of war crosses the threshold of insanity, he began to hate the Vietnamese. On a routine patrol to gain intelligence on enemy movements, John’s small patrol faced hostile enemy fire, wounding him above the left eye. While recovering from his wound and being processed to return to the continental United States, John was informed of the death of his best friend in Vietnam, Howard Peleholani.

When he returned to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, John was tasked with standing guard duty at the main entrance to the base. He was now confronted by protestors demonstrating against the Vietnam War and men like him. He had left a war in Vietnam, only to face another at home. In spite of this, during our conversation, John did not comment on the demonstrators at the main gate of Camp Pendleton. I shared my experience with John and told him that when I returned from Vietnam, I too stood guard duty along that same fence line at the entrance of Camp Pendleton. With new uniforms issued to us upon our arrival at Camp Margarita from Vietnam, all non-commissioned officers (NCOs) awaiting orders for leave or
other reassignments were ordered to guard duty at the main gate. I still recall a woman protestor squatting and urinating in a round vehicle hubcap, then throwing the urine she excreted at me and the two other marines on either side of me.

After being discharged, John returned to Hawai‘i. He remitted the remaining monies he had to his relatives back in American Samoa. He returned to civilian life, but began to show significant signs of trauma and uncertainty. As a way to suppress the anger, aggression, and grief, he resorted to drinking. Consequently, he got into trouble with the law, and his employment record was blemished with poor performance. As he recounted, “I even had a good job as a mechanic on a tug boat and I just walked off.”

On returning to American Samoa (year unknown), the dense foliage of Tutuila constantly reminded John of Vietnam. He felt uncomfortable to live in a wooden structure dwelling. His silent cry for help evaporated with every breath. Trained to survive and avoid capture, he retreated into the dense forest above his home village of Matu‘u on Tutuila Island and remained recluse from society for an unknown length of time. Gathering his thoughts and reclaiming his spirit, he reemerged with the discipline and courage to defend his right to freedom; the freedom he earned, the freedom he fought for, and the freedom he deserve.

He wants his family to understand his actions as he continues to push forward one step at a time. He is now retired from the Veteran Affairs and resides with his wife and children in Matu‘u on Tutuila Island in American Samoa. He continues to battle with the memories of war. Whenever he hears the word “Vietnam”, or periodically glances at a particular scratch on his arm, which is significant to a personal incident he encountered in the war, they take him back to Vietnam.
In absence of the President of the United States of America, his Unit Commander awarded John Fred Pedro the Purple Heart for the injury he received, while engaged against hostile enemy forces in South Vietnam.

Ketesemane M. Meaole

Courtesy photo

A decade before I enlisted into the U.S. Marine Corps, Ketesemane Meaole was already a proud Marine Recruit earning the Eagle, Globe and Anchor emblem and the honor to proudly claim the title of “Marine”. This hard-core Marine displayed his indomitable Samoan courage, leadership, and exemplary devotion to duty beyond his native home and gained America’s trust. As he proudly says, “I am dedicated and [would] rather die in combat than in the street.”

Ketesemane, longing to make it known to others the Marine Corps slogan, “Once a Marine, Always a Marine” proudly wears his scarlet colored hat with the words, “UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS ‘RETIRED” engraved in gold. He is a man who takes positive action, yet he is compassionate and humble with very high esteem amongst Marines.

I had the honor and privilege to interview this Marine who has taught me Samoan history and culture beyond the books that I read for this project. Ketesemane is from the village of Amanave. He and his family left Samoa in 1952 for Hawai‘i and then to Oxnard, California,
because his father worked for the U.S. Navy. His father was a member of the elite *Fita Fita* Guard and employed by the medical department of United States Navy, while the Navy was still in control of Pago Pago Bay, during WW II. Circumcision was his father’s specialty, of which he performed on countless Samoan infant males. Many of the families seeking his father’s expertise could not afford monetary payments for their child’s medical procedure, instead made payment with food crops, vegetables, livestock, and seafood. However, Often times Ketesemane’s father would refuse to accept the gifts, offering his services for free.

