

FOUND, FEATURED, THEN FORGOTTEN

U.S. Network TV News and the
Vietnam Veterans Against the War



Mark D. Harmon

Found, Featured,
then
Forgotten



Image created by Jack Miller.
Courtesy of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

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Mark D. Harmon



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Preface

Certainly I hope that *Found, Featured, then Forgotten* reaches and pleases some of the surviving antiwar veterans and newscasters of the era and that they find it a valuable addition to the historic record. I recognize that the book casually slides across the disciplines of journalism, broadcasting, political science, sociology, public opinion, and history, by necessity giving insufficient attention to the full breadth each area of study has to offer. Yet, I believe this book holds value in that it cuts across disciplines—and may even, by its telling story, have some popular appeal.

This nerdy optimism, at its heart, is an act of faith in each reader. I believe a good story can survive academic silos, jargon, detours, and even preconceived notions. So, if you read this book casually or as an undergraduate or graduate supplemental assignment in history, media, political science, or sociology, please bear with the quirky mix. In the end, the antiwar veterans and those who covered them will tell us a lot about ourselves and our institutions, offering timeless lessons for those willing to listen and to reflect.

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Introduction

Coming to terms with the Vietnam War hasn't been easy for Americans, and in many ways we still haven't come to terms with it. The aging warriors of that generation have been left to their own sense of what that history means and portends. For some people, notably neoconservatives, the Vietnam War represents a lost cause and an untaken opportunity—a missed chance to spread democracy by warfare. To them, the lessons learned are strategic and tactical: muzzle the news media, ignore dissent, and escalate as much as needed. The slowly growing levels of war since then (Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War) reestablish in their minds the notions of an undefeatable America, always in the right. This attitude played a large role in the folly that was and is the Iraq War.

To liberals, progressives, and many moderates, the Vietnam War is a lesson in healthy distrust of official reasons. The war, sold as a crusade to halt the spread of global communism, actually had a strong overlay of nationalism and colonialism. It became more of a civil and guerilla war, with no front, little reliable local population, and frequent clashes between “lifer” officers and disgruntled draftees. Many soldiers saw no good purpose beyond surviving to go home—what the soldiers in the documentary *World of Charlie Company* called “back in the world.”

A 1970 Herblock cartoon parodied well the circular logic of the war. It showed two U.S. soldiers sitting on a log in a jungle clearing. One is reading a newspaper that features Richard Nixon on the front

page. He says to his buddy, “You see, the reason we’re in Indochina is to protect us boys in Indochina” (Block 1972).

For many Americans, the war in Vietnam was best forgotten: put in the past as quickly as possible. Many veterans returned from the war unwilling to talk about their experiences, except among themselves. There was no celebration; there was little to celebrate. The civilian population seemed more than willing to join Vietnam veterans in this move-on-with-our-lives approach. Psychologist Dr. Robert Lifton called it a “psychologically illegitimate” war (MacPherson, 2001, 55).

The popular mythology of Hollywood did little to reconcile the war in Vietnam with our national sense of self. Films that featured the war include the hyper-patriotic and simplistic *The Green Berets* with John Wayne, the gritty and troubling *Platoon*, the difficult and depressing *Coming Home*, the tragicomic *Good Morning Vietnam*, and the shocking and disturbing *Apocalypse Now* and *Full Metal Jacket*. They also include the historical revisionism of *First Blood*, the first of the Rambo movies, a muscular claim that valiant soldiers were not allowed to win in Vietnam and were sabotaged by their own country.

One film, *Born on the Fourth of July*, highlights a key component for understanding those times: the great difficulty, shared by the general public and news organizations, in accepting the reality of substantial numbers of veterans returning to protest a war still in progress.

Although these retrospective entertainment films are somewhat instructive about our national cognitive dissonance about the Vietnam War, they pale in comparison to contemporaneous news coverage of the war and its protest movements. *Found, Featured, then Forgotten* examines that news coverage, focusing on how U.S.

television news organizations treated a very significant antiwar group, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

This book is not a history of the VVAW. Several authors have done a good job with that task. I recommend Richard Stacewicz' *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*, Andrew E. Hunt's *The Turning*, and Gerald Nicosia's *Home to War*. Nor is this book a history of the Vietnam War. Among the many choices, I recommend beginning with Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam*. Finally, this book is not a history of U.S. broadcast news. *Now the News*, by Ed Bliss, serves as a good starting point for that.

