

Oct. 12 - Oct. 19, 1969

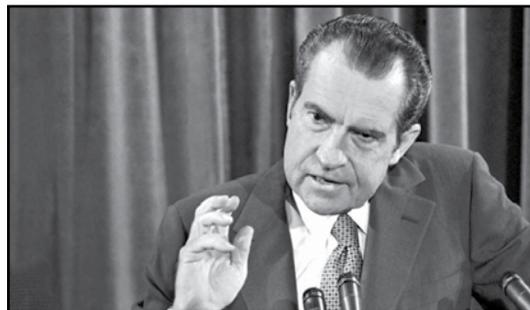
By Tom Bodle

The most consuming event of national interest in our formative years was the Vietnam War. In post World War II, national movements in southeast Asia were rebelling against French colonialism. Integrated in the turmoil was the rise of Communism. Concerned with the global containment of Communism, the United States became involved in Vietnam, fostering pro-democracy forces as the French withdrew in 1954. Initially, Americans primarily served as advisors, keeping about 1000 present until 1959. As the "Cold War" intensified between the Soviet Union and the U.S., the Kennedy administration began increasing troops to counter the North Vietnamese military and the insurgent Viet Cong, both supported by the U.S.S.R. By 1963 the American presence rose beyond 16,000.

Lyndon Johnson became president upon Kennedy's assassination in 1963. He subsequently won the 1964 presidential election by a landslide over Barry Goldwater. Considering his election as a mandate, Johnson decided to have a massive military response to counter the Communists in Vietnam. By 1966, over 180,000 Americans had been deployed to Southeast Asia. The military draft was used to fill the ranks of the military. More and more, men age eighteen and over had to defer their education or career plans to fulfill their service requirements. As the war became more and more impactful, the number of casualties increased and by 1969 over 34,000 Americans had died.

Vietnam became a quagmire both politically and militarily. Support began to wane and anti-war demonstrations became more frequent, especially on university campuses as the purpose of the war came more and more under scrutiny. Radical elements took these protests to the extreme, often ending in violence and property damage. The 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago became the climax of confrontation between anti-war demonstrators and police as the convention was interrupted constantly by protests in the street. Richard Nixon was elected to the presiden-

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cy in 1968, in part to change the direction of the war. He proposed a “Vietnamization”, where the U.S. would train the South Vietnam army to allow them to suffice for themselves. Nixon pledged the U.S. would find “Peace with Honor” as they would withdraw from the war.



Early in his presidency, it appeared nothing was changing. A committee of former staff members for Eugene McCarthy’s presidential campaign, sought to create a coalition of pacifist groups from the civil rights movement, university teachers, church leaders and business to present a “respectable” anti-war platform. October 15, 1969 was targeted as a “National Moratorium” to present purposeful criticism of the Vietnam War.

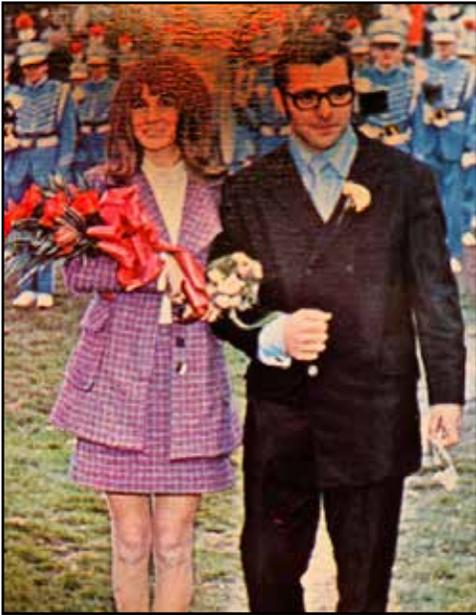


Assemblies and events were held around the country. Speakers such as Coretta Scott King, Dr. Benjamin Spock, W. Averill Harriman and Dick Gregory were enlisted to lead such assemblies. The event drew crowds in major cities and mostly achieved the goals of being peaceful. However, counter demonstrations and responses still revealed the division within the nation. Downtown Cleveland was also a site of such a protest. Classmate Ivan Berlec noted that Cleveland’s observation was “reminiscent of a political rally” and a rather festive gathering of anti-war and anti-establishment protestors rather than a more serious event.



St. Joseph High School’s administration considered the “Moratorium” a relevant educational opportunity for the student body, with so many coming of draft age. Neil McCormick requested and was granted the opportunity to have an in school discussion. Room 219 was provided as the designated room for discussion. Students could use their free time during the day to participate. Two major points of discussion were the foundation of the day, “peace through withdrawal” or “live up to American commitments.” The day unfortunately drifted into a very emotional series of one side versus the other. Shouting and “in your face” challenges to individual’s values took the place of civil discourse. McCormick lamented that too often it was “I feel...” instead of “I think..” The St. Joe enactment of the “Moratorium” however was nothing more than a mirror of attitudes throughout the United States. As we would see, the war along with protests would continue to engulf American politics for six more years.

In spite of the intense attention to and political divisiveness of the “Moratorium” the Viking campus was still filled with spirit and pride. It was the middle of the fall sports season, which would include the homecoming football game. In professional sports, the “Miracle Mets”, led by Tom Seaver, shocked the baseball world defeating the Baltimore Orioles four games to one in the World Series. The Browns would defeat the Steelers in a Saturday night game to sit on top of the Eastern Division of the NFL at 4-1.



The Viking Cross Country team would continue its surge to a state title. The harriers captured the Cincinnati Elder relays. John Klima paced the runners in winning the Crown Conference championship. At week's end St. Joe took the sectional championship, outpacing second place Euclid 24-105. Jim Stanley and John Schmidt placed first and second respectively.



Homecoming 1969 became the spotlight event of the third weekend in October. Student Council hosted dancers at a mixer on Saturday night, featuring the very popular band, "the Originals." In a rare scheduling event, the Homecoming football game was scheduled on a Sunday afternoon. A parade led off festivities marching from the St. Joe parking lot to Euclid stadium. The marching band led the way followed by five floats and cars carrying the homecoming court. In the float competition, senior Frank Straus' "Viking Ship" easily earned the \$25 cash prize over entries by the band and sophomore, junior and senior classes. Marcie Capadonna would be crowned at halftime as queen by captains Don Daily and Ed Bestvina. Marcie and her four attendants presided over the game from the front row seats in the bleachers.



Crown Conference foe Padua provided the competition for the game. In a blustery and damp day the Viking offense struggled to obtain any momentum. Early in the game quarterback Bob Bobrowski was injured and backup Ken Polke took the reins. With some disruption in timing, the gridgers hurt themselves by committing eight penalties for 110 yards, even though they had mustered 267 total yards. It was the defense that saved this day. They were outstanding, limiting the Bruins to just 55 yards on offense. Defensive lineman Craig Myers made the play of the game, intercepting a pass and rambling 55 yards for the first Viking score. Later, Ken Polke connected with Greg Lieb for a touchdown. Unfortunately Lieb would depart with a fractured ankle later in the game. The Vikes would come away with a 14-0 victory, winning their sixth in a row and continuing their dream of undefeated football. #30