As the Department of Interior assumed command of the Navy’s responsibilities in American Samoa, Ketesemane and his family was relocated to Hawai’i aboard the USS *Jackson* on July 22, 1952, where he attended Pearl Harbor Elementary School. From Hawai’i his family relocated to Oxnard, California where his father was reassigned to Port Hueneme U.S. Navy Medical Department. Shortly after graduating from Oxnard High School in May 1959, and being tough throughout his youth, Ketesemane was encouraged by his father, whom he loved and respected, to join the Marine Corps. In addition to his father’s encouragement, Ketesemane, desiring to give back to his family and wanting them to feel happy and proud for him, ventured into the disciplinary and regimented U.S. Marine Corps. At the age of seventeen Ketesemane reported to the Second Recruit Training Battalion at San Diego, California to test his tough persona. “I was made for it,” he states. In commenting about his boot camp experience, he looked at me and said, “It was tough, but I paved the way and left the grassy (sand) area around those Quonset huts for the rest of you guys to take charge.” Upon graduation, he was sent to Camp Pendleton, California to resume training as an infantryman (0311).
As word of “Vietnam” was circulating amongst the military communities, Ketesemane could not control his desire and enthusiasm to be involved. He received his orders to Vietnam with the First Marine Brigade, one of the first Marine detachments to arrive on Vietnamese soil on May 7, 1965. His unit was ordered to secure and defend the southern coastal area of Chu Lai. I gathered from his memoirs that his first tour of duty with the First Marine Brigade was heartrending. With a tidbit of humor between the two of us to ease the tension within the ambient air, he blurted out, “I even wore my Lava Lava on patrols.” We continued on with the interview. He did not trust the Vietnamese people, because they were putting glass in food, and as such, he did not care for their food anyway. Keeping in communication with his family was complicated, but oftentimes he would write home on “C-ration” box covers to let them know that he was fine and still alive. As he stated, “If I died, at least my family will know I died with honors.” He rotated back to the United States a year later in 1966. Still hard-charging and “Gung Ho” he requested and received orders to return to Vietnam in 1968. This time being assigned to the 26th Marines stationed at Da Nang, Vietnam. He was there for a short two month period before being ordered back to the United States. Another two years had passed as he patiently awaited a third assignment to Vietnam.

Having to deal with the changes in the U.S., especially the politics around the Vietnam War and the growing protests against it, Ketesemane maintained his discipline and composure and proudly displayed his Marine virtues. His expertise to train Marines for duty in Vietnam restricted and delayed his request for a third tour in “Nam.” When he was about to give up on the idea that he would be reassigned back to Vietnam, his request was finally approved. His third and final tour landed him within the infamous 5th Marines on Hill 34 and Landing Zone (LZ) “Ross”, just north of Da Nang. He was there from 1970 to 1971.
Returning home in 1971, after his third tour in Vietnam conveyed both happy and sad moments as he remembered his fellow-Marine buddies in combat throughout his tours in Vietnam and a heartfelt memory of his best friend and Samoan Platoon Sergeant, Atapana Tagaleoo, who he lost track of after they separated in Vietnam. He was finally convinced to retire from the Corps he loved and respected. The Corps that fulfilled his destiny by sending him to and from combat, not once, but three times and the Corps which tested his survival skills and expecting no less from his troops.

So many Marines will continue to mention this “Marine of Marines” as he accepted his retirement on May 31, 1979, as a proud Gunnery Sergeant of Marines. He then headed home to his Native American Samoa. As he flew high above the trans-Pacific Ocean, the same ocean he repeatedly sailed on, or flew over on his way to combat; he lay somber to the thoughts of his comrades that did not make it home.

