

Peace Coalition of Monterey County celebrates 25 years with a bold new vision for the future.

County's Peace Coalition celebrates 25 years.

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It starts in the sky, with Lockheed C-5 and C-141 cargo planes flying in and out of Monterey Airport in the summer of 1990.

That was not normal.

The planes – owned by the U.S. Air Force – were loading up with Fort Ord soldiers and equipment and headed to the Middle East.

“As a peace person and a veteran, it was really nerve-wracking,” says Monterey resident and Vietnam War veteran Gordon Smith.

The flights began in August as part of Operation Desert Shield, the leadup mobilization effort in anticipation of Operation Desert Storm, the invasion of Kuwait the following January.

On a day in late August or early September, Smith rode down the Rec Trail toward Monterey and ran into lifelong peace advocate Joyce Vandevere at Window on the Bay, who was with another activist being interviewed by a TV reporter.

“That is when the various leaders of the different groups got to know each other,” says Smith, who formed a local Veterans For Peace chapter in the months that followed.

Vandevere, a co-founder and longtime head of the Peace Coalition of Monterey County, was at Window on the Bay as a member of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

Vandevere also can’t recall the exact day she met Smith, but it might have been Labor Day, 1990, during a “teach-in” she organized at Window on the Bay with her friend Nancy McClintock in protest of the military ramp-up.

“It was a new park, and I chose Window on the Bay because it never had been used before,” Vandevere says. “It was a great day.”

After that, she and fellow activists continued to demonstrate at the park every Sunday for months. But the seed for the Peace Coalition didn’t truly germinate

until Martin Luther King Day 1991, during the midst of Desert Storm, when activists of all stripes came together in Seaside to honor MLK's nonviolent philosophy. In the weeks after, the coalition – comprised of about 20 nonprofits with nonviolent tenets in the vein of MLK – was officially formed.

And then, for years, there was peace.

For the Peace Coalition, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary at Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey Feb. 12, the toughest challenge was not maintaining engagement during the peace in '90s, or in the years of war to follow 9/11, which have gone on more than 14 years.

The toughest challenge comes now, in envisioning a future where there is not only peace, but one that is not built on the firepower of the American war machine.

Vandevere and others believe the path to that future is finally starting to reveal itself, but to travel down it will require a paradigm shift in how our country – and others – interacts with the world.

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There may have been many signs globally that acts of terror on U.S. soil were an increasing threat in the 1990s, but locally, the most tangible portent was a planned U.S. Marine Corps mock invasion of Monterey on March 13, 1999. The exercise was called an "Urban Warrior Advanced Warfighting Experiment." It would entail 250 Marines landing on Del Monte Beach and then loading into Humvees and other trucks on their way to the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense Language Institute, where there would be combat scenarios set up for the exercise. Some 250 more Marines would land at DLI by helicopter.

Monterey city staff, its City Council and the California Coastal Commission hardly took notice, despite the fact that – according to an article in the *Weekly* at the time – it was the "largest such military training exercise in a North American city."

Protests began in the lead-up to the exercise, and among the protesters were Vandevere and her late husband Jud, a naturalist, who questioned the invasion's impact on endangered sea otters and snowy plovers.

But the military insisted on its importance, as evidenced by a March 11 story in the *Weekly*:

The Marines say this exercise is part of the military's effort to train for the kind of warfare they expect to encounter in the 21st century, focusing on the testing of new computerized command and control communications technologies. Military

operations in the future “won’t be like Desert Storm,” explains Lt. Cmdr. Jack Hanzlik, spokesman for the Navy’s 3rd Fleet. “We’ll have terrorist-type acts operating within civilian environments.”

The same day that story printed, the Coastal Commission agreed in a public hearing that the Marine Corps’ environmental assessment didn’t adequately address the exercise’s impact on otters, seals and plovers.

Defeated, the Marines carried out the entire operation by helicopter.

Then came 9/11 two and half years later, and following it, peace protests at Window on the Bay in opposition to the war in Afghanistan. Then came protests to the Iraq War. As both those wars continued indefinitely, Vandevere says, the protests began to taper off in the mid-2000s.

