

Editorial

Reagan should not cut veteran's benefits

Pasco, Wash., Aug 22, 1983: Vietnam veteran mistakes three friends for enemy soldiers. Stabs two to death with a kitchen knife.

Alaska, 1980-7: Purple heart holder Mike Schass is tormented by bodies that jerk from his bullets. Escapes to Alaska's desolate areas.

East Coast, 1983: Vietnam veteran fears that he will hurt someone. Runs in front of a car. Survives.

Like all of us, President Reagan has read or heard stories like these. In fact,

Reagan was so overwhelmed by Vietnam veterans' plight that he broke down and cried earlier this year while paying respect to an unknown soldier in Virginia's Arlington National Cemetery.

Standing before the soldier's grave, Reagan said Vietnam veterans are "heroes as surely as any who ever fought for a noble cause. . . we know what you have done for us. We love you for it."

Now, a few short months later, what does Reagan plan to do for them? He plans to cut veterans' benefits, limit

admission to Veterans Administration hospitals and for the lucky admitted, raise hospital bills. All in the name of love.

The veterans' budget could perhaps be trimmed in some places. For example, semen and blood should be tested for Agent Orange birth defects, rather than administering every test except the two crucial ones. But veterans' direct benefits should not be cut.

We currently have 28.5 million veterans. Many are plagued by recurring nightmares, depression, paralysis, poisoned

semen, alcoholism, nervous breakdowns and job failures just to name a few problems. Their only hope for coping is to seek the help of professionals and other veterans who understand. The Veterans Administration is the best place to get this kind of help. But if Reagan cuts veterans' benefits, the Veterans Administration may be out of reach for many.

They served their country. Now we must serve them.

Judi Nygren
Daily Nebraskan Senior Editor

Planting trees requires hope, hubris

Conscientious Injectors help comeback of American elms

I went outside this morning to pick a spot in our small urban landscape for a new elm tree. This is serious business, choosing the proper place for a newcomer. It won't do to plant a tree too close to the house. I have to be sure it won't block the sun from my vegetable garden or infiltrate the perennial bed.



Ellen Goodman

My planning is wildly premature. My tree is only six inches tall, barely a treelet. If it grows a foot a year, as predicted, it will still be six years before the elm reaches my height; 30 years before any tan is ruined. It is an act of hubris and hope to worry about such things as shade when the twig is just six-inches tall. But that is the essence of tree planting: hubris and hope.

Today is one of those last, fragile, warm days of fall that seem to suggest a leap of faith. In this barren season between leaves and snow, we plant the last bulbs genetically programmed for spring, put the last tree in the ground — one step ahead of the frost.

This year, my task has a wonderful, even corny, edge of optimism to it. Once my entire street, like thousands of others, boasted the elegance of a dozen American elms that reached as high as three story buildings. But 20 years ago, one by one, they were destroyed by Dutch elm disease.

So, when I find the proper spot, there will be an elm again on my street. An American Liberty elm, grown, tested and warranted to resist the disease that has killed 35 million of its kind.

I didn't come by this tree easily. I went on a kind of mission to the source, the Elm Research Institute. I drove up to Harrisville, N.H., on one of those dismal days

that come at the end of a warm November, in and out of pockets of fog on mountain roads.

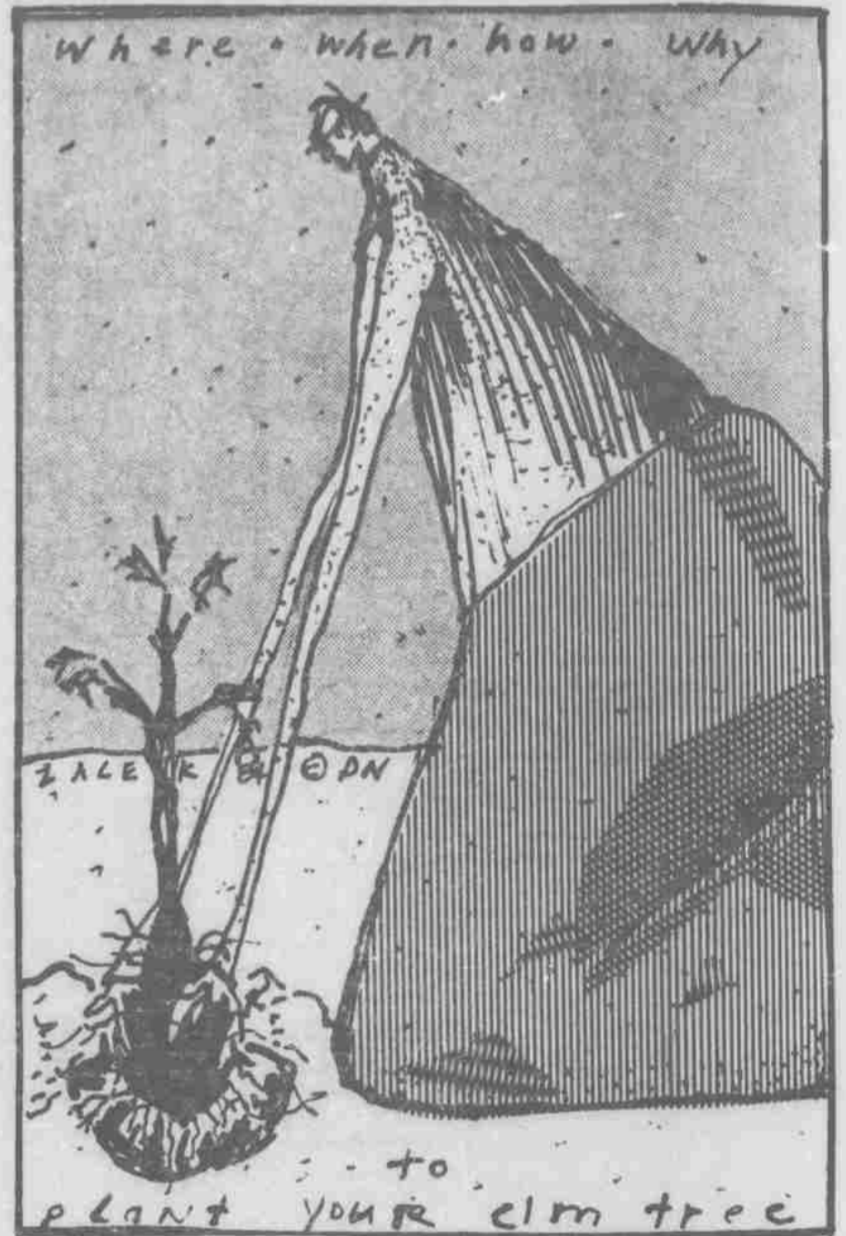
The town of Harrisville was in every way pure New England, a mixture of centuries, the old and picturesque, and new and technological. The Elm Research Institute was located on the bottom floor of a renovated 19th-century brick mill: An historic restoration project housing a natural restoration project.

