

A Vietnam War Veteran Talks About the Reality of War: An Interview with Allen Nelson*

Q: Do you think that you would still have become a marine if you had not been poor?

Allen Nelson: This is a very hard question because I have no idea. I just knew I wanted to do something with my life, and I had no idea what to do when I met the recruiter. His suggestion that I join the Marine Corps seemed like a very good idea at the time. If I had not been poor, I would not have gone, I would not be in the situation where I would be looking for something to do with my life. If my family had a lot of money, I would have never gone into the Marine Corps.

Q: Was your experience of military recruiting like the scene in the recent movie directed by Michael Moore titled *Fahrenheit 9/11*?

Allen Nelson: It wasn't like that. In my experience when I joined the Marine Corps, the military did not come to our schools and they just stayed inside their offices. But, nowadays the military is allowed to go into our junior high schools and our high schools and they have programs, ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) programs for the young high school and junior high school students. So now it's much more aggressive to get kids to join as it was shown in the Michael

* This interview with Mr. Allen Nelson was conducted in New York on September 10 and 13, 1994 by Ms. Maki Saito and Ms. Yuri Tokutake as one of the research projects for their junior seminar on American foreign relations. Both are now senior students of the Department of British and American Studies at Nanzan University. We would like to thank Mr. Allen Nelson for giving them the chance to interview him as well as the permission to put the script of the interview in this issue of the *Nanzan Review of American Studies*.

The interviewee, Mr. Allen Nelson, an African American Vietnam War veteran was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1947. In 1965, he dropped out of high school mainly because of poverty and joined the Marine Corps at the age of eighteen. After military training in Okinawa for two weeks, he was sent to Vietnam where he spent 13 months in the jungles. He killed Vietnamese soldiers and he saw many people die. As we can understand from the interview, it was when he saw a baby born in his Marine company's patrol at a village that he discovered the humanity of the Vietnamese people as well as his own humanity. After four years' military service, he came back home at the age of twenty-three. He suffered from PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) for many years. He fortunately recovered with the help of a doctor who is a therapist for PTSD. He has been traveling around Japan and lecturing at schools for almost ten years. By telling the students the reality of war which he mentions in this interview, he would like the young generation to understand the importance of creating a world of peace and nonviolence. He wrote several books, most of which are in Japanese. He has published a booklet in English based on one of his lectures, titled *You Don't know War* (Kyoto: Kamogawa Shuppan Publishing Co., Ltd., 2003).

Moore's movie where the recruiters were looking for kids just walking by and they would stop them and talk with them. When I was a child, that didn't happen; you had to go to the recruiter's office.

Q: What do you think about such aggressive recruiting?

Allen Nelson: I think that it doesn't give young people a real good chance to look at what their options are. Because of the United States' military presence in our schools, many children are convinced that the military is a good thing. Before they even look at universities or colleges or programs, the military would send them overseas where they could grow up and learn something else. They automatically figure the military is good because it's easy and it's right there. So I don't like this kind of aggressive recruiting technique. If young people want to join the military, they know where the recruiting office is. Recruiting offices do not need to be in our high schools and junior high schools.

Q: What are the common images for American citizens towards the U. S. Marine Corps?

Allen Nelson: Well, of all the United States' fighting forces, after World War II, there was a great talk, a lot of talk, of disbanding, getting rid of the Marine Corps and this was in progress when World War II happened. The Marines were basically responsible for fighting the Japanese Imperial soldiers in Southern Asia and because of the tremendous battles they had on places like Okinawa and other places, hundreds of thousands of the U. S. Marines were killed. That meant that the Marines were not going to be disbanded. So the Marines are always seen to be the best fighters. Their training is very different from army training. It's much more aggressive, and the Marines are attack forces and we have the reputation of being the first ones to go into battle. So the American citizens' attitude towards the Marines is that they're the toughest, we got the best in the Marines.

Q: Through military training how do the young people change their minds?