He resides on both American Samoa and Independent Samoa with his family, receiving his military retirement and 100 percent VA disability. Today, he continues to serve his people in Samoa by volunteering at the Lyndon B. Johnson Hospital on Tutuila Island. His legacy lives on, as he has a son and daughter in the U.S. military. He reminds his children to learn as much as possible, to always respect and help others, to live life to the fullest, and recognize him as a dedicated Marine who was proud to serve.

I had the distinctive honor and privilege of meeting his wife and three daughters who traveled to Tāfuna Airport to bid me farewell. From my insight, they are the invaluable source of Ketesemane’s steadfastness with the love and compassion his family displayed. It was the true love in their faces that I witnessed of having their father and husband home. I will forever
remember Gysgt Ketesemanë Meaole by his unique exemplary personality of being a born leader and a hard-charging Marine.

**Fauatanu F. Mamea**

*Courtesy photo*

![Photo of Fauatanu F. Mamea](image)

**Awarded:**

1 Bronze Stars w/combat “V” (Confirmed)  
2 Purple Hearts (Confirmed)

Fauatanu Mamea and I exchanged stories about our tour as ‘drill instructors’ during a period in our military career. I listened to his incredible experiences in the U.S military, his brave combat encounters in Vietnam, and perseverance to fulfill his twenty years of dedicated military service, that earned him a medical and full retirement from the United States Army. He is a soft-spoken Samoan who is the descendant of a warrior family from Fitiutua Village on Manu'a, American Samoa. At a very young age he watched and was impressed by the U.S. Marines who were on Manu'a Islands during their defensive occupation of American Samoa in WWII. He had since wanted to join the U.S. military. However, that did not happen until he was twenty-two years old.
He journeyed to Hawai‘i in 1963 to fulfill his quest of being an infantry man in the American military. On January 10, 1964, he joined the first “All Hawai‘i Company” of the United States Army destined for basic training at Fort Ord, California. He said, “I expected basic training to be grueling and stringent, but was disappointed. I felt basic training was childish and everyone knew that it was part of the program. Though the training was typically harassment, it was important and beneficial to all of us that were heading for combat in Vietnam.” He remained at Fort Ord to complete his Advance Infantry Training (AIT) and was transferred to his first permanent duty station as an infantry man (11B).

As the war in Vietnam escalated, the U.S. government committed more troops into South Vietnam in an attempt to stop the advance of the aggressive communist forces. The first of Mamea’s three tours in Vietnam was from 3 July 1966 to 19 May 1967. During that first tour he was assigned to Alpha Company 2nd Brigade 14th Infantry of the 25 the Infantry Division at Cu Chi village in the district of Saigon (presently Ho Chi Minh City).

The innumerable amount of underground tunnels discovered by U.S. troops at the initial point of the war was frustrating to the U.S. military in Saigon. These tunnels allowed the guerilla fighters of the Communist Vietnamese (VC) to easily house and covertly supply troops, survive, and control where and when skirmishes with American troops would take place. This advantageous asset to the VC caused immense causalities to the American forces that were defending Cu Chi and other villages within its vicinity. The immeasurable fighting his unit encountered with the VC was eternal. On 6 May 1967, a couple months before his rotation out of Vietnam, shrapnel from a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) penetrated through his protective armor, entered his chest and stomach. He narrowly escaped death. After recovering (back in the continental United States) and being declared “fit for full duty”, Fanuatanu returned to Vietnam
on 28 July 1967 and joined the 116th Air Assault Helicopter Company as a helicopter crew-chief. Having completed countless flights of troop transports and retrievals, his helicopter was shot down and crashed on 26 October 1967, leaving him with a broken jaw and fractured lower back. He was treated and remained in Vietnam until 11 December 1967 when he was evacuated back to the United States for supplementary treatment and convalescence.

After he recuperated, Mamea was sent to the Drill Instructor school at Fort Ord, California. Despite his injuries, Fanuatanu graduated outstandingly in the top one-third of his class of eighteen cadres. All through these first two tours and being wounded as well, Mamea’s heartfelt feelings towards the Vietnamese people by no means vanished. On his third and final tour in Vietnam, he recognized the war had changed with massive destruction and innumerable casualties. With a somber glance at me, he said, “It was no good to kill them.”

