

Author Commentary

“When the War Ended,” by James D. Redwood

By the time this story is published, the 40th anniversary of the end of the American war in Viet Nam will have come and gone. There have already been a number of commemorative events and effusions on the war—Cory Kennedy’s documentary on the last days in April, 1975 perhaps the most noteworthy. Anniversaries appear to be suitable times to reflect, although reflection should not need anniversaries. “When the War Ended” adds to the number of effusions, or perhaps I should say emissions, about the war, which is still our most painful overseas conflict.

The story, although serious in subject matter, arose out of an amusing event in the author’s life. After being awake for two nights on my way back to Saigon from New York at Easter, 1974, the first because of an all-night Icelandic Airways flight, the second because of my inability to find even one available hotel room in Paris due to the religious holiday, I found myself badly in want of sleep. The only contact person I had in Paris at that time was the sister of a Vietnamese woman I knew in Saigon. This sister had married a French veteran of *la guerre Indochinoise*, and I decided to throw myself on their mercy in the hope that they might be willing to give me a bed and a bath. They knew nothing of me, either before or since, but they kindly indulged me for a couple of days before my return flight to Saigon. Sadly, they unnecessarily dragooned their teenaged daughter, much against her will, into showing me the sights and sounds of Paris. The daughter and her boyfriend took me to the Paris zoo in the Bois de Vincennes, probably figuring that that was about all the French culture an American could absorb, and then they left me to my own devices and went off to have a little fun on their own. Where, I do not know, although I certainly did not (and do not) begrudge them their happiness. Originally, there was a zoo scene in my story, but I have deleted it on the grounds of irrelevance.

I do not know whether the real daughter ever went through the kind of crisis of identity that afflicts Annieke Mollot. I hope not. The many wars in Viet Nam have resulted in far too much pain without that addition to the toll.