Allen Nelson: I think people have a misunderstanding of what soldiers and marines do. We are trained to kill. We're not trained to be social workers, or build bridges or schools, or to help old ladies get across the right path safely, or give out candy to children. We're marines. We're trained to kill. So the first thing they want to do is to remove your civilian life from you; they want to take your civilian thinking away from you. In the military there's no thinking. You're trained to follow orders. You don't ask any questions. You never say, "now or later?" So part of the military training is brainwashing.

How do you get a young man or young woman who grew up in a Christian religion? How do you get them into the military and turn them into killers? People who will kill women and children think that this is just part of war. They have to remove that civilian from you; they have to remove fear from you; they have to remove thinking from you so that all you do is to follow orders. That's

how they make young people sort of change from being thinkers to killers.

So if you went into the military now, you would have a very hard time because you're a thinker. So they would try to get you not to think, not to think, don't think about it, you know, just do. For a young person coming out of high school who has no idea of what they want to do with their lives, it's very easy to change their minds, to brainwash them into believing that no thinking is a good thing, following orders is better, just to follow orders.

Q: Does everybody adjust to the new rules?

Allen Nelson: Some people don't and they're kicked out immediately. They're removed from the military. Maybe three or four percent will drop out because they are just thinkers and so the military sees thinkers as being very dangerous, so they get rid of them. They get rid of them, but it's definitely brainwashing. Our military does it, Japanese military does, all militaries do it. They have to brainwash a person because normal people do not change into a machine gun. Normal people would not ever do that, but soldiers do that. Someone gives him the order to charge and he jumps up and runs toward the machine gun only to be killed, that's brainwashing.

Q: Do you think soldiers in Iraq have been educated about Iraq before they went there?

Allen Nelson: No. I don't think that most of the military men and women ever even knew where Iraq was before they were sent there. I certainly didn't know anything about Vietnam. I didn't know the history of Vietnam, I didn't know Vietnamese language, I didn't even know the Vietnamese were different from the Chinese or Japanese. I didn't know anything. We see Asian people and think you're all the same, you just live in different parts of Asia, but you're all connected. I couldn't spell Vietnam when I went there. I mean I had no concept of the history of Vietnam. If I had learnt about Vietnam as a junior high school student, if I had learnt the history, I would never have gone there. I would have realized Vietnam has been in the struggle to have their country for over 200 years. And you can not win a war on somebody else's land. The Vietnamese people did not mind dying in Vietnam. That's their country, that's where they live, that's where their ancestor's bones are buried on that land. They didn't mind dying at home, no one minds dying at home. But, when you go to another person's country, you don't want to die there. And so I didn't know anything about Vietnam, I didn't know where it was on the map, I had no concept of the Vietnamese people, their history, their culture, nothing. And these soldiers, and marines, and women, and men who are in Iraq, they have no concept of the history of this country, the language, the culture, they don't know anything. All they know is that they're there.

I think that after you go into combat, of course your mind starts to change. When you start seeing the devastation, when you start seeing your friends die

around you, you start asking that question, “What are we doing here?” When you start bombing a city and go into the city and see a bunch of dead women and children and old people, you start asking yourself “What are we doing here? Is this the right thing to do? Why am I in these other people’s country bombing them and killing them?” I think that those things start getting soldiers to think.

Q: When did you come to yourself and think or feel of Vietnam?

Allen Nelson: Well, I had many incidents especially when my friends were killed. When African Americans and some of my white friends were killed, you start to think about your life and you start to realize that you can’t help them. There’s nothing you can do and they’re dying. And some men die very calmly, they talk to you very calmly and they tell you things like this; “Please write my mom, tell my mom I love her.” They can’t believe it’s happened. They always believe dying only happens to someone else, not me, and they’re in shock. They’re like how could this happen? And they don’t want to die, and so they do a lot of yelling and screaming and grabbing onto your clothes, trying to pull you into death with them. Those are the most difficult to be with, to watch them, and to be with at their last minutes because they’re only 18 or 19 years old and when you’re 18 or 19, you never think that you can die, you never think that you die. Dying is for old people; it’s not for an 18-year-old boy. And so when you see an 18 year-old, 19 year-old boy who’s dying, it’s a very painful thing to hear them talk about all the things they’ll never do, “I’ll never get married, I’ll never have children, I’ll never see my family again, I’ll never see America again, I should have done this with my life, I should have done that, this is so crazy, how could I have wound up like this?” They talk like that. I saw a lot of that. That started to make me think what I am doing here. Why am I in Vietnam? Why am I killing these people? And but you also have a feeling that I have to survive, I have to survive somehow, I have to get through this, I can’t, I don’t want to die here, you know.

