



# Remembering Vietnam: Instructor to ride



By **ERIC DORMAN**  
Features editor

Astride a gleaming black Harley, with wraparound shades and iron-gray hair streaming in the wind, Sociology Instructor Bennett Oppenheim looks like any biker poised for a 3,000-mile joyride across America.

However, the ride he's preparing to take will be for a different reason.

"As I'm riding, I'll be revisiting the many feelings suppressed over the years regarding my involvement [in Vietnam] and the loss of friends whose names are on the Wall," said Oppenheim, who served in the Vietnam War.

The ride Oppenheim is preparing for is the "Run for the Wall"

annual motorcycle ride, in which veterans from all over the nation ride to Washington, D.C. for Memorial Day.

On Sunday, May 27, Oppenheim and about 350,000 other motorcyclists will ride in the "Rolling ThunderParade" from the Pentagon parking lot through downtown Washington, finally ending at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

The Vietnam War was America's longest war, lasting from 1959 to 1975, with America involved from 1965-1973. The war began when communist-led rebels (the Vietcong) began attacking the government of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) later came to their aid, prompting the United States to send troops in aid of South Vietnam. North Vietnam eventually won the war, but not before the American death toll reached 58,000, and about 1 million Vietnamese soldiers and 4 million civilians were killed.

Oppenheim enlisted in the Marines at the age of 18 in April 1966, a decision that he knew at the time "all but guaranteed that [he] would fight in Vietnam." Even though the war was escalating, he felt he had a duty to serve his country—a feeling he now views as foolish.

"At 18, I was naive and ignorant," said Oppenheim. "I believed conventional wisdom and that one must serve one's country in time of war."

Seven months later, Oppenheim stepped off the plane onto Vietnam soil. Forced to "neutralize" the enemy on a daily basis, he quickly learned the necessity of "turning off" himself in order to do what needed to be done.

"What I experienced is that you learned quickly to emotionally 'turn off' and engage each day as though it didn't matter," said Oppenheim. "It didn't make it right, but it made it easier to do what you had to do."

That necessary task of "turning off" was a big de-

tractor from Vietnam veterans' attempts to return to normal civilian life, said Oppenheim. After living in an emotionally "turned off" state for so long, returned soldiers didn't have the time or place they needed to "turn back on again."

"Going from war back to civilian life is a very difficult psychological metamorphosis," noted Oppenheim, "and there are a lot of consequences to [not providing a way for soldiers to turn back on], including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and often suicide."

Though Oppenheim himself survived the war uninjured, around him he saw his friends injured and dying. Throughout the course of the war, over 50 percent of his friends were killed in action.

But despite the rampant killing he witnessed on a daily basis, Oppenheim never despaired completely of making it out of the war alive. "You always have hope," he said, "but you can't be preoccupied with life and death" because that causes one to lose focus.

When Oppenheim returned to America after serving his time, he was faced not with welcoming celebrations but with hostility. "We were looked at as outlaws, as the reason for an increasingly unpopular war," remembered Oppenheim. "We were shunned by society...we were looked at as baby killers, as pariahs; we were yelled at and disrespected. We were part of the problem, not part of the solution. Instead of reminding society of a victory won [as in previous



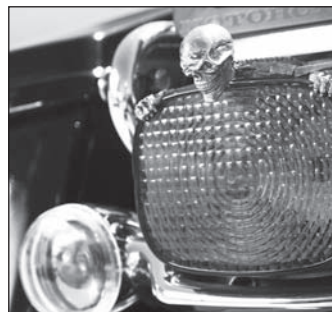
**Sociology instructor and Vietnam War veteran Oppenheim is wearing a leather "Vietnam Vets" shirt and riding a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. He will be participating in the Run for the Wall Memorial Day. Right and left, Oppenheim rides his Harley-Davidson motorcycle. On the left, he poses beside his bike.**

wars], we were a constant reminder of a failed occupation."

None of this made assimilation back into civilian life any easier, noted Oppenheim. Many hid their military service. Many blamed others—the current administration, the American people—for what had been done to them.

Oppenheim said that while he witnessed this, he was personally able to avoid it. "I knew that if I didn't lose my anger and my rage, I would not be able to function or be a reasonable person."

To cope with his conflicting feelings and America's rejection, Oppenheim began traveling, first hitchhiking to New York,



## Spend week helping Earth

By **MARGARITA KITOVA**  
Staff writer

Ohlone's LIFE club, ASOC and the Sustainability Club will put on an "Earth Week" next week from April 16 to 20. The activities will include earth-centered events, live music, food, speakers, free giveaways, information, games, contests & more.

