

OPINION

PUBLISHER • DANIEL M. RYAN

EDITOR • JAMES R. MOSBY JR.

EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR • ROBERT L. STEPHENSON

A parade whose time has come

"The Parade That Never Was" is a good idea, tinged with sadness.

The parade, which will start at 2 p.m. Sunday and wind through downtown Kalamazoo, is the project of Tom and Janice Emit of Parchment, assisted by Jerry DeRyke, president of the Kalamazoo Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). It is intended by its organizers to serve as a way for the community to thank the men and women who served in the Vietnam war. Some 50 units and more than 1,400 people are expected to participate in the parade. It is thought by its organizers to be the first of its kind in the country.

It's appropriate, even necessary, that Vietnam veterans get the recognition and thanks. How sad, though, that the parade and speakers and concerts — trappings that traditionally have accompanied the troops' arrival home — are being planned some 10 years after the end of the war. There is a sense that veterans of other wars, no matter how horrifying their experiences, were at least accorded more public honor and respect for responding to their country's call.

The divisions and doubt that wracked the nation about its involve-

ment in Vietnam have cast a long shadow over those who did what they believed was the right thing by serving their country. There are also those who felt that their commitment to their country demanded refusal to serve in a war they believed to be immoral. Even agreement with that decision, however, ought not detract from the respect owed those who came to a different conclusion.

The war in Vietnam was, in the words of a protest song from the era, "a dirty little war," one that left deep and permanent scars on the lives and in the psyches of individuals and the nation. The reasons for Vietnam and the failure of U.S. intervention there are still being debated. We may never reach national consensus on the question of "for what?"

For too long, though, the people who fought that war have borne the brunt of the country's confusion over Vietnam. Let's hope that the parade route is packed with people Sunday; people who may hold differing views on the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, but who are ready to honor those who carried out a commitment to serve their country.