Death on the battlefield is a terrible thing because in Vietnam and I’m sure in Iraq and Afghanistan it’s the same way, the moment life leaves your body, the bugs come. The bugs come for you. And so when your friend dies, the first thing that comes...if he’s alive and you’re with him and he’s talking to you, you can fan the flies away, if you see the ants are coming, you can shoo the ants away, you can keep them at bay. But the minute that he dies, it seems like the bugs understand that this is food. And so they just gather and you can’t fight them off and the next thing you know, you got a hundred flies on your friend’s face and it’s horrible. I always had this sense. I didn’t want to die in Vietnam because I didn’t want these bugs to eat and tear my body apart the way that they would do. Because of the heat in Vietnam the bodies would start decomposing very quickly and start stinking very badly and you can’t imagine. I mean if you’ve ever smelt a dead body the minute you smell you would know it’s a dead body. It’s a smell that is so different from anything on this planet. It’s a horrifying, putrid smell. When you first smell, it’s sweet, it has a sweet smell but then it turns sour. As sweet as

it is, it turns a sour and that sourness that you smell causes your food to just come up, I mean it's a horrifying smell. So you're carrying your friend through the jungle trying to get their body back before the bugs eat them, trying to get their body back to their parents, and the bodies weigh a lot when the person is dead, it's almost twice his weight because they can't help you. So it's a struggle trying to get the bodies back and you're slipping and falling and the body is falling down, oh it's just a mess; it's just horrifying.

So seeing a lot of those things got me to think what I was doing in Vietnam and I started to think about my own life and how I put myself in such a danger of being killed at 18 years old. And then when I saw the baby being born in the cage, in the bunker that really that was it, because I realized the Vietnamese people were human beings

When you're in war, you don't have tomorrow, there is no tomorrow in war, so it's common that young girls, 15, 16 years old get married and try to have a family because there is no tomorrow. So in wartime during Nazi Germany, you know, on the homeland of Japan where bombs are being dropped on people, people realize there is no tomorrow. I have to live now, I have to enjoy and when you are in that type of situation, you start to love seeing the sun. All before now it's not important. All before the sun would come up and go down and you would just go about your everyday life. But when you wake up one morning realizing that tomorrow I might miss...today might be the last day I see the sun. Today may be the last day that I see these flowers. All of a sudden these things become so beautiful and important to you because your life becomes important and you realize before I went to Vietnam, life was black and white. It was not colored, but when I got to Vietnam and I saw and realized how precious my life was. I also understood how precious the world is, nature is. How beautiful it is, we have no reason to be sad, we have everything we want. God gives us everything we want. Buddha gives us everything that we want. All we have to do is to open our eyes and realize the beauty of our lives. I remember this waking up one morning in Vietnam and saying, "Oh my God, what a beautiful country. Oh my God, look how beautiful the sky is." I never thought that way before. But then because I saw how my life could be ended at any minute, I started to look up. And I started to see how beautiful the stars were, how beautiful the moon was, and how beautiful it was to breathe. What air tastes like and smells like. I started to understand how wonderful water is. Anything with life was precious.