College President Doug Treadway will kick off the events with a short introduction on Monday at 11:30 a.m. Following that, the band WHOGAS will play from noon to 1 p.m. in the Quad.

The schedule for Tuesday promises to be even more interesting, with the band NEXUS playing in the Quad from noon to 1 p.m. The same day, the LIFE club will be having an art contest with a "Global Warming" theme. The winners will win cash prizes.

On Wednesday, Biology Instructor Walter Arenstein, who helped organize Earth Day in New York, will come to speak on the progression of Earth Day from noon to 12:30 p.m. For the next half hour, Nina Rizzo of the Global Exchange will talk about what people can do locally to help the environment. In addition, KOHL will provide a disc jockey from 11 a.m. to noon. On Thursday, students will have an opportunity to attend a "Meet the Candidates" forum for ASOC in the Quad. Another planned event is the tree planting ceremony that will happen between the Palm Basque and Building 1.

Students can all contribute to a clean campus on Friday. Teams from various departments of the school will be cleaning up the whole campus, and the LIFE Club participants will be collecting recyclables as well.

The LIFE Club, ASOC and the Sustainability club will have environmental information tables each day.

There are also tentative plans for a PG&E table, which will aim to inform people of the importance for saving energy. There will also be laptops available for students to take sustainability tests on.

If enough funds are raised for the week, food will also be provided.

Next week is the time when students should all become aware of what they can do to help our environment and preserve the beauty we are surrounded by. Need more incentive? Last year some of the teachers gave extra credit to students who went out to pick up trash. This shouldn't be students' only motivation, though. The events planned are a great opportunity for all students to contribute for a cleaner and even more beautiful campus.



Photo by Jack Husting

**On an Earth theme, the LIFE Club created a garden near Parking Lot N. LIFE, ASOC and the Sustainability Club will put on an "Earth Week" next week.**

# Harley 3,000 miles to Washington



War veteran Bennett Oppenheim, right, is reflected in the mirrors of this ride to Washington for Memorial Day. Below left, a skull flies through the wind; below right, he flies past and below

Photos by Jack Hustling



United States to rebuild his life. He got a job, married, and raised a family of twin boys. Still, he said that he never forgot his time in Vietnam, and is very concerned about the parallels between the Vietnam and Iraq wars.

The Iraq war has many of the same characteristics of the war in Vietnam, noted Oppenheim. In both wars, he said, the U.S. went in for the wrong reasons, the decision to commit troops was made by non-military officials, the electorate was ill-prepared for a long struggle, there was no achievable exit strategy and the government was not prepared to handle returning troops.

"So far as I'm concerned, the only differences [between Iraq and Vietnam] are time and place," declared Oppenheim.

Oppenheim warned not to rule out the possibility of a draft for the Iraq war, as happened in Vietnam. "If the war endures much longer, if tours of duty are extended, or if we get involved in another Middle East skirmish, the likelihood of a draft is much greater," said Oppenheim.

Oppenheim went a step further on the subject of drafts, stating that a draft should be a prerequisite for the U.S. entering any war. "If the nation knows we are going to institute a draft, we will think long and hard before entering any kind of struggle," and a draft would ensure sufficient forces to end the war, said Oppenheim. "Neither of which took place here."

When asked what he would do if his twin boys - aged 29 - wanted to fight in Iraq, Oppenheim thought a long time before choosing his answer carefully.

"I would respect their decision, but I would warn them that this is not



a war worthy of their personal sacrifice," said Oppenheim. "I would encourage them not to be part of this ill-advised endeavor."

Oppenheim decided to participate in the "Run for the Wall" ride for the first time this year because it's something he has always wanted to do and because his friend and riding partner Ed won't be able to make the ride much longer. He plans on leaving Tuesday, May 22 at 2 a.m., the morning after the final of his last class, Sociology 101. He and Ed will ride across the country for five days in time for the "Rolling Thunder" parade on Sunday - although Op-

penheim admitted that it probably wouldn't take them quite that long to get there.

"We'll ride fast and hard," said Oppenheim, "and let's just say that we'll probably make it in less time than we should."

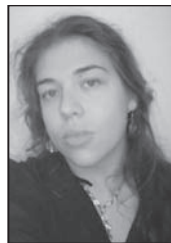
This will not be Oppenheim's first cross-country trip, or his first time to the memorial. However, he said that the remembrance of his friends and his own experiences haven't faded with time. "I've visited the memorial three times now," said Oppenheim quietly, "and let me tell you, it doesn't get easier with each successive visit."



