

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

When only a few sacrificed

Last week, Gov. Wolf ordered all schools closed through the rest of the academic year.

Despite determined efforts to replace classrooms with on-line learning for students sheltering at home, many will suffer academically.

School closures will be particularly tough on seniors, who are not only losing about three months of classes, but also one of the most enjoyable periods of their lives.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

By March, most seniors have put the most stressful part of high school behind them and can enjoy proms, yearbook signings, and graduation ceremonies. They eagerly look forward to going out on their own.

All of that is now up in the air.

The looming fear of a recession, or possibly a depression, gives us all a sense of foreboding.

For my generation, fear of the future was limited to a few — young men of draft age.

President Lyndon Johnson had led the country into a huge morass known as the Vietnam War. Ignorant of Vietnam's culture, misled by his generals, and determined not to be the first president to "lose" a war, Johnson doubled down on America's involvement in the conflict by sending ever-growing numbers of young men to fight strangers in the jungles of southeast Asia.

Unlike today, America had military conscription for all male citizens aged 18 to 26 for two year's service in the Army. Everyone had to register. If you were deemed fit, you could be forced into military servitude.

In addition to providing soldiers for the Army, the draft encouraged

others to voluntarily enlist in the Navy, the Air Force, and the Marines.

There were great inequalities involved. College students received deferments until graduation. Blacks and working class men were drafted in disproportionate numbers.

The most awesome power government can exercise is killing its citizens. For many young men, the draft amounted to a death sentence.

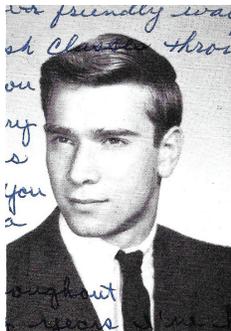
My brother was drafted immediately upon graduating from college in 1966. He was fortunate to be posted to Thailand. The Army called me up after I graduated from college in 1970, but I was rejected for being underweight. However, the Army diligently weighed me every six months until the draft ended in 1973.

Most people in my generation know someone who was killed in Vietnam.

One of my wife's classmates, David Holland, joined the Marines immediately after graduating from high school in 1966. He was bright, popular, handsome, and very kind. He felt it was his patriotic duty to enlist. He was killed in Vietnam a week before his 20th birthday.

All those decades of life robbed from him! So many other lives destroyed! The Vietnam War generated huge protests, but for the vast majority of Americans, life went on as usual. The 60s and 70s were prosperous years.

Is this time different?



DAVID HOLLAND
Killed in Vietnam
at 19 years old



TRAGIC WAR — More than 58,000 American men, most of them young people, many of them drafted into the Army, were killed in the Vietnam War, a conflict that history has concluded was a tragic mistake.