These ideas came from seeing that baby being born in a lot of ways that maybe changed me, it changed me even today. I realized from seeing that my mother did the same thing that this girl did for her baby. I also realized that in Vietnam every soldier that I killed had a mother. Every soldier. They're not animals, you know. Every human being that walks this earth has a mother. That mother loves that child. She brought the child into the world. We don't have the right to kill other people's children. We don't have the right to do that. Who would kill another person's child? For what? For what reason? And so we as human beings, you

know, we have to start understanding that our government whenever they tell us that we have to go commit violence are wrong. They're wrong. If you want to go commit violence you go. You and your children go. But don't send my children; don't send my neighbor's children. If you believe that war is so important that violence is the only way to solve this problem then you go and do the violence. Like the Prime Minister of Japan, he's so fast to send his own country's children off to war. So fast. "Yeah, we're sending in the troops." What about his son? His son's old enough to go to war. He's not going. What about the other Diet members? Are their grandchildren and their children going off to war? No. It's the poor children; it's the working class children of Japan who find themselves over there in uniform. They don't care about those kids. George W. Bush doesn't care about the 1,000 soldiers who died in Iraq. That's nothing. 1,000? That's nothing. That's a small number. That's nothing. That's an acceptable number of deaths. When you look at how many people died in Tokyo bombing, you think about how many people died in Russia during the siege of Stalingrad. Hundreds of thousands died a day. So we as human beings, we have to really reject this idea that violence is a way of solving our problems. This is why I like the Article Nine of your Constitution.

Q: If you didn't come across the childbirth, what do you think you would be doing now?'

Allen Nelson: I have no idea. I think that if I had not seen that childbirth I would have been killed in Vietnam. It saved me. I couldn't save that baby, I could not save the mom, but it saved me. I don't know what happened to that girl. I don't know if she survived. I don't know if she died. I don't know what happened to her. I often think what happened to her. But, that child saved me in a way that religion could not, in a way that doctors could not. Because by seeing that child born I realized that these Vietnamese people were my brothers and sisters. Now I didn't learn this in high school. Did you learn this in high school that the Filipino people were your brothers and sisters? Did you read a chapter in your history book or science book that says that the Chinese, the Vietnamese, all these people are your brothers and sisters? We don't learn these things. If we learned these things, we might have more respect for them.

The war on terrorism has nothing, You will never win it with a military strikes and violence. The war on terrorism is about war on poverty and hopelessness. For any man living in the desert, all he's got is a goat and a camel, that's all he got, and he's got three or four children, and his baby dies because of lack of medicine, just medicine, dies from a cold, dies from an ear infection. And that dad whose baby has died, his heart is broken, and he looks at America, big powerful, rich America, who has allowed his child to die. Why should they love us? They hate us. They hate us because we do nothing but cause misery for them.

I don't have the major sufferings like I did when I first came home from Vietnam, like I don't have the dreams, and I can sleep at night. I feel good about

myself. I have forgiven myself. I don't care what other people think, but I have forgiven myself for the brutality and the violence that I did in Vietnam.

Q: Could you explain your experience of the PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) which many Vietnam War veterans have suffered from?

Allen Nelson: Part of the post-traumatic stress has something to do with feeling guilty, like you're a bad person. For instance, post-traumatic stress is very common among women who have been raped because deep down inside the women feels 'It is my fault, I did something wrong. My skirt was too short, or I was walking too sexy, or I shouldn't have been out at one o'clock in the morning.' Somehow she blames herself, that's part of the post-traumatic stress syndrome. So part of the healing, the overcoming of post-traumatic stress syndrome is to forgive yourself. And to learn to accept what you've done. I cannot bring back the lives of the people I've killed in Vietnam, that's impossible. But what I can do is to take that situation and turn it into something possible with what I've learned in that situation, that these things do not bring us peace, it brings us more misery. And soldiers, civilians and everyone who is involved in war, are victims of society's brutality that we would send people to kill other human beings.

We have a lot of fireworks here, and you have a lot of fireworks. I hate fireworks. Fireworks is not beautiful to me, it terrifies me. And during the Fourth of July I do not go out, I do not go looking at fireworks. I don't care about fireworks, and people love to see fireworks and to most people fireworks are so beautiful. But when you've had big battles at night, you see the same type of beauty, only that's happening on the ground. So the type of explosion you see in the sky, same color, same blasting, and fire shooting out. So to me when I see fireworks it just reminds me of bloodshed. So I hate fireworks, I don't go seeing them, I can't enjoy it, that's part of the PTSD.