From his cadre assignment, he was reassigned back to Vietnam on 30 August 1970 and attached with “C” Troop Squadron 17th Air Calvary 1st Aviation Brigade. With no injuries on this his final tour in Vietnam, he rotated homeward. Still, Fanuatanu made the long journey home with painful memories from all three tours of duty in Vietnam.

As with his fellow Samoan Vietnam veterans, returning home was a gracious and memorable occasion initially, but the trauma of war soon set in. He was constantly angry, aggressive, anxious, and solitary. However, despite the difficulties, Fanuatanu was determine to succeed in life. Frequently reminding himself that he survived the worst in life and to enjoy life to its fullest. He praised the United States government for letting him serve in the U.S. military. And for his family, he leaves a special message: “It has been a difficult road, but someone had to do it. I hope my grandchildren will understand that we are equal in this world and to make things
better in life.” Master Sergeant Fanuatanu Mamea retired from the United States Army on February 7, 1984 and resides on his home island of Tutuila, American Samoa.

He was awarded the Bronze Star with combat “V” and two Purple Hearts for his combat wounds and gallant service in Vietnam. He was recommended for the “Silver Star” and continues to await confirmation from the Department of the Army for this prestigious decoration of which he merits.

A meek and reverent person, Moses Katina did not flounder to the demise of the war in Vietnam. His faith guided him along the road of uncertainty to unravel the complexities of piety. Having met for the second time, since my being on Tutuila, I was honored to interview this Stalwart of Almighty God.

Encouraged by his parents and wanting to join the American military, Moses left American Samoa (date unknown) and passed through Hawai‘i to reside with his aunt in San Francisco, California. He had initially wanted to join the United States Navy. However, he was frustrated with the delay of the Navy’s recruitment procedures. So, he gave up on the Navy and
instead joined the U.S. Marines on 3 April 1962. He reported for recruit training at Marine Corps
Recruit Training Depot in San Diego, California shortly after his induction. He remembered and
spoke lightly about his three months of grueling pain experience in boot camp. At graduation he
was delighted and relieved that this arduous element of becoming a Marine was fulfilled. He was
assigned as an infantryman (0311) and remained as such until his deployment to South Vietnam
in August 1967. As the American military strength escalated during the mid-1960s, Moses,
without a doubt had the most demanding military occupational specialty of being an infantryman
(0311) to be deployed to battle.

In Vietnam his military occupational specialty of being an infantryman (0311) was
changed to motor transport operator (3531). He was assigned to the 7th Motor Transport 5th
Marine Division in Phu Bai and Da Nang, being responsible for operating trucks for ground
transport of troop and supplies. The truck convoys were vulnerable to ambush and land mines
along the routes. He was constantly assigned to the artillery components of supportive weaponry
that were critical to the survival of the American infantrymen being outwitted and ensnared by
the communist Vietnamese forces. He was always suspicious of the Vietnamese people and
remained alert at all times throughout his tour of duty.

Moses escaped injuries and returned to American soil in September 1968. Returning to
Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, Moses reunited with his wife and family,
spending his leave at home in Oceanside, California.

Departing Vietnam with no physical injury was a blessing for Moses. But it was not all
“quiet at the home front” for him. He was stricken with sleepless nights, anger, and rage. The
recollection of the death of his friend in Vietnam has and will remain with him. With patience
and compassion his wife and family help rehabilitate him back into the norms of civilian life.
On December 5, 1972, after repeated medical evaluations for hearing loss due to his experience with the artillery units in Vietnam and a non-combative injury to his left arm, Moses received a disability retirement from the U.S. Marine Corps. He returned home to American Samoa with his family and focused his attention on college courses at the American Samoa Community College.

After a diligent reconnection with God, Moses was able to suppress his non-combative injuries and is currently the pastor of the “Assembly of God” church on Tutuila, American Samoa.