## You may not know Jack - but is knowing Jill any worse?

Knowledge is a funny thing. We all have it, to some extent, but it's like an answer to a logarithm problem - never the same twice. The way you just *know* something one moment can change like the wind, as when you *know* you've turned the gas off only to come home to a burning building and a highly irritated landlord.

There are different sorts of knowledge, too. There's IQ (intelligence quotient) and the recently coined EQ (emotional intelligence), there's photographic memory and the ability to do huge sums in your head, there's having a green thumb and being great with animals and kids and, on the other hand, shining in front of a crowd and being a top-notch demagogue, there are idiot-savants and autistic geniuses and the kindest people you ever meet, who put two and two together and come up with eight, and there are



**Devil's Advocate**

By ANNA NEMCHUK  
Editor-in-chief

the biggest bastards ever, who save corporations on legal technicalities and kick puppies in their spare time.

And who's to say what kind of intelligence is better? I've known kids that excel at homework and organize their pencil boxes by lead thickness, study for tests three weeks in advance, play two instruments and baby-sit on the weekends - I think they're batshit insane, but I have my own brand of dementia.

(Consequently, these are also the kids whose mothers start them on SAT tutoring a little early, in my opinion - right around

the time they've finished potty training. These people are always amazed that bookstores don't have a section for kindergarten test prep and highly offended when I offer a nice coloring book instead.)

I've known people who perform their best under pressure and so are chronic procrastinators. You can usually pick them out of the crowd by their heightened color (heart-attack mauve), rapid breathing (hyperventilation is a lifestyle choice), agile stride (where's the elephant stampede?), unique fashion sense (let's see you pick out matching socks with 30 seconds to spare), piquant expression (widening of the eyes and twitching of the brows facilitates the thought process, doncha know), digital aides (maybe you can get by on one Blackberry, but my contact list barely fits on three) and nifty accessories (I

know there're five pencils in my hair - I put them there, didn't I?).

That would be journalists generally and yours truly in particular.

I didn't study for the SATs. I didn't even know the format of the test, so when I scored a 1400 on the PSAT junior year I thought that was terrible. Upon hearing some of my friends' tears caused by the 1100 they'd received after grilling study guides for the past two years, I was just confused.

Then there are people like a coworker of mine - triple majors in chemistry, astro-physics and nuclear engineering with Pulitzer-winning novels, loving spouses, a couple of adorable Labs, stable hairlines and a 10-minute mile - in other words, aliens.

But if there's one thing the human race can't stand, it's that damn grass on the other side. Sure, you can do 30 push-ups,

but can you write code? You're getting top marks in art history class but can't get a date if you were covered in chocolate sauce, clutching hundred-dollar bills and built like Fabio. You're an empath; you actually feel people's pain and can coax a stone to smile but are damned if you can write your name legibly or walk and chew gum at the same time.

Does one type of intelligence forestall another - a sort of balancing act the brain performs?

And who's better? I can take a test on the fly and B.S. an essay in 40 minutes. (How long did you think this column takes?) But my study skills suck (although my alliteration's nothing to sneeze at) and I'm constantly on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

But that's how my brain works, and I like it. Keeps me on my toes.

Now, *did* I turn off that gas?

## Running for the Wall

By ERIC DORMAN  
Features editor

The ride Oppenheim will be taking part in his trip to Washington, "Run for the Wall" (RFTW), is an annual motorcycle ride for veterans. It aims to raise public awareness of the effects of war, and promote healing among war veterans.

The ride was started in 1989 by two Vietnam veterans, James Gregory and Bill Evvans. It grew in popularity and became a yearly Memorial Day tradition.

The cross-country trip takes 10 days and ends at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial the Sunday evening before Memorial Day. On Memorial Day, riders will have a choice to join 350,000 other motorcycles in the Rolling Thunder Parade through Washington, D.C.

During the 3,000-mile ride, RFTW participants make stops at memorials, hospitals and schools. The members are of a range of ages, from 8 to 80.

In addition to veterans, riders include active military, supporters, friends and family.

Participants pay their own expenses and gas money, as well as a nominal charge for the event.

"Some people join 'Run For The Wall' and think of it as just another vacation or motorcycle event," said the "Run for the Wall" description statement. "After one or two days, though, you realize this is something very special."