Camping, I can't go camping. There's just no way that I could pack up and we go up on a mountain and set up a tent. That terrified me. That I could not handle, never ever. And I had a situation in Japan. When a friend of mine in Japan asked me at her house, 'Would you like to go mushroom hunting with my family?' I said "Oh, Ok." And so I thought we'd just walk on, like in the forest or something, I didn't know we'd have to climb up this mountain. And so we started up this mountain and his uncle, he was the wisest, so I was maybe five people back, and we were going up the hill when all of the sudden my mind went to Vietnam. The people were making too much noise. They are talking and pointing out things and the kids are making noise. My friend came to me and asks "Are you Ok?" and I replied "Yes, just tell them to be quiet, We're going to be heard." I said to them, "Look out for landmines! You're not looking down." We're climbing and I still had this Vietnam mindset, really afraid, I said "Oh, they're not looking for landmines, they're making too much noise, we're going to get ambushed." We finally got to the mountain where we started to look for the mushrooms, and I was walking and I fell. And I turned over and looked to see why I fell. We found

maybe twenty mushrooms and there were thirty people to eat them, so everyone got a little piece but they were very good. I went right back to the Vietnam thing and I realized that I was not ready for that type of journey. You know, I was not ready for dealing with outside, camping out, hiking, that type of thing.

When I first came home from Vietnam, I did not know that I had PTSD. I did not know why my behavior was the way it was. And it was very different because of course I was happy to be home, and then there was sadness about being home because I had no job, I had no money, I had nothing. All I had was the memories of the war. And so I didn't know that I had them until I started to get close to other people and then I realized I couldn't talk about them, I couldn't talk about my memories of Vietnam, But after visiting a class of fourth graders, and they asked me if I'd killed people in Vietnam, that's when I realized something was wrong, because it was so difficult to talk about it. So that's when I decided, along with my first wife, that I should try to get some help, plus I wasn't sleeping at night, and she realized that I wasn't sleeping at night, and having nightmares and behaving very strongly, very strangely, so that's when I decided to get help for the post traumatic stress. It took me over 18 years of therapy before I could start to talk about Vietnam.

Most soldiers are poor, that's why you go in the military because you don't have any money. And when you get out of the military, if you have an injury, or some kind of mental disease, from your experiences in the military, you have to prove that your mental disease, your mental state comes from your involvement in the military, you have to do it. It's difficult because most veterans don't have money to get a lawyer and get their own doctors, most veterans when they get out of the military they have to automatically start working. And once you get out you're on your own. The government does not take care of you. When you're a soldier the government takes care of you, gives you everything, food, clothing, housing, healthcare, you know whatever your needs, they give it to you. But once you get out of the military there's none of that. You have to get those things on your own. So most veterans don't have the time, the energy or the money, to pursue injury cases or get help from the government because they're unable to work, or take care of their families.

There are veterans who do get assistance, without question. Veterans who have lost their legs in combat, or lost their arms in combat, or those who have to be hospitalized because of injury, they'll get their benefits. There are veterans who do get one hundred percent, I'm not sure how much that is but there are veterans who do receive financial assistance from the government, but very few compared with the number of veterans who get nothing. And that's one reason why in America, like eighty percent of homeless men, like men who sleep in the streets and go to shelters, are men who served in the military.

I had all kinds of hangovers when I came back from Vietnam. There wasn't a moment without thinking about seeing my friend die or seeing a village burn, or seeing children cry over their dead moms or the horror of just being in the jungle

all the time. My dreams about Vietnam would be so real that it would start with smell, with the smell of dead corpses, rotting corpses, and then I would go into the heavy dreaming about Vietnam, of the fighting. And always in my dreams, right before I would die I would wake up, so it was very hard to relax when you're having dreams like that.

Q: Do you think the soldiers in Iraq will have the same type of traumatic experiences?

