

“Forty-eight years ago, our nation staggered through twelve cataclysmic months.”



‘1968’ - Part I

Trauma

"I knew those 12' months well... I was sixteen years old, attending a military school and was extremely interested in what was going on around me."

The Memories Are Hard-Wired in My Head

No other time was as turbulent or tragic – or, for many of us – as life changing. Here, heavily marked, in pure emotion – was a pivotal turning point in an already turbulent era – when every established and traditional norm, every rule, and every traditional moral standard seemed under siege.

It was here where idealism clashed with fear. When the national psyche went from hopeful to despairing at such free-fall speed... that some began to wonder whether the America they knew could actually endure the moral destruction... the literal havoc.



So extraordinary were the dramas that were created by the culture in 1968 that I continually relive them in shorthand within my mind:

Vietnam and The 'Tet Offensive'...

The Assassinations...

Chicago...

Mexico City...

The Nixon Riots...

Student Rebellion...

Black Power...

Sisterhood...

Prague...

Paris....

Poland.

“If you can just get your mind together then come on across to me... we’ll hold hands an’ then... we’ll watch the sun rise from the bottom of the sea.”

Jimi Hendrix “Are You Experienced?”



1968 coursed through my life along side music-making and cultural expression that was as riveting as it was ground breaking.

Here were the *Beatles*, *Jimi Hendrix*, *Aretha Franklin*, and the *Rolling Stones*... I watched them set new artistic standards.

I remember television, brazenly changing the political landscape with raw images of war and repression never before seen... live... and living color in most living rooms every evening.

Men were actually orbiting the moon, taking LSD, participating in free love, allowing nudity on Broadway, and establishing themselves as Yippies...

They were outrageously testing the limits of what the FBI labeled - countercultural freedom.

It was a heady time. And I was there – I read about it – I participated in it – and I was confused by it.

"Liberation from state repression itself was the most common current in most of the protests of 1968. These refracted into a variety of social causes that reverberated with each other: for example, protests for civil liberties, against racism and in opposition to the Vietnam War, as well as feminism and the beginnings of the ecological movement, including protests against biological and nuclear weapons, all boiled up together during this year. The battles were fought not just on streets and college campuses, but also on the television screen by courting media coverage."

Protest



Mark Rudd, Chairman of the Students for Democratic Society, talks to reporters

There was so much fighting, grieving... so many were demanding changes... so many were experiencing the ecstasy and the agony of the so called "new morality" ... there were new attitudes. Or not.

I watched as some were still proud and vigilant protectors of the world as it was... as they thought that it should be...as it should remain. While others, once again, saw the world as what they thought it could be.

Still, many watched from the sidelines, stoically putting one foot in front of the other, making a life as best they could in the midst of all the radical changes. Whoever I was, there was one certain thing... I had the ability to shut out some of the world around me. And I did.

And so here, on the following slides, are some of the stories of 1968 – stories from others – some I knew personally... but many I did not know at all; stories from the famous; stories from those whose public acts, 44 years ago, are now etched in history.

All of the unknown outside participants painted a picture of how that momentous year helped to form me into what I became as an individual, it determined my friendship group... and ultimately... my view of America as a whole.

"Hugh walked over to this lieutenant [Brooks], and I could tell they were in a shouting match. I thought they were going to get into a fist fight. He told me later what they said. Thompson: 'Let's get these people out of this bunker and get 'em out of here.' Brooks: 'We'll get 'em out with hand grenades.' Thompson: 'I can do better than that. Keep your people in place. My guns are on you.' Hugh was outranked, so this was not good to do, but that's how committed he was to stopping it."

The Hero Hugh Thompson

"My Lai... was no accident whatsoever. The incident was pure premeditated murder. Are we too big to apologize?"



On March 16, 1968, the men of Charlie Company opened fire on some 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians during what would become known, darkly, as the *My Lai Massacre*.

