

# Viet Nam Vets Bring History To Cal High Students

**S**cott Hodges' junior American History class at Cal High had just finished a unit on the war in Viet Nam. To cap off their studies, the students were treated to living history, as four men who had actually fought in the Viet Nam war visited their classroom. Along with recounting their harrowing experiences, Mike Martin, Dave Smith, Bill Green and Del Loewe passed around their photos, memorabilia and medals to the students, who had never before heard a vet tell his side of the war.

The Viet Nam Veterans of Diablo Valley have set up a speakers bureau, which will arrange for several vets to visit a high school class to present a program of what it was really like for a young man (average age 19—barely older than the students themselves) to be in Viet Nam during that era.

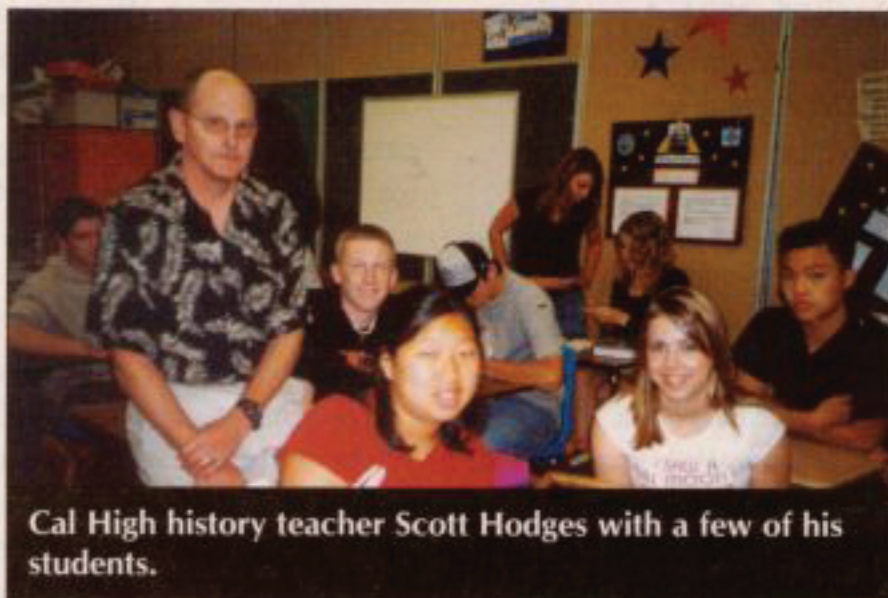
The vets experienced frustration at not being allowed to win militarily because of political posturing at home, and all were given unfriendly receptions when they returned to the U.S. They told how protests in the streets at home actually prolonged the war and cost us more lives, and how the Communists regarded the protests as a front in their war. "North Viet Nam was equipped and funded by the USSR and China—nobody protested that!" According to Bill Green, all live with post traumatic stress disorder because of the horror of seeing their friends wounded or killed. He told the kids: you live in the greatest nation on earth and you have the freedom to protest...the blood of vets has given you even this freedom.

**Mike Martin** was ordered to Viet Nam as an ensign in the Navy. He served in the port city of Da Nang, and at the age of 22 he ran a fleet of 100 trucks, bringing in supplies from the ships. When he came home after 12 months, he flew into LAX where a woman spit in his face and called him names; he turned the other cheek.

**Dave Smith** was in the Air Force for 23 years. He was stationed in Thailand, and flew all over South East Asia. He underwent survivor training, POW training, water survival and jungle training. His greatest fear was being shot down

and captured; he was always prepared with intelligence before he went on a mission. When he returned home his girl friend no longer liked him. She had become involved with the anti-war protests.

**Del Loewe** was a sailor in the Navy. He volunteered for duty in Viet Nam, and was stationed on an LST (a flat-bot-



Cal High history teacher Scott Hodges with a few of his students.

tommed boat that can run right up onto the shore and off load vehicles and supplies) in the Tonkin Gulf. When he came home he was aware of the hostility, but he was just a "blue jacket" doing his job.

**Bill Green** was drafted into the Army. He showed the class his letter from the President that starts with "Greetings." He volunteered for the infantry, and became a small arms specialist. In Viet Nam, as part of the 198th Light Infantry he "walked everywhere." He volunteered to be point man, and walked point for six months. The point man leads the others through the jungle, clearing booby traps and watching for ambushes. The jungle was so thick at times he could not see the sun during the

day or the stars at night. He needed a machete just to get through. Green had the highest praise for the helicopter pilots who risked their lives by flying in unarmed to land in the jungle and pick up the wounded men. When he came home he could not talk about his experiences. He put his keepsakes and medals in a box which he stored in the garage.

His son found them one day, and talked him into making a display, which he passed around so that the students could see his Purple Hearts, Infantry Combat Medal, dog tags and other memorabilia.

What did the students think of the Vets' presentation? "Super!" said Nick Visconti (17). Nick has always dreamed of flying, and is working on getting his pilot's license. He hopes to get into the Air Force Academy.

"Informative...the vets' side of the war is different from what we get from the media," enthused Lauren Clarkson (16). "Really great...I appreciate them fighting for our country," commented Lynn Hiratzka (17). "I like the perspectives of the soldiers...their opinions are sincere and genuine," said Kevin Lee (17).

The Viet Nam Vets have spoken to many high school classes, and hope to speak to many more in the future. They have a collection of thank-you letters which they have received from previous presentations, and most say the words which many vets have yet to hear: WELCOME HOME!

To arrange for a presentation at your school call Mike Martin at (925) 820-2671.



(l-r) Vets Del Loewe, Mike Martin, Dave Smith and Bill Green told their stories at Cal High.