

## Postscript – 1985

In 1985, I was working as a litigation associate at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, a large Wall Street law firm. Most of the lawyers at the firm were from Ivy League schools and almost no one had served in the U.S. Armed Forces or been anywhere near the Vietnam War. The exceptions could be counted on one hand. John Poggi, who left the firm before I really got to know him, had served as an infantryman in Vietnam, been wounded in combat, and walked with a limp. Then there was Ken Logan, a litigation partner, who had been an officer in Vietnam, and me.

Simpson Thatcher's main office was located at Battery Park, a block away from Bowling Green, the spot where Broadway begins. From Bowling Green to City Hall, Broadway is called the "Canyon of Heroes", the site of innumerable tickertape parades. The heroes of the hour, everyone from Charles Lindberg and John Glenn to Olympic champions and World Series winners, traveled up the Great White Way amid torrents of paper to City Hall where they received the keys to the city. Likewise, the armies returning from World War I, World War II, and the Korean War had been honored on this stretch of lower Broadway. For the soldiers of the Vietnam War, however, there had been no ticker tape parades, no City Hall salutes, and no keys to the City.

But in the spring of 1985, it was announced that a Vietnam veterans' parade would be held on lower Broadway. The sponsor was unclear - - apparently some Vietnam veterans committee in conjunction with the City Office of Veterans Affairs. When the day came, instead of proceeding from Bowling Green to City Hall to be honored by the Mayor, the march started in Brooklyn, crossed the Brooklyn Bridge, passed by City Hall where no reception took place, and then wended its way down Broadway to the Battery.

On the day of the parade, I left my office at Simpson Thacher a little after noon and walked a block and a half to the cobbled area in front of the Bowling Green Customs House to watch. A few minutes later, the marchers arrived at Bowling Green, ambling past me in ragged clusters, some mockingly calling cadence, without a semblance of organization. Many of the men - - long-haired, unshaven, and clad in a motley of army gear and civilian clothes, red or blue bandannas around their heads - - resembled the guys I'd seen for years, begging at street corners and subway stations with hand-lettered signs pleading "Please help a Vietnam vet". Although I believed most of the beggars were legitimate veterans, mentally scrambled or otherwise down on their luck, I also thought a hefty percentage were phonies. But genuine or not, they had come to embody for the American public the "Vietnam Veteran", someone to be pitied and avoided. This stereotype misrepresented the great majority of the war's veterans and I resented it.

A few years earlier, I'd watched the official tickertape parade for the freed Iranian hostages. Broadway had been thronged and the air filled with shredded paper, joyful shouts, and heavy sustained applause, all the way from the Battery to City Hall where the Mayor honored the former hostages with an official reception. Now as the Vietnam veterans shuffled past, a few wisps of paper floated down from the office towers, the spectators on the streets were no more numerous than a normal lunchtime crowd, and the sporadic applause was feeble. The contrast with earlier parades was vivid and painful. I felt angry and humiliated; a lump rose in my throat. As I turned away from the marchers, I glimpsed Ken Logan standing on the cobblestones a few steps away from me quietly watching the spectacle. Our eyes met, we quickly looked down and shook our heads, then silently headed back to the office.