In a short request, he asked that his family (present and future), all veterans, the Samoan community, and the Samoan government always to have faith, believe in God and help others.

**Suiaunoa, Navy M.**

*Courtesy photo*

**Awarded:**

2 Purple Hearts (Confirmed)
Navy Suiaunoa is a well-built towering figure with broad muscular shoulders and a smile that is half shy and half brash. By his command presence and physical stature, leaves no doubt as to who is in charge. Both Navy and his older brother “Army” enlisted into the U.S. Marine Corps. Navy linked up with his brother “Army” who was residing with their aunt in Washington State, USA. In 1966, his brother “Army” enlisted into the United States Marine Corps. The following year in January 1967, at age twenty-one, Navy followed his brother’s footsteps and also signed up for the Marines. His initial decision was to enlist with the United States Navy, but the Navy kept delaying his recruitment, thus leading him to consider the Marines. The Marine Corps recruiting personnel immediately processed his application for enlistment and welcomed him into the “The Few, The Proud, The Marines.”

Arriving at Marine Corps Recruit Training Depot at San Diego, California in March 1967, he quickly passed boot camp training and was assigned as an infantryman (0311). He was ordered to report to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California for advance training pertinent to his military occupational specialty. Upon completion of this part of Marine Corps preparatory and diverse training for all Marines, he immediately received orders for Vietnam. While still at Camp Pendleton, he was ordered to Staging Battalion to prepare and train for combat duty in South Vietnam. Successful completion of this training is paramount for the survival of all Marines being ordered to Vietnam. This unit was also responsible to expedite the training and fill the request of Marine units in Vietnam that were in dire need of replacements, due to increasing casualties from the indomitable opposing enemy forces of North Vietnam. Navy was transferred to Okinawa where Marines ordered to Vietnam from the United States were again administratively processed for Vietnam, retrofitted with camouflage uniforms and acclimated to the environment of Southeast Asia. While satisfying the processing procedures on
Okinawa, Navy teamed up with fellow Samoan Ketesemane Meaole, who was also on Okinawa. Meaole’s presence comforted Navy, as the two often reminisce about their native homeland of American Samoa. However, a restriction hindered his immediate deployment to Vietnam since his brother “Army” was already in Vietnam.

Determined and eager to go to combat and feeling concerned for his brother’s safety, Navy applied for a waiver to replace “Army” in Vietnam and presented it to their mother. Having received the favorable waiver/consent form from his mother and brother, Navy forwarded the waiver to military authorities on Okinawa for immediate action. Army was then extracted from combat duty in Vietnam and reassigned to a supportive element in Yokosuka, Japan. With his request accepted and his brother “Army” safe in Japan, Navy departed Okinawa on 22 August 1967 for Vietnam. He reunited with his fellow Marines of Fox Company 2nd Battalion 3rd Marines who were assigned the daunting task to suppress and defeat the indomitable enemy forces in South Vietnam.

This is Navy’s written account of his experiences in Vietnam:

I went to Vietnam on 22 August, 1967, when I was 21 years old, and was assigned to the 2nd BN 3rd Marines. Never have I seen anything like a war before. I was very frightened and the fear of death was with me throughout my tour of duty. I saw combat in mid November 1967 on my first operation, an amphibious deployment called “Operation Badger Hunt.” We moved in by ship, the USS Tripoli from which we assaulted the beach in Mike Boats.

The area we hit in this operation was Dia Loc District, Quan Nam Province, RVN. We started shooting as soon as we were on land. I saw many Marines wounded and some die. The battlefield was flooded with hurt men calling out the
names of their buddies and calling for corpsman. A good friend of mine named Schultz lost an arm and we put him on a stretcher, moved him to a safe place and called a corpsman to give him medical aid. I have never seen him since that day.

