

# VIETNAM VENGEANCE

ONE Divided TWO  
by



KEITH KLUIS



Creative Force Press

SAMPLE CHAPTER FOR PERSONAL  
READING PURPOSES ONLY



*Vietnam Vengeance*

© 2015 by Keith Kluis

[www.keithkluis.com](http://www.keithkluis.com)

This title is also available as an eBook. Visit  
[www.CreativeForcePress.com/titles](http://www.CreativeForcePress.com/titles) for more information.

Published by Creative Force Press  
4704 Pacific Ave, Suite C, Lacey, WA 98503  
[www.CreativeForcePress.com](http://www.CreativeForcePress.com)

*All characters and stories represented in this book are fictional.  
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a  
retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means--for example,  
electronic, photocopy, recording--without the prior written permission of the  
publisher.*

ISBN: 978-1-939989-18-5

Printed in the United States of America

This book is dedicated to the men and women of our armed services: all who sacrificed some and many who sacrificed all.

To their family and friends: many who lived each day praying their loved one would make it home, and then lived (or tried to) with the fallout as their soldier came home, trying to adjust to life after war. Many times, this adjustment is much harder and longer lasting than most people comprehend.

Please take the time to read and care about the struggle and difficulty our returning soldiers experience. Nearly every day there are stories to be found in any major news source.

*He who thinks all wars  
are bad has a blind eye*

*He who thinks all wars  
are good has a blind soul*

-K Robert Kloos

# 1

---

## **JANUARY 1973 THE START**

*Why is it, thought Paul, that I hate waiting so much?* The atmosphere in this businessmen's lounge was certainly comfortable. Stuffed leather arm chairs, short-skirted waitresses dressed in low-cut outfits, low-level lighting, and people mechanically moving around him but noticing no one. He had been in many of these before joining the Army. He liked it then, but it felt different today, just two weeks after returning from Vietnam. *A lot of things feel different now*, he thought. Glancing at his watch he noticed it was now 7:15. *Where is Chris?*

He fidgeted in his chair, motioning to a waitress. "Bring me a vodka seven," he heard himself say, realizing that even the thought of Chris Stone caused his mind to drift, sliding into another day, another time.

"God, how I try to forget," he mumbled.

That scene had replayed hundreds of times in his mind. The three of them walking down a bombed-out street in Nam: Jess Whitfield, Bill Lux and himself. Navigating the cluttered city streets, they were going to meet Chris for an evening of R&R. The horror of the next 60 seconds always came to him in grotesque, slow motion. There was Chris, rounding the corner and coming toward the three of them. Paul quickened his pace, moving ahead of Jess and Bill to greet Chris first. A quick movement from behind the three men caught his eye. *Oh God, no...* Looking down, he spotted a grenade lobbed by a Viet Cong rolling to a stop between Jess and Bill. He dove into a doorway, but they had

no place to escape. A loud explosion. Blood and pieces of bodies went flying. The smell of burnt flesh and gunpowder.

What could he do? He stood, numbed, for an eternity of seconds. The VC perpetrator had disappeared, and so had the young lives of his friends.

The MP's came. He answered their questions. That part was a blur. As far as the authorities were concerned, they might have been talking about stolen typewriters. They were cold, insensitive, like they had no feelings. *Where were the big boys that decided we should be in this war? Back in Washington, that's where. Nice and safe, the dirty b... 's.*

"You want this on a tab?" a sultry voice had pierced his thoughts and brought him back to his chair in the lounge.

"Uh, no." He reached for his wallet. "Keep the change," he replied. Sweat. He was sweating. A cold sweat, no less. *Why the hell can't I forget? Why the hell should I? Somebody is going to pay.*

Looking around, Paul spotted Chris. He was talking to the hostess while glancing around. Their eyes met. Chris smiled and waved off the hostess as he walked briskly to Paul's table.

Except for height and a little more bulk, Chris was a lot like Paul. They could easily be mistaken for brothers. Chris was a solidly built, 5'-10" man with wavy black hair – a nice compliment to his permanent tan. He walked easily with the grace of a gifted athlete, which he was. His rugged features stereotyped him as an outdoor worker. In fact, he had spent many hours working for his father's construction company. It was hard physical work, but Chris enjoyed working with his hands. Building and construction gave him satisfaction and a sense of importance, and he was built for it.