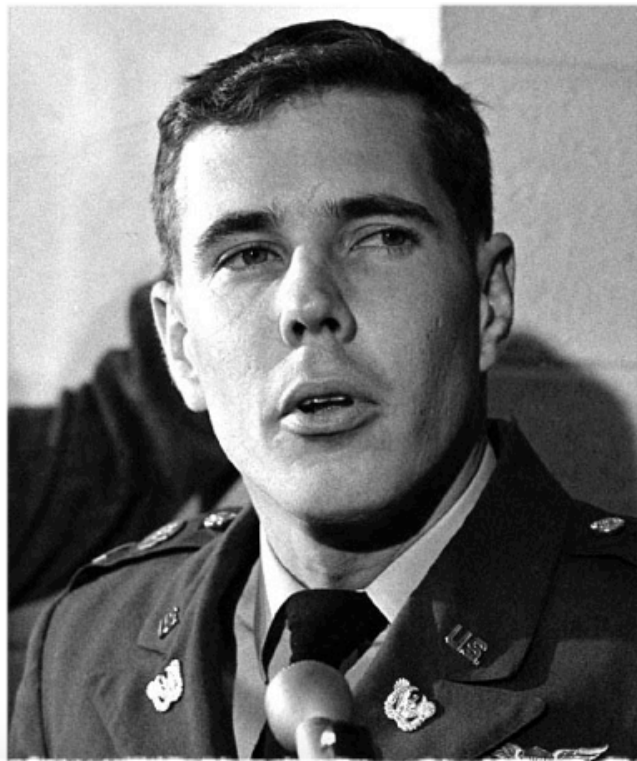
Much later, the world would discover that it was pilot Hugh Thompson, 24, who landed his helicopter at the scene and ordered his gunners – Lawrence Colburn, 19, and Glenn Andreotta, 20 – to fire on the U.S. soldiers if need be.

Meantime, Thompson rescued a dozen of the Vietnamese civilians inside a bunker and airlifted them to safety with the help of two nearby helicopter gunships.

Colburn, now 62, says, *"the nightmares still come to me at night."*

"I landed my helicopter and then dismounted. Sergeant David Mitchell (Squad Leader, 1st Platoon, C' Company) walked over to me. I asked Mitchell if I could be any help... could I possibly provide any help to the Vietnamese Civilians that were being held... by gunpoint... in the ditch, Mitchell replied to me... that the only way to help them was to put them out of their misery."

"We Found a Small Boy."



HUGH THOMPSON, before the investigation committee, My Lai Massacre, 1968

"When we'd gotten the people out of the bunker and were ready to leave, Glenn Andreotta saw some movement in the ditch, he went in, and, among all the mutilated bodies, found a small boy.

He handed the boy up to me, and I grabbed him by the back of his little silk shirt, and I remember thinking...

"I hope these buttons are sewn on tight." I just had him in my left hand, my weapon was in my right, and I couldn't even feel any weight – so much adrenaline was pumping.

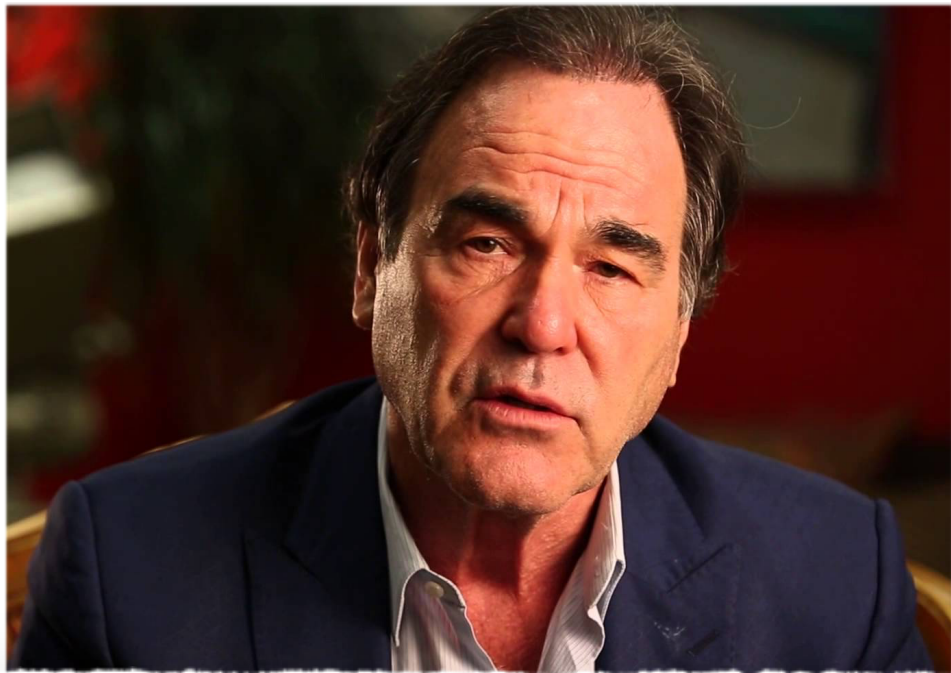
We took him to a hospital, and I prayed that since he was so young and so traumatized that maybe he wouldn't remember.