This was as I said, my first operation and it was a bloody introduction to the Vietnam War. As for myself, I was wounded for the first time several days into the operation, on about November 26, 1967, incurring a fragment of shrapnel in my lower extremity…. On the ship to which I was flown by medivac, I spent two weeks…. To this day, I think almost constantly about all the Marines I saw die before I was evacuated from the battle, and I suffer from extreme feelings of guilt when I think that I lived while they did not. I remember well-sometime too well-leaving behind PFC. Finch from Arkansas, and a fellow Samoan named Laolagi, who I had come to feel close to as guys I could rely on. But I was flown out to the area of contact by medivac, so it turned out that they couldn’t rely on me.

I recovered from my wound and participated in another deployment that produced many casualties in March, 1968. This was “Operation Ford”, and I was moving with my men in a company within a battalion-sized sweep. The unit designation was Fox Company, 2nd Battalion 3rd Marines. We took incoming mortars and I was hit almost immediately in my right upper thigh. The battlefield, which consisted of flooded rice paddies intersected by paddy dikes, was a deafening, bloody confusion of mortars, small arms fire and screaming Marines. We laid down a base of fire, as well as we could, consist mostly of M-16s and M-79 grenade launchers, and called in Marine artillery, Naval gunfire, and air strikes. While I along with a group of other wounded Marines waiting on a landing zone
to be evacuated, I saw my Samoan friend PFC. Misa, on a stretcher. He was unconscious and had IV tubes running into his body.

I knew Misa, whose father had also been a Marine from Camp Pendleton, where we spent a lot of our spare time together as fellow Samoans. During that time, we two lonely Samoan boys in a strange country getting ready to go to war, became extremely close friends.

Now, on this lonely battlefield, on March 19, 1968, I couldn’t talk or comfort my friend because he was unconscious and in extreme distress. Misa and I were put on the medivac helicopter together, along with three other Marines from my unit, who I also knew, but whose names I don’t recall after all these years. Misa never regained consciousness during the helicopter ride to the medical facilities at Da Nang, and it wasn’t until the next day that I was told that Misa had died of his wounds.

I will never forget Misa, or the horribly empty and helpless feeling that came over me when told that he was KIA. My thoughts also often go back—whether I want them to or not—to that terrible Thanksgiving Day when I suffered my first wound. In addition to being tortured by the fear that at the age of 21…. I had to face the guilt and shame of leaving my buddies in the midst of battle. I had to leave my fellow Marines in the field, although I would never have left them had I not been hit. Every Thanksgiving this day comes back to me, and I am so filled with guilt and shame for leaving my buddies that I have to spend the day alone. My wife gets angry at me every year about this, but I have never explained
myself. I think that if I told her about it, I might start crying and don’t know how I could ever stop. This is something a Samoan man would never do in front of his wife.

I do not recall the names of the medical people who tended my wounds during those panicky, confusing days. In addition to the specific horrors of being wounded, having to leave my men, and having a good friend die while I was helpless to stop it from happening, Vietnam in general did terrible things to me. There were times when my fellow Marines were wounded and killed and the enemy carved and wrote in blood “USMC”. We also sometimes found dead Marines whose fingers had been cut to remove rings, and this angered us more than words can tell. It was this rage and the need to establish a body count that led us to begin cutting off the ears of dead VC. At the time, it seemed like I did this with no feeling. Today I feel deep regret that I was driven to such an act, even against the corpse of an enemy soldier.

The memories of that Thanksgiving Day, the day when Misa died, and so many days like them come back to me all the time, and bring with them all the horror I felt then. I felt fear and rage and confusion. I still have those feelings, but now I also suffer from extreme guilt and sadness.

As I said, I was hit twice in Vietnam and as nearly as I can recall, every one of the men I served with that I became friends with was hit at least once. I was a proud Marine when I went to Vietnam and I served the Corps for many years after the war was over.

-Navy Masefau Suiaunooa  Msgst.Sgt. USMC (Ret)
After only fourteen months following his recruitment into the Marine Corps, and after being wounded several times in Vietnam, Navy was sent home for convalescence with his mother, brother and other family members following his medical treatment in Da Nang American military hospital.