Paul was one year older than Chris, although at 24 years old, it didn't

show. What *did* show was Chris' uneasiness in this upscale lounge. He was more at home in a dank corner bar than here. Even though he had changed into a turtleneck and stylish brown slacks, which would be a standout in his neighborhood, he now felt out of place among the gray-vested suits all around him. Paul stood up to greet Chris as he approached.

"Glad to see you again, Chris, hope you didn't have too much trouble finding the place."

"No trouble," replied Chris, "just ran into a little traffic delay—accident I think. No problem. Yeah, nice to see you again too, Paul. It's been, what, two weeks since we got off the plane from Nam?"

"Two weeks ago today," said Paul. "Seems like years." Paul was watching Chris' eyes to see what reaction might be visible. None. *Wonder if he's got it sorted out for himself*, thought Paul. *We were both pretty vocal about the establishment after what happened to Jess and Bill, and the thousands of others needlessly killed.* They had talked while on the way home about doing something to even the score. Paul was wondering how Chris felt about it after two weeks back home. *Might as well find out if I've got a partner or if I'm the Lone Ranger in this plan*, Paul had thought before their phone call yesterday.

"Chris," Paul started, "let's get right to the point. We want to do something to even the score for Jess and Bill and all the Jess' and Bill's in Nam. I've thought about it for two weeks now, and thought I might mellow, but my resolve seems to be deepening. The more I think about what is really happening, the madder I get."

While Paul talked, Chris was observing. Paul was also tan with wavy black hair, and though four inches taller than Chris, he was not much heavier. Paul's right arm draped over the top of his chair, while his left

hand gestured as he spoke. Paul had an air of confidence about him. It was almost as if he were still in uniform, complete with Captain's bars. It was fitting. Just like the war: Captain talking to Sergeant.

Chris liked Paul. He was a good Captain and had treated Chris and his men like real people. As Paul continued, Chris could feel the positivity and authority that Paul exuded. Oh, Paul was a little more academic than Chris liked, but then his intellect fit well with his looks: wavy hair and wire-rimmed glasses. They had made a good team in Nam. *We would still make a good team now.*

"Are you with me, Chris, or am I in this by myself?" Paul shifted, putting both feet on the floor, both forearms out in front of him on the table. The drink in one hand, his eyes staring right into Chris'.

Chris looked right back, silent for ten long seconds; a pause that seemed like minutes. His eyes, although still looking at Paul, lost focus, and everything became a blur of colors. He, too, took a trip back to Nam – the senseless loss of life, the knowledge that there was no way to win, the fact that Washington wouldn't let them win even if they could have.

"Count me in," he blurted out before he was completely recovered from his thoughts. Then, as if he had never said them, he repeated, "Count me in."

"Good." Paul was satisfied, for now. His eyes lit up with approval. Chris would be an excellent partner. Together they could do much more than either alone. They complimented each other well, both being intelligent and savvy in different ways. Paul more the academician, while Chris had more of the street smarts. Paul was a little more thorough, Chris a little more reckless. Paul had the power of verbal persuasion, while Chris was more physically gifted. In each area, they



were closely matched with just a slight edge one way or the other.

“Just one thing, Chris. Somebody *is* going to pay, but nobody gets hurt. I’ve had all the violence I can stand in a lifetime.”

“Agreed. I thought you would feel that way.”

Catching the waitress’ attention, Paul motioned her over. “What’ll it be, Chris? It’s on me.”

“I’ll take a Bud.” The waitress gave a slight affirmative nod and flounced away.

“How would you like that for your housekeeper?” asked Paul as he motioned to the departing waitress.

“No thanks,” smiled Chris. “Haven’t had much time for chicks since I got back. Even moved out of my old man’s house. Got a little apartment on the other side of the city. Needed time to think and, well, you know.”

“Yes, things are different all over. Friends gone, some married, some just different. I don’t know, maybe it’s just me. I’m four years older than when I left, physically, anyway. Here, let me pay for the beer. Keep the change.” Paul unfolded two bills and placed them on the edge of their table. “Where was I? Oh, yeah, four years older physically, but seems like ten mentally. You know, the things I thought were so important before, don’t seem so important now. In fact, a lot of it seems, what would you say, false, meaningless, pretentious, plastic? You know what I mean.”

