

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

Event: Friday rally and march observes Hiroshima Day, the memorial to the victims of the atomic bombing in 1945, welcomes Vietnam Veteran for Peace, S. Brian Willson to address the weekly gathering for peace.

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Date: Friday, August 6th, 2004

Time: 5:00 p.m.

Place: Pioneer Courthouse Square

Friday rally and march observes Hiroshima Day, welcomes Vietnam Veteran for Peace, S. Brian Willson to address the weekly gathering for peace.

The *Portland Peaceful Response Coalition's* Friday rally will be observing Hiroshima Day, the annual memorial to the victims of the US atomic bombing in 1945, and welcomes special guest, Vietnam Veteran for Peace, S. Brian Willson, to speak at the weekly gathering at Pioneer Courthouse Square. The rally will begin as usual, but this week will make its way down to the Japanese-American Historical Plaza to attend Portland's annual Hiroshima Day Memorial.

In 1966, at the age of 25, Brian Willson entered Officer Training School in the United States Air Force. He describes himself as being "a total believer in the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war ..." In his brief autobiography, he describes some of the events that shaped and transformed his life. He tells of one incident in particular that marked a turning point. He was accompanying a Vietnamese lieutenant to examine a village that had just been bombed by South Vietnamese pilots.

"'Intelligence' reports had indicated these villages as 'enemy friendly' and were therefore now identified as within 'free fire zone' areas," writes Willson. "The purpose of our visit, it was reported to me, was to assess, from the ground, the pilots' successes at hitting their specified targets, rather than 'intentionally' missing them, as some suspected." Witnessing the results of these "successful" bombings, Willson says that he experienced an epiphany. "On one occasion in April 1969, in eerie safety, I witnessed the incredible destruction that had just been inflicted in daylight morning hours on a typically defenseless village about the size of a large baseball stadium," writes Willson. "With smoldering ruins throughout, the ground was strewn with bodies of villagers and their farm animals, many of whom were motionless and bloody, murdered from bomb shrapnel and napalm."

Several were trying to get up on their feet, and others were moving ever so slightly as they cried and moaned. Most of the victims I witnessed were women and children. At one dramatic moment I encountered at close range a young wounded woman lying on the ground clutching three young disfigured children. I stared, aghast, at the woman's open eyes. Upon closer examination, I discovered that she, and what I presumed were her children, all were dead, but napalm had melted much of the woman's facial skin, including her eyelids. As the Vietnamese lieutenant and I silently made the one-plus hour return trip to our airbase in my jeep, I knew that my life was never going to be the same again.

Brian Willson will accompany filmmaker and publisher, Frank Dorrel, for a longer presentation on non-violent change as part of the Hiroshima Day commemoration. They will be speaking at 7:30 p.m. at the First Unitarian Church, SW 12th & Main, in the Salmon Street Sanctuary.