This book draws from these three histories to illuminate one specific and important U.S. broadcast news form: network television newscasts and their coverage of a very unusual and significant social movement, thousands of veterans returning to protest a war still in progress. Along the way, readers may discover certain points that validate or challenge social movement theory as well as assumptions about mass media, the Vietnam War, veterans, and the antiwar movement.

Chapter One introduces readers to the key players, antiwar veterans and network TV newscasters, and explores their interactions during the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter highlights the huge audience and political significance of the U.S. network television newscasts of the era. It also explains how the VVAW emerged from a long, elaborate, and little-known history of veteran and soldier resistance to the Vietnam War.

Chapter Two assembles the scattered record (predating the August 1968 *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*) of early protest to the Vietnam War and television attention to it. Mostly, but not exclusively, that television coverage supported official U.S. policy in Vietnam, although it was not as jingoistic or hostile to protesters as the lingering

newsreels of the mid-to-late 1960s. Chapter Three explains how I triangulated interviews, polls, and archived videotapes of network TV news coverage to critically analyze treatment of antiwar veterans in the news.

Chapter Four presents the sharp contrast between the scanty news attention to antiwar “testimony” in Detroit in January 1971 and the extensive coverage of VVAW events in late April 1971 in Washington, D. C. Chapter Five reconstructs large VVAW protests at the 1972 Republican National Convention, and Chapter Six explores the paucity of coverage for those protests.

Chapter Seven documents the fracturing of public opinion about the Vietnam War, even as the public retained its distrust of antiwar protesters. Government attempts to harass and discredit the VVAW, combined with a news frame that “the war was winding down,” worked to diminish VVAW coverage. Chapter Eight updates readers on the continuing contributions of VVAW members and draws some conclusions about the long-term significance of the group.

Serving as background to the study, the Appendix cautiously tries to place the VVAW and its news coverage in the context of social movement theory. The chapter authors, Dr. Catherine Luther and I, recognize that this theory has a long history and several competing approaches that at times prove contradictory. This work may stir, but certainly will not settle, those differences. The historical record, nonetheless, should illuminate journalistic tendencies in dealing with a highly credible and heretical social movement. It holds value as a fascinating case study.

A Powerful Medium Meets a Stereotype-Shattering Source

Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) formed shortly after an antiwar parade, the 1967 Spring Mobilization in New York City. Six Vietnam veterans found themselves marching together in the throng of a hundred thousand (Kendrick 1974). A contingent of about two thousand people among that throng represented a group called Veterans for Peace. One of the marchers, Jan Barry, accepted the help of Veterans for Peace, even though he realized that many in the group were not veterans and that the organizational structure was weak. He and five other antiwar Vietnam veterans met on June 1, 1967, to create the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (Prados 2002, 403-404).



An early VVAW banner and march. Photo courtesy VVAW.

Other returning service men and women who were disillusioned with the war efforts soon joined the original six. By 1972, VVAW membership numbered twenty thousand (Zastrow 1984; Hunt 1999, 143), including about twenty-five hundred soldiers overseas and still on active duty (Zastrow 1984; Prados 2002, 409). The membership had increased significantly after *Playboy* ran a free, full-page ad for the group in its February 1971 edition (Urgo et al. 1997; Lindquist 1997).

David Cortright (1999) tallied antiwar sentiments during that time, using survey data in a two-volume report compiled by the Research Analysis Corporation for the U.S. Army. The survey found that one in four enlisted men had participated in dissident activities, such as attending a protest or receiving an underground GI newspaper. One in four had engaged in equipment sabotage or insubordination. Some 47 percent of the lower-ranking enlisted soldiers had been involved in some act of war resistance, and 32 percent had done so more than once. If frequent drug use is tallied as resistance, the number climbs to 55 percent, an unprecedented level of soldiers opting out or protesting.

