

E t cetera Veteran

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There, too, the Viet Cong found a way to ruin Denney's Christmas.

As the Marines enjoyed their swim, a tree covered with bushes floated down the river towards them. The young men ignored the tree until it started shooting at them. Belatedly realizing it was a camouflaged group of enemy soldiers, the Marines fled up the hill and returned fire till the tree had passed.

Christmas, 1966, was less eventful for Denney, who had earned a three-day pass to Tokyo. For the first time since arriving in Vietnam, he felt a pang of homesickness — particularly as he flew into the Tokyo airport on Christmas morning and glimpsed the snow-covered runways.

Denney and his buddies deliberately avoided associating with too many strangers in Tokyo, preferring each other's war-worn company to that of civilians who would remind them of what it was like to live in peace.

"Over there (in Vietnam) was false, and you knew it was false, and in order to make it legitimate you had to keep it false," he said, explaining the need to not "break the spell" of living in wartime. "I could not have taken r(est) and r(elaxation in) Hawaii because the illusion of it would have come to an end. You'd never go back," he concluded.

Denney and his companions preferred the notion of being "alien" that they felt in Japan. He said that other American servicemen may have coped better with going

home on leave and coming back to Vietnam — something he never did.

When he was discharged in early 1967, Denney's first day back in Rochester was almost enough to make him wish he could return to Vietnam. His greeting from civilians at the airport was less than cordial when they noticed his uniform.

"Some ... woman saw the ribbons and she said: 'You killed babies,'" Denney remarked. He didn't remember whether he responded.

His first drink in a downtown bar wasn't much better. "I went into this bar to have a beer and these two ... World War II vets came down on (me)," Denney said, spicing his story with profanities. "They said (Vietnam) wasn't a real war."

The three proceeded to re-enact the Battle of the Bulge on a lesser scale inside

the bar, with Denney playing the role of the defeated German forces.

Despite the lack of compassion he found among both liberals and conservatives, Denney knew where he stood. Eventually, he chose to work actively against the war, participating in several demonstrations against the U.S. role in Southeast Asia.

Two decades later, Denney, who is now a carpenter, plans to spend Christmas with three of his four children. Although he claims to carry the memory of the war with him every day, he keeps a wry sense of humor about its effect on his faith in God and life.

When asked if the war had shaken his belief in a Supreme Power, Denney shook his head and joked: "No, not really. I believe there's less of a God because of the (Buffalo) Bills losing."

Baby

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wrapped in birthday paper."

From experience, Jill knows the problems a Christmas child can experience. One problem, she said, is "only having one day a year to get presents." In addition, Lyndsey could never have a party with her friends on her actual birthday.

Still, Jill said, she never really felt deprived — due in large part to her mother.

"My mom always made it out to be special," she observed. "She always said, 'You're my Christmas present. You have the same birthday as Jesus.'"

"We always tried to make it special," acknowledged Joyce Vembre, Jill's mother. Christmas included a birthday

cake and gifts in birthday wrapping. Vembre added that although Jill's friends could not come to a party on her birthday, they were invited to a party on another day.

When granddaughter Lyndsey was born last year, Vembre — like Jill — didn't immediately make the connection between the day being both Christmas and Jill's birthday.

"It's just so unusual," Vembre said. "To think Jill had the baby on Christmas in the same hospital — we were thrilled."

As they prepare for a triple celebration this Christmas, the Gruschows are already looking forward to another event: Their third child is due this spring.

"Maybe this one will come Labor Day," Jill joked.

Considering the family's track record, anything is possible.

Entrance exams slated

Entrance and scholarship examinations are scheduled at the following diocesan Catholic high schools on Saturday, Jan. 6, at 8:30 a.m. All exams require a \$5 registration fee.

Rochester — Our Lady of Mercy, 1437 Blossom Road. Pre-registration requested, but not required. Walk-ins welcome.

The Mercy exam is a primary requirement for any freshmen and upperclassmen wishing to compete for a Hope scholarship, which covers the cost of tuition, uniforms, books, supplies, and special services. Applicants must meet certain financial guidelines, and exhibit both strong academic achievement and personal character.

For information, call Joan Hildebrand,

716/288-7120.

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Aquinas Institute, 1127 Dewey Ave. Call 254-2020.

Bishop Kearney, 125 Kings Highway S. Call 342-4000.

McQuaid Jesuit, 1800 Clinton Ave. S. Call 473-1130.

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