Allen Nelson: All soldiers do. All soldiers who go into combat have this type of disease. Some are in denial, they say I'm fine. Others will just give into it, which causes lots of problems, alcohol, drug addictions, domestic violence, unemployment. I think even the Japanese Self Defense forces when they come home, I think their families will also see a big difference in their behavior, their inability to relax. When you come out of combat, one thing you can't do is to relax, because you think that at any minute you could be killed. There are many veterans that I know that have overcome post traumatic stress syndrome. Some men have to have heavy psychological work, like I did, and others seem to be able to work it out in their everyday life. They seem to be able to shed it off and talk about their experiences. So I've met American soldiers who have been able to do this on their own, and I've met Japanese World War II soldiers who have been able to do the same thing. Because when I meet with them they can speak openly about their war experience, they're not afraid. After all of these years they realize that they have to talk about their experience and about how they have to warn people of the dangers of going to war and how war just victimizes everybody, no one gets away.

I think that the most important thing for soldiers to do when they come out of a combat situation is to get some kind of psychological help, they have to get a psychologist, they have to be dedicated to working through their issues. I mean they have to realize that they have issues. Most soldiers think I'm fine, you come home, they come home after the war and they say, "Ok I'm the same person, nothing is wrong with me." But that is a person who is in denial because the people around him see that there is a difference within him.

So I think the first thing soldiers should do is to seek out help because they've been traumatized. The whole idea of being in the military is traumatizing because there's no thinking. The first thing they teach you when you go in the military is there's no thinking, so they take your mind from you. Then you learn to follow orders, and after living in an environment where you have no thought, there's no thinking, you do what you're told, you wear what they tell you to wear, you eat what they tell you to eat, you don't have to make any decisions. Then you get out of the military and all of a sudden you have to make decisions. You have to find housing, food, clothing, all these things were done for you before, but after four years in the military, or five years in the military, even two years in the military, now you have to do these things and most soldiers don't know how to do these

things. They don't know how to look for an apartment. They don't know how to pull up a job information form. They don't know how to do resumes and interviews. They have none of these skills. I think this is why there are so many veterans who live totally under the poverty rate in this country, they are very poor. When most of them get out they can't get jobs, because in the military you were a machine gunner, you carried a machine gun for four years. Now you're out in the system, now you're back home and where's your skill? What do you do? There's no jobs for machine gunners, and nobody is hiring machine gunners. So the jobs that are available for you are McDonald's, Burger King, low paying jobs, because you don't have skills. Soon, that's one, in order to get those skills you have to get psychological help, to get yourself back from the military, in order to start thinking like yourself. I think education is the most important thing for helping veterans. So I really encourage some type of psychology work, of getting your head back together, going into therapy. The second thing I would recommend is to go back to school.

Q: You are an activist for peace and against war.

Allen Nelson: We have an upcoming election for the presidency, George W. Bush, who took this country to war when he should not have done so. George W. Bush was not really elected by the American people. Al Gore got more votes than he did [in the 2000 presidential election]. And even though he was not elected president, he still took it upon himself to send this country to war. And I think that peace activity in this country is now very important because part of peace activity is education and we have to educate people through the peace movement as well as through what we do. So going to demonstrations, talking about these issues among ourselves, getting them out to vote, and letting them know exactly what's happening to this country under George W. Bush will make a big difference in who's going to be picked for the next president. I'm not necessarily happy with John Kerry, but I do know that George W. Bush has to be defeated because he's a very dangerous man. So I think that many American peace activists see this as their goal to educate people and to change their minds if they're thinking about voting for George W. Bush. Look at the record, look at the reality of where he's taking us. I think the demonstrations in New York send a message all over the country to at least pay attention to what's going on. So I think that through peace activity and education we'll be able to help change the course of this country.

Q: Some people say that the Iraq war is a lie because George W. Bush said that Saddam Hussein had lots of nuclear weapons, but they couldn't find them. So what do you think of this war based on lies?