Chris was listening and thinking how much alike they were. Feeling many of the same things Paul was talking about, Chris had spent many hours in his apartment thinking along those lines. And, about how unfair it was that old politicians could send vibrant young people into war, tearing up their lives and families. Then, there was the hovering

cloud of guilt. *How is it that I'm still here instead of Jess and Bill?*

"Yeah, you know it, Paul. It's like we've been thinking the same thing, and now we can stop thinking and start doing."

"Well, not completely," Paul replied. "We can start doing, but we can't stop thinking. One thing for sure, whatever we do it's going to cost money – a lot of money. If we want to publish a magazine, do lobbying, search for MIA's, or whatever, it'll take money."

"Don't look at me," said Chris with a shrug of his good-sized shoulders. "I don't have any."

"Neither do I, but you know who does?"

"Lots of other people."

"Where do they keep their money?" asked Paul.

"In a sock?"

"Yeah, funny guy, in a sock. Well, I was thinking *banks*. In fact, on the plane on the way home, I was even then thinking of the two of us and various talents we have that could be utilized in an operation of this sort."

"What did you come up with?" asked Chris as he drained the last of his Bud and leaned back in his chair, his feet out front and crossed at the ankles, his strong fingers intertwined and rested on his midsection.

"I've come up with a simple plan. One that fits us just right. I'll rough it out for you now, then we can take our respective parts home and do some polishing."

"Tell me more."

"Well, my father's an architect, and I'm going to be working with him. Since I graduated from the U, he's willing to let me take additional responsibility. Your father is a building contractor specializing in light commercial construction – churches, small schools and office buildings,

right?”

“Right.”

“What could be more natural? We’ll bid some small bank jobs to do the architectural work. I’ll get put on the project and design a weak link somewhere around the vault. I’ll slip that sheet into the plans that are used on the job. Your firm gets the construction bid, you get put on as foreman and see that the weak link I design gets built in. Nobody’s the wiser. After we get three or four built we can open them whenever the time is right. The war is not yet over in Nam and it’s not over in the U.S. either. What do you think?”

Chris had moved so he was sitting on the edge of his chair, his hands still folded together, only now his fingers were white where they met. His eyes focused straight ahead at Paul as he reviewed the plan. Chris realized he had been staring at Paul so intently that he’d forgotten where he was. He looked quickly away, sweeping the scene he found himself in – a nice hotel lounge, soft chairs and cold drinks. Thirty minutes ago he came to meet an Army buddy, and now he was all set to participate in robbing a bank. *A bank? Three or four banks! What the hell was going on?*

“I think we can do it, should do it, and will do it!” There was no lack of conviction in Chris’ voice as he thought about the fat cats in Washington who had murdered his comrades in arms. “We’ve got to take our time,” Chris continued. “We’ve got to lay the groundwork right. If either of us appears too eager it could easily raise suspicions. We’ve got a lifetime to do it, so let’s each do a little more planning and meet again.” Even as he said this, Chris started doubting whether he would have the will to wait as long as it seemed the plan was going to take.

“Good point, Chris. Another thing, not many people around here know that we know each other as well as we do. We should keep it that way. Let’s meet in unfamiliar places, changing locations and calling each other as seldom as possible. I don’t want to meet your friends or relatives or know who they are, and I don’t want you to meet my people. The fewer people who know about the two of us the better.”

“Right,” Chris replied, “the FBI could piece things together later if a lot of people know about our relationship. Give me a couple days, Paul, then you call and set up a meeting. Here’s my number at my new apartment.”

Chris handed Paul a slip of paper with his left hand and reached with his right for a handshake as they both rose to leave.

“You think it over Chris, I want you to be sure about this one way or another by our next meeting. Take it easy now, okay?”

“Yeah, see ya.”