He told me that he felt sorry for the Vietnamese. Navy as with countless other Vietnam veterans who suffer from severe post-war trauma are often disturbed by certain reminders of incidents that occurred during their tour in Vietnam. In Navy’s case, the ringing of bells triggers his alertness to be distrustful towards the Vietnamese peoples. He remains vulnerable to unexpected car popping noises, of which, he immediately reacts by throwing himself to the ground.

In discussing about the protests against the Vietnam War, Navy was blunt in expressing his opinion: “I didn’t like it and they did not welcome us home.”

On March 11, 1994 after twenty-seven years of impeccable military service, this exemplary prodigy retired from active service and bid farewell to his beloved Corps and fellow Marines. After his long and adventurous journey absent from his Native American Samoa, Navy returns with his wife and four children to their home island of Tutuila, as entrepreneurs. With the highest standards and salute, Navy was awarded two Purple Hearts for the injuries he sustained in the Vietnam War.

With age claiming the lives of hundreds of Vietnam veterans annually, these Samoan veterans saw the opportunity to finally tell their stories and to set the record straight. Their stories along with those from other respondents in my interview offer a glimpse of the participation of the Samoan soldiers in the American military, their actions and experiences in Vietnam and their readjustment back to civilian community.
They joined the American military to seek income for remittance to their families back home. They paved the way for other Samoan young men and women to earn a better education and subsistence. For these veterans earned their retirement, which contributed significantly to the whole of the economy in American and Independent Samoa.

As we recognize the unquestionable dedication of our Samoan Vietnam veterans we gain a glimpse to the future of their descendents. As another generation of Samoan soldiers fill the formations of American military men and women fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. They too will become apart of the American and Samoan history.

Will they remain in the military and make such a career or discover other means to remit as their fathers and brothers of the Vietnam War? Will they also suffer from the psychological trauma that these Vietnam veterans have suffered or will they hold tight to their fa‘asamoa (the Samoan way) in caring for the next generation to venture out into the world far from their native American Samoa.

This new breed of Samoan enthusiast will fill the void of responsibilities passed down through the generations of Samoan soldiers who have fought America’s wars and in the protection of their beloved Samoa. Will they too take risks they never imagined themselves capable of from the most heroic to the most savage, all in pursuit of a cause they could neither win nor identify nor embrace. They too, will add their names to the list of scholars, decorations and awards for accomplishment and valor as were their forefathers.

The persistent pain and suffering of these Samoans veterans went unnoticed by the American and Samoan government for decades following the fall of Saigon to the Communist North Vietnamese Army. The benefits from the Veteran Affairs were far from what is now awarded to the present day Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Their uncertainty to their welfare,
employment, opportunities and the homeless circumstances and non medical attention of American veterans of the Vietnam War, prompted veteran advocacy organizations to secure benefits and medical attention far beyond the limits of previous war veterans. These state of affairs initiated a response from congressional leaders to inflate compensation and increase comprehensive medical treatment to all veterans.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

After the Vietnam War thousand of American veterans across the country and throughout the Pacific required continuous medical attention. Falling victim to fatigue, these soldiers ventured home anxiously to be reunited with loved ones long separated by their combat tour. They had problems when they returned home. Their combat experience created an array of multiple physical and mental challenges. Not knowing about these issues or how to deal with them caused psychological havoc on their lives and those of their families. Some momentarily could adjust, but as they aged, it became more frantic and compounded by sadness and memories that were difficult to overcome and forget.

They were greeted by an unwelcoming society upon their return home to the United States. A nation caught in the politics of the Vietnam War and the society that never will understand them. The war veterans of Vietnam were desensitized to fear, death and the cries of wounded soldiers. They became animals adjusting their senses to the jungles of Vietnam, fighting in the homeland of an aggressive enemy and the first soldiers of contemporary warfare to taste defeat.
The United States Veterans Affairs were forced to recognize the extreme needs of the Vietnam veterans as thousands took to the streets demanding jobs, housing and additional benefits in 1971. The VA initiated procedures to meet the demands of these veterans and recognized their service-connected disabilities including problems that started or were aggravated due to military service. The department promulgated and initiated new procedures, replacing the antiquated policies with contemporary procedures that provided the veterans with an opportunity to gradually recuperate and survive the agony.