Allen Nelson: What is amazing is that the Americans have lost over a thousand soldiers. How many of the Iraqi people died? Probably 16,000 of them are dead now, probably more, 20,000 or 30,000 people, mostly women and children and all this, that's a lot. And George W. Bush likes to say that he was misled, or he didn't

have proper information but that isn't an excuse. We now know that there are no weapons of mass destruction there, that Hussein has never been a threat to us. The Iraqi people suffered under Hussein, but they certainly didn't die in the numbers that they're dying in now. So this war is totally a lie, and it's brutal, and I really think that people like George W. Bush, Colin Powell, Dick Cheney, and the others around the world that started war, attacking people who have not done anything to them, should be on trial as war criminals, so people are more responsible before they start sending people off to die. And so I think that it's a horrible tragedy that many people around the world, in Japan, in Russia, wherever, they believe the lie. They believe the lie, and they allow their children to be sent off to die for nothing. These people's lives have been wasted because of George Bush's lies.

Q: How do you evaluate George W. Bush's policy toward the Middle East?

Allen Nelson: I think that George W. Bush's Middle East policy is so wrong, and so shortsighted. He doesn't have a policy. I think that's his bottom line. His only policy is that we go along with anything that Israel does. And this is one of the things that cause many of the Middle Eastern countries not to trust America. Because we're all on the side of the Israelis and we don't even talk about the Palestinian issue. The Palestinian people are suffering so horribly. It's almost like ethnic cleansing. Israel has all these bombs, planes, tanks, guns, men. The only weapon that these Palestinian people have is suicide bombing, and that's it. They don't have an army, they don't have a navy, they don't have airplanes, they don't have nuclear weapons, and they have nothing. The Israelis, who can attack them any time complain when a suicide bomber gets in there and kills innocent people and they see this as a horror, but the horror is what they're doing to the Palestinian people. So George W. Bush's Middle East policy is the type of a policy that makes more Middle Eastern young people want to become suicide bombers. He creates terrorism in the Middle East. So if he doesn't behave properly, honestly, and evenly, with the Palestinian people and the Israelis, then we will never have peace in the Middle East, and these people will hate us because of the brutality that we allow Israel to do to the Palestinian people.

You have to be even-handed. The Palestinian people have a right to live, too. They have a right to have their land, they have a right to live in peace without the path of the Israelis imposing their bullying on them. I think that in order to bring peace, the settlers who have settled on Palestinian people's land have to leave. Israel cannot continue to steal these people's land, to just put people on it and say, "We're here." That land does not belong to them. If we don't have peace we're not going to have justice, so we have to have justice first. Justice for the Palestinian people means justice for the Israelis. Both parties have to feel like they've gotten what they want. Israel has a right to be safe and a right to exist. So do the Palestinian people, so you have to have balance.

Q: Do you think most American people understand the situation in the Middle

East?

Allen Nelson: I think that Americans in some ways are a very ignorant people. We don't understand anybody's culture but our own. I mean most people didn't even know where Iraq was until 9/11. We have no idea of the culture in the Muslim world. We have no understanding of that. And in fact, growing up in America you see those things as sort of backwards. I think that there is also a lack of respect that America has for countries and people that they don't know. I also think that most Americans think that Muslims are just a bunch of violent people, and that they oppress women, but within the Muslim society and their culture, that's far from the truth. So, again, I think lack of education makes us take wrong decisions.

Q: What can we Japanese people learn from the veterans' peace activities?

Allen Nelson: I understand that the majority of Japanese people reject war. I think that hearing the stories of veterans will tell the Japanese people that you're right. Don't send your troops to war. Never send your children to war. Never go into someone's country and begin killing and shooting and burning them. And I think that Japan's history is one that we see a wonderful country of wonderful people who suffered so horribly because of war. They suffered horribly. And that's not to say that Japanese World War II soldiers did not do horrible things, but war is horrible. That is war, and we have to learn from men who return to tell us these stories. We have to get the understanding that war is not going to solve our problems.

As I said before, I think the one thing that veterans need when they get out of the military is that they really need support from the government, because it really takes a while for them to get on their feet. The second thing is that they have to go into therapy because they have to realize that they have post-traumatic stress syndrome. They have to help them now, and they have to take care of these things quickly for their families. When you have PTSD, you can't function. You can't go doing the job, you can't relate to your family, you can't get a job, and you can't be a normal person. So they have to go to therapy. They need at least two to three years of financial support from the present government so they can have time to get their life together, to deal with the PTSD. So they don't have these hangovers, and also I think the other thing is that they have to go through some type of university or school.