Paul sat back down and stared at Chris’ back as he strode away. *If anybody can do it, Paul thought, Chris can.*

## AFTERTHOUGHTS

*Vietnam Vengeance* is just a novel, and maybe that's all there is to it. This novel's purpose is to raise awareness of the awful fallout from war; any war. What is depicted in these pages is mostly mild compared to real life, except for Chris' vengeful actions. Some wars seem to be necessary. In my opinion, we had to participate in the two world wars, no matter the consequences to individuals. But as for other wars, I'm not so sure.

What did we accomplish in Korea or Vietnam that was worth the body count, injuries, and the trauma inflicted on our soldiers, their families and loved ones?

The fictional story shows several perspectives; perspectives of participants and non-participants. It's the ripple effect: throw a stone into a quiet pond and the ripples continue their outward journey, affecting the calm for quite a distance. In our story, Paul became someone he would not normally be. Chris did as well, although in a different direction: taking many lives. He carried the battlefield with him, with all the destruction that ensued. Ellen could not have a normal relationship with a man due to her war trauma. Steve is permanently handicapped. And, on it goes.

Our decision-makers probably sit in their war room, estimate a body count, and then try to make a good decision. But, they do not look deep enough. Every casualty and injury has a tremendous impact on many lives for a lifetime. Think of the wives who lost their husbands, or the husbands who lost their wives, the children who grow up without a parent, the thousands of potential children never born, and the anniversaries never celebrated. Lives are ripped apart – some literally,

some emotionally. Some recover from their emotional and physical wounds and move on in life. Some do not. Even now, decades later, it is hard to go two days without reading of some consequence of the Vietnam War. Almost every day something bad happens as a result of our presence in the Middle East. Just recently, the paper reported about a mother taking her own life because her son had been killed in the Middle East conflict. After four years of grieving, she could not stand it anymore and wanted to be with him. Watch the papers. The war ripples move nearly every day.

Injured soldiers live, but with the horrors of war, as do their families. It is a difficult adjustment back to civilian life, so there is a higher rate of divorce, unemployment and mental instability. This brings much stress to children, spouses, parents, siblings, and extended family.

Is what we are doing in these *conflicts*, and the devastating consequences, worth being foisted on even one American family? Multiply that by 58,000+ killed in action and the 153,000+ wounded in Vietnam. In Korea, more than 33,000 were killed in action and over 103,000 wounded.

Looking back, even if we accomplished something in these *wars*, was it worth anywhere near the terrible cost?

©2015 Keith Kluis

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my end table drawers, which held my unfinished novel for 30+ years, keeping it safe.

To my wife, Ruth, who encouraged me to finish that novel and get it out of the drawer. And then, encouraged me even more.

To my best high school buddy, Dr. Paul Nelson, Professor Emeriti at NDSU, who, when I instructed him to read this things to see if there was any hope—but not to edit it—couldn't help himself and gave me many pointers.

To my son, Kevin, who was the first to read it and also helped with editing. To Kris and Kat who took time to read and comment.

To Stephanie Hall, Head Librarian at the Meinders Community Library in Pipestone, Minnesota, who took time from her busy home and professional schedule to critically read the story and offer many good suggestions.

To Judy who edited a chapter, then edited a bit more to get me on the right track.

To Dr. Bill, Donn and others (you know who you are) who read the many drafts of the manuscript and gave me encouraging feedback.

And finally, to my publishers, Krista Dunk and Deborah McLain, for their editing, suggestions and making this project come to life. You're the best!

## **AUTHOR BIO:**



Author Keith Kluis' career included traveling the United States as a seminar leader associated with residential housing. While serving in the US Army Reserves in the 1960's, Keith saw no action, but his stint in the military and living through the Vietnam War era inspired him to write this novel. *Vietnam Vengeance: One Divided by Two* is his first work of war-related fiction.

Now retired, Keith enjoys his grandchildren, Tanner, Makenna and Kaedin, playing tennis, walking, traveling, and reading. He and his wife live in both Minnesota and Arizona, splitting their time between the two.

**[www.keithkluis.com](http://www.keithkluis.com)  
[keithkluis@gmail.com](mailto:keithkluis@gmail.com)**



*Vietnam Vengeance* is proudly published by:



***Creative Force Press***

[www.CreativeForcePress.com](http://www.CreativeForcePress.com)

*Do You Have a Book in You?*