VA medical facilities and Veteran Centers (Vet Center) are run by the Veterans Health Administration of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, while community-based outpatient clinics (CBOC) are run by civilian medical practitioners within a community and serve the veterans of those communities in partnership with the VA. Vet Centers focus on post-war adjustment, counseling and outreach services for veterans and their families. In addition, they improved services with vocational rehabilitation and employment, homelessness, military service benefits, minority veteran assistance, surviving spouse and dependant benefits, women veteran advocacy and education.

In July 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs opened its door to the new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Tutuila, American Samoa. This is the only known VA facility south of the equator in the Pacific.

The paramount objective of the CBOC at Tutuila is to provide medical attention to all active duty and veterans of the United States military and non-emergent primary health care to eligible veterans with chronic health problems or minor acute illnesses. Their services include Physician, Nursing, Psychiatry, Social Work, and Addiction Therapy. In addition, the clinic provides Comprehensive General Medical Care for men and women veterans, Comprehensive
Diabetic Care, Preventive Care/Vaccinations, Specialty Care, Pharmacy services and referrals to VA Medical Centers in Hawai‘i. In addition, the clinic assists veterans and their families with I.D. cards, funeral entitlements and education under the newly established Montgomery G.I. Bill, which replaced the Vietnam Era G.I. Bill on July 1, 1985. This educational benefit may be used while the service member is on active duty or after the service-member’s honorable military discharge (Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents, 33).

Ninety percent of the veterans interviewed received 100 percent VA disability payment for in-service injuries, which are classified as service-connected disabilities. They are entitled to monetary disability compensation that varies according to the degree of disability and number of dependents. Payments in accordance to degree ranges from 10 percent rating at one hundred seventeen U.S. dollars to 100 percent with two thousand five hundred twenty-seven U.S. dollars, paid monthly to the veteran ((Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents, 15, 16).

It is clear that for the majority of the interviewees, their level of political and cultural awareness, heightened and oftentimes was radically changed by their experience in Vietnam. Some believed that the communist was a threat to the United States and that it was their duty to fight against it. The majority felt that they had a high sense of duty, pride and faʻasamoa (Samoan way) in serving in the American military, while representing their beloved American Samoa and their families. They struggled over time in search of a new growth of life, one they could learn to realize that some things they could talk about, while others they can only carry with them for the remaining of their lives. Even though they were American Nationals fighting America’s war in Vietnam, these American Samoan warriors remained faithful to their native homeland of American Samoa. They all volunteered and remained brave as they faced the horrors of war and returned home scarred forever. A good number enlisted for reasons of
remittance to family members, yet decades later, their military pension and veteran compensation are a major economic contribution to the American Samoa economy.

They are still loyal and feel their sons and daughters have to make their own decision regarding participation in the military to defend their homeland. Still, they are mentors with expertise that are the impetus of the younger generations of warriors that are preparing to step into their boots and carry their weapons to do battles across the globe with dignity and pride of being Samoan.

Some Veterans endured serious medical problems and all suffered from the effects of the war. Eating at their souls, is the knowledge that in the Vietnam War they committed acts and took risks they never imagined. From the heroic to the most savage, they fought for survival in the war and are still determined to survive the pandemonium and uncertainty of being at peace. Still within them is the cyclone of unknown predicaments swirling around from months of extreme stress and agony, the protected will never know nor understand.

The narrative of these veterans is a minute part of their induction into the United States military and their experiences in and about the war, including their post-war escapades were never recounted or documented. Their patriotism was without doubt by all who served, spilled their blood and fought alongside these courageous and valiant “Samoan Island Brothers.” –Welcome home.
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