Remember what I said? Soldiers don't think, we don't think, you just do what you're told. So it's a stack of depleted uranium bullets here, ammunition, and the sergeant says move it over there, and I take my shirt off and I move it over there. Well I don't have any sense of what the scientific data is saying about depleted uranium, I have no idea what is going on. Those people who sprayed the jungles of Vietnam with the Agent Orange they were told the same thing. The chemical company said, "Don't worry this is safe, it will not hurt human beings, all it will do is to kill vegetation." Well, I'm sure if all the soldiers knew that these

chemicals they were spraying in the jungles of Vietnam were going to be killing women, children and babies for over fifty years after the war they would not have done it. They would not have done it. As a matter of fact there is indication that the men in the Enola Gay who dropped the nuclear bomb on Japan had no idea, they just knew it was a big bomb, a powerful bomb, they had no idea it was nuclear which spread disease and cancer and is still killing Japanese people. I think if they knew, then they would not have done it. I think if most soldiers had the scientific data of what was going to happen ten years after you use this bullet, they don't have that, they just have the basic information that this bullet will kill you, or if I drop this bomb it will kill ten people, or twenty people, or a hundred people, they have that information, but they don't have the scientific or chemical studies that scientists would have. Soldiers don't think, they just do what they're told. So if they are told, for example, fly this airplane, drop this bomb, we don't ask them, well, what kind of bomb it is? Well, what does it do to human beings? That's thinking and we don't think, we just do what we're told.

Q: Finally, could you give us your message to Japanese college students?

Allen Nelson: This is a message to Japanese students, university students, high school students, junior high school students, even elementary school students. Before you study other people's war, you have to study wars of Japan. You have to understand what happened during World War II. You have to understand what happened during World War I. What was the Japan's stance on World War I? What did Japan's nation do during World War II. It's a very important history. If you don't understand your history, you're going to repeat the mistakes of your past. Some conservative people in Japan tried to cut this information out of the school text books in Japan. There's no reason that any Japanese young person should feel ashamed of what happened to human beings. We all should feel ashamed of what happened. And no one in school should be ashamed of what happened during World War II. There's no reason for you to feel ashamed. You weren't born yet. So I think that Japanese children should study their history, and read it from lots of different sources not just from Japanese authors, but read from American perspectives, Russian perspectives, and Chinese perspectives. So you can really get a sense of how Japan was at that time. So it's very important that you educate yourself of your own history of war. And from your own history of war, learn how useless, and wastefulness wars were; so many Japanese children lost their lives, lost their wives, and for what? Many Japanese boys ran away and never came back home, families don't even know where they were buried. I mean this is a horror of our time and we keep repeating it over and over again.

So Japanese students, please learn your history, that's number one. Number two, then start looking and researching how war happens, what was the causes of war, what was the roots of war that springs up into violence. Look at the economic and social policies of countries. Look at the economic needs of different countries. We still have war on this planet. Every day when we go to

sleep, there are families running for their lives on this planet. We have to stop this. And so we have to understand war, we have to understand our own country's violence, our own country's war. And so I would encourage all Japanese students to be politically active. You've going to do something, you just can't go to the university and sit there, there are things happening around you. Your politicians are making decisions that will affect your grandchildren. You have to be involved politically. You can't be so conservative. And in my traveling around Japan, they're so many students and high school students who are so conservative. It's the World War II generation, people that are in their eighties in Japan are radical compared with high school students, junior high school and university students. The young people, you have to realize that you have to get radical. You have to say no. You have the Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution. You can't break the Article Nine. So I would encourage the young people to get politically active. Please start organizing among yourselves. Start setting up demonstrations, start handing out pamphlets, and start educating your neighbors, your families, to the reality to where Japan is heading. Japan is heading back to war again, and they're going to try to get rid of your Article Nine and you should never let this happen. It's your life and it's your future.