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## Every day is Memorial Day

By Mike Felker

For those who have lost loved ones to handguns, every day is Memorial Day. And there are many, many people who can commemorate this holiday, both here and throughout the nation.

Every day in the United States, 77 people are shot to death. They are the casualties of war, a war caused by guns. That's almost 30,000 Americans killed annually by firearms.

By comparison, during the many years of the Vietnam War, about 58,000 thousand Americans died. I got to see the victims of those shootings close up as a medic in Vietnam. The last minutes of their lives remain in my memory.

One Marine was nicknamed "Big Man" because he was 6'5." On June 2, 1970, while on a patrol in the mountains of Vietnam, near the Laotian border, he was shot in the chest with an AK-47. I was the medic with his infantry "grunt" unit, and it was my job to save Big Man. I put a battle dressing over the hole in his chest. He wasn't breathing, and I tried to revive him with artificial resuscitation, but I failed and he died.

After a bullet perforates the layers of skin, muscle, and bones, it travels through the human body shearing, tearing, and crushing the tissue and organs in its path. It produces a cavity that fills with blood from ruptured blood vessels; this cavity may be as much as 30 times the diameter of the bullet.

Here's what probably happened when Big Man was shot: The bullet hit the bone and cartilage of his sternum, which flattened the bullet somewhat, increasing its diameter, widening its path as it punctured his heart. In its passage, the bullet stretched and displaced the heart muscles, valves and chambers, forming a hole the size of a baseball. Briefly, the heart continued to pump blood from the bullet holes in the heart wall, filling the chest cavity at a rate of about five quarts a minute. But there was no pressure to carry blood through the aorta and arteries. With no blood, there was no oxygen, just death.

Whether they are in a war zone far away, the inner city, or the suburbs, shootings cause injury and death. In our country, about eight young people age 19 and under are killed each day by a firearm - that's the death of a child, teenager or young adult every three hours, every day. In addition, more than 10 murder-suicides, almost all by gun, occur each week in the United States.

Last year, nearly 400 people died through gun violence in Philadelphia. The year before, the death of 10-year-old Faheem Thomas-Childs caused a public outcry but not a cease-fire. And Camden still is known as the most dangerous city in America because of the number of crimes per capita.

Fear, physical pain, and death are the price we are paying for our easy access to handguns. Weapons, particularly illegal ones, are shattering lives and ruining families.

Criminals can easily obtain guns in states such as Pennsylvania because the laws are so lax. They're being aided by "straw purchasers" - people who legally purchase guns, either one or many at a time, and make them available to felons who are unable to pass background checks. These guns are then sold on the streets at a huge profit. It's a deadly cycle that goes on and on.

Lawmakers in Harrisburg are considering a one-handgun-a-month bill that would make it illegal for anyone to purchase more than one handgun in any 30-day period. This could prevent straw purchasers from buying handguns in bulk, dramatically reducing the number of handguns that end up in the hands of criminals.

We must tell our officials that we support this legislation, House Bill 871 and Senate Bill 1002.

We must stop the carnage. We must stop the war at home caused by handguns.