The institute exists because one man, John Hansel, watched the elms outside his Connecticut home die. That was what you did for the elms in the Sixties. You watched them die. But Hansel was different; he started ERI with money from private citizens and foundations.

Today this modest nonprofit institute operates a program to save some of the standing elms, at least those trees of historic dimensions. On the ERI's pine-paneled wall is a map full of pins, each one representing a town with a Conscientious Injector, some person or group committed to saving the elms from Dutch elm disease by injecting them annually with a powerful and effective fungicide developed nine years ago. About 185 Conscientious Injector groups from Baudette, Minn., to Macon, Ga., to Denver, Colo., have volunteered to inject about 8,000 of the millions of remaining elms.

For those people and places that have already lost their elms, the ERI has what they forgivably called the Johnny Elmseed program. This year, for the first time, they distributed to their members about 4,000 genetic clones of disease-resistant elms that were developed in Wisconsin and raised in New Hampshire.

Mine was one of these elms, plucked out of the misty mill room that doubles as the greenhouse. It came with a green card that bears a computer number and planting instructions and no promises. I am told that even Dr. Eugene Smalley, who cloned the tree, is not sure what it will look like. It may be majestic, he has said, or "It may turn out to be a ratty dog. We won't know the answer for 20 years."



But this morning I have no concern about its beauty. When acid rain threatens sugar maple and fungus threatens the chestnut tree and people threaten each other, there is something wonderful in being part of a comeback story.

What I am worrying about is whether my tree will get tangled in the telephone wires and whether its trunk will upend the cement sidewalk. Anyone who plants a tree knows how to hope.

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Sharon, Westmoreland wage war in court

In one courtroom sits William Westmoreland, commander of the debacle of Vietnam, and in another sits Ariel Sharon, commander of the debacle of Lebanon. They have both brought suit, one against CBS, one against Time, seeking to win in court the victory that eluded them on the battlefield. In the media age, Admiral Perry has been updated. Westmoreland and Sharon have met the enemy and they have sued.



Richard Cohen

But there the similarities end. Westmoreland is handsome, a profile on a recruitment poster, a soldier who in a bygone era would have been a hero on horseback, but who in this one was forced to dismount to write memos. His testimony is replete with jargon, with meetings held and cables sent, with authority delegated and with crises caused not only by the enemy in the field, but newspaper reports back in Washington that had the Pentagon brass in a dither.

Not so Sharon. Fat, slovenly, a

pastry chef posing as a warrior, he is the unexpected man of action. Sitting in the dimness of the courtroom where the Rosenbergs were convicted, he describes how he went in the night to meet the Phalangists of Lebanon: "I was unarmed. I was met by a group of 10 or 15 armed Phalangists and put myself — I put my life — in their hands." Earlier he had discoursed on the nature of revenge in the Middle East, using the English word, the Arabic word, the Hebrew word and for each he had an example of death drawn from life.

Americans, of course, are more interested in the Westmoreland case. But his is an inconsequential trial since its effect on either the present or the future will be nil. He is suing CBS for saying in a documentary that he participated in a conspiracy to underestimate enemy strength. But whatever the truth of the charge, it hardly matters and if Westmoreland had not sued, few would remember the documentary anyway. Vietnam was not lost because of troop estimates, but because it should not have been fought in the first place.

war Westmoreland is fighting all over again — the war against the war itself waged by critics in the media. It is a war against those who are perceived to have caused the failure in Vietnam, those who, like the Jews of facist imagination, stabbed the army in the back for the lucre of circulation and ratings.

And so "Westy" is doing it all again, reviewing the memos and the meetings, the cables and the briefings, the grand strategy sessions with the CIA, DIA, CINCPAC — fighting his paper war one more time. An accountant in full battle dress, he now leads a charge of lawyers seeking to prove that his troop estimates were honest, that he would not lie about them to his commander in chief, even to win the war.

Sharon, on the other hand, would do anything to win a war. Because of him, Israeli troops stay and die in Lebanon. That was his war. He conceived it. He argued for it. And he carried it out. He told the Cabinet he would take the Israeli army only 40 kilometers into Lebanon and he took it to Beirut.

Continued on Page 6
More Editorial on Pages 6 and 7