The whole experience has made me less trustful and less happy in my life, but it's what it is.

I don't stand in judgment of anyone."

"In 1976 I optioned "Platoon" to a producer, but it was not made. The production manager asked me to entrust him with many of my prints and negatives from Vietnam. He thoughtlessly sent it all in a package from New York to Los Angeles, but it never arrived. I'm sure they're somewhere in this world — anyone know (reward offered)?"

"Sometimes you are guided to your destiny."



OLIVER STONE, 64, film-maker and screenwriter, who received a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart for his service in Vietnam; his film, *Pinkville*, explored the investigation that followed the My Lai massacre.

"On January 1, we were out in the bush on the Cambodian border, in these foxholes, what they call a two-company perimeter, with artillery.

We'd set up a kind of a quick LZ [Landing Zone], and for some reason all the packages for Christmas arrived on the 1st.

I was opening all these beautiful things that were sent from home, from Mom, from my friends. Then the night came – and that was some night. We got hit with a two-battalion human-wave attack by the NVA [North Vietnamese Army]. That was a heck of a way to start the year.

It was hard. But I became a better soldier that year. I learned a lot about life and the realities of dealing with other men. I saved lives. I didn't kill people unnecessarily. I kept my soul, while a lot of people came out dead. Still, I knew I would never be the same again."



While waiting at the airport for my plane to go back to the United States, men were loading body bags.

Suddenly, one of the bags fell open. And body parts fell out.

As the plane took off, every one of us began to weep.

I had wanted to be a career soldier, but the war changed all that.

All I wanted to do was go home. "

– RAYMOND Day, 61, Bushkill, Pennsylvania

“I’ve Been to the Mountaintop”

“No, It Doesn’t Matter Now.”



MARTIN LUTHER KING delivering his final speech the night before he was assassinated – 4/3/68 – At the Mason Temple Church of God in Christ Headquarters, Memphis, Tennessee

“It really doesn't matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, there were six of us.

The pilot said over the public address system, ‘We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong on the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we've had the plane protected and guarded all night.’”

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out there. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!”



"I have traveled and I have listened to the young people of our nation and felt their anger about the war that they are being sent to fight and about the world they are about to inherit."

- SENATOR ROBERT F. KENNEDY, DECLARING HIS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY



“Is Everyone Ok?”



HARRY BENSON, 78, photographer who has chronicled more than 50 years of history, for publications from 'Life' to 'Vanity Fair'

“I got married the day that RFK died. I was 18. I was devastated. It was a day of loss – a loss of innocence. I married to leave home, because that was the only way out for many girls at that time.

So I felt the direction of my life and the direction of the country were irretrievably altered and amazingly intertwined that day.” – *GLORIA ESTES, 58, Aurora, Colorado*

“**THE NIGHT BOBBY WAS SHOT** – I was standing next to him – it was like “I must not fall!” There was the memory of JFK’s assassination in Dallas and how it wasn’t recorded properly. I was saying to myself, “This is for history; don’t mess this up now.”

I watched someone I genuinely liked... dying... right in front of my eyes – right in front of me, and five other people were shot all around me, but I couldn’t hang back.

It’s a strange thing, though, with violence – you either fall to pieces or else you come out stronger than you went in. That’s the way that I have always felt about America – it had its nervous breakdown in 1968, but that was a bump in the road, I mean, we’re still here.” (*Harry Benson*)

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