“People get tired, the war never ends,” Vandevere says. “But what we are talking about now is not just standing on the street, it’s what we have to do to build out civil society to support peace.”

And so, after 25 years, it begins again.

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When Vandevere and Sidney Scott come into *Weekly’s* office Jan. 8 to talk about the Coalition’s anniversary, they are glowing.

It’s not because of current world events, which are perhaps more depressing than they’ve been in the last 15 years. It’s because they’ve once again found hope.

“We don’t have to stay with Permawar, we can move beyond it,” says Scott, a longtime local peace activist.

They have come to announce the Coalition’s 25th anniversary, and proffer a book published by WorldBeyondWar.org titled, *A Global Security System: An Alternative to War*.

“The really exciting thing about the World Beyond War movement is, they’re not saying, ‘Let’s go out and demonstrate and hope that’s OK,’” Vandevere says. “They’re saying, ‘We have to think through what kind of a world we really want.’”

For Vandevere, who turns 89 next month, the book is a call to action, much like her first awakening after World War II, when she interacted with returning veterans as a recent graduate of Pomona College.

“They’re passionate feeling that war was not OK – after having had that experience of war – and that is something that stayed with me,” Vandevere says. “It’s probably part of why I’m a peace worker now.”

But the WBW book, which is part of an international peace movement, gave Vandevere’s pacifism something it hadn’t had: structure.

“[The book] lays out so clearly the possible steps,” Vandevere says. “They’ve done the initial job, and it’s up to rest of us to hone it and make it what we want it to be.”

Those steps are many, and include phasing out foreign military bases and weapons of mass destruction, ending the use of military drones, ending invasions and occupations and outlawing the arms trade. (See excerpts of the book online at worldbeyondwar.org.) The book also addresses counterarguments to nonintervention with statistics about war’s human, social and environmental toll.

But the text is not a complete document, by design. It is a living one, and ideas are wanted.

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“As long as war is looked upon as wicked, it will always have its fascination,” Oscar Wilde wrote. “When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular.”

That is one of many quotes interspersed throughout the book, which seeks to answer any questions one might have about creating a sustainable peace.

For how to address global bad actors like the Islamic State – and, many would argue, the U.S. – the book provides short-term solutions like an arms embargo, pursuit of diplomacy and economic sanctions against ISIS supporters. Long-term solutions would be withdrawing U.S. troops and ending oil imports from the region.

One of the book’s most overarching precepts is that our nation must demilitarize and stop devoting so many resources to our military industrial complex. That is a message that will be discussed at the anniversary event by three speakers: Nancy Merritt, Jim Haber and Angela Keaton, all West Coast-based peace activists.

“Our militarism is out of control now, and it needs to be reigned in,” Haber says in an interview. “We are arming our enemies, and less would be better than more.”

Keaton, the director of operations at Antiwar.com, is sickened by today's military culture.

"People worship it and think it's wonderful, even though it kills civilians every day," she says.

For Karen Araujo, current co-chair of the coalition, the anniversary is an opportunity to tap locals for their ideas, and use that momentum to create synergy with like movements across the world.

"What is your input, your vision for a culture of peace?" she says. "There's a lot of opportunity here. My vision for the [coalition] is to expand the circle of inclusion, expand the groups that are part of our group."

Vandevere echoes that.

"Some people criticize us for not demonstrating as we have in the past," she says. "But we need to organize. That's the real work."

It's a noble goal, but given the landscape of the world today, the peace Vandevere envisions feels like a far-off, unlikely dream.

Yet as Martin Luther King, Jr. started to demonstrate more than 50 years ago, there is hope for the biggest dreams. But they also require tireless work – and relentless optimism – that spans generations.

The Peace Coalition of Monterey County 25th Anniversary takes place Feb. 12, 6pm-9pm, at the Irvine Auditorium, 499 Pierce St., Monterey. Free and open to the public; the event features a reception, speakers and displays.