That same government report drew a distinction between dissidents and disobedients. Dissidents had some college education and were more likely to volunteer—but some only days ahead of being drafted; disobedients were draftees. Dissidents followed a protest model. Disobedients preferred direct and personal action, such as going Absent Without Leave (AWOL), confronting a commander, or sabotaging equipment. In extreme cases of rebellion within the ranks “fraggings” (using a fragmentation grenade, usually against an offending officer) could occur. By mid-1972, the total number of such incidents reached 551, with eighty-six soldiers dead and more than seven hundred injured (Cortright 1999, 228, 238, 239).

John Helmer (1974) conducted extensive survey research on returning Vietnam veterans and reviewed surveys conducted by others; he estimated that in 1971 roughly half of returning veterans opposed continuation of the war and President Nixon's conduct of it. One telling moment occurred during the November 1969 Moratorium when District of Columbia police officer Jim Andrews was on duty outside the National Gallery of Art. Among protesters carrying nameplates of the war dead to put in a coffin at the Pentagon, a Vietnam veteran carried the nameplate of Andrews' brother. The policeman and the protester talked. The vet had been in the brother's unit. Andrews was grateful. "I was all about getting out of the middle of someone else's war," he recalled. He also remembers thinking about the massive number of protesters: "If all these people had put on coats and ties, the war would have been over in 48 hours" (Andrews 2009). Middle America didn't see itself in the protest and had yet to realize the scope of war opposition among Vietnam veterans.

GI protest, resistance, and revolt were real and became widespread. The documentary *Sir! No Sir!* traced the growth from isolated incidents to a serious threat to the reliability of the army (Zeiger 2005).



CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO

Trailer for *Sir! No Sir!* Available as an open source movie at www.archive.org.
From Link Media, Inc

On March 8, 1965, the first U.S. combat troops entered Vietnam. Three months later, Richard R. Steinke, a Special Forces lieutenant who opposed the war, refused an order to go into a combat zone (Ostertag 2006, 123).

In late 1965, Donald Duncan, a Green Beret who quit in revulsion about the war, began speaking out. His article "The Whole Thing Was a Lie" appeared in the February 1966 issue of *Ramparts*. Army dermatologist Dr. Howard Levy refused to train others; he cited the duplicity of curing minor diseases while bombing the villages of the same people. Three GIs at Fort Hood refused to go to Vietnam. Federal agents arrested them on their way to a press event at a church, but supporters read their message. Army Lieutenant Henry Howe carried a protest sign: "End Johnson's Fascist Aggression in Vietnam." The military men were convicted at court-martial and given long sentences. In 1967, Andy Stapp, when found to have antiwar literature in his footlocker, declined a minor charge and insisted on a full court-martial. The military judge was shocked to see both soldiers and civilians shouting antiwar slogans at those Fort Sill proceedings, likely the first antiwar demonstration on a U.S. military base (Zeiger 2005; Ostertag 2006, 123-126).

Inspired by the Fort Hood Three, Ronald Lockman, a black GI and the son of a steelworker, also refused to go to Vietnam. Captain Dale Noyd refused to train bomber pilots for duty over the skies of Vietnam (Ostertag 2006, 126).

In July 1968, nine AWOL members of the U.S. military took sanctuary in a San Francisco church. One of them, Oliver Hirsch explained, "We essentially called the press and said to them, 'We're not going to Vietnam. We're refusing orders and, in fact, we're resigning from the military. Come and get us.'" The nine were sent to the Presidio stockade, and soldiers in the Bay Area responded by putting together the first antiwar protest organized by GIs and veterans. Navy

nurse Susan Schnall appeared in uniform and was court-martialed for doing so. Meanwhile, at the Presidio, tensions ran high after a 19-year-old private was shot and killed, reportedly while trying to escape a work detail. Prisoners tore apart the interior of the military jail and, at a roll call, sat down in protest and sang “We Shall Overcome.” Thousands of people then marched in protest in support of the Presidio 27. A large GI Movement had begun (Zeiger 2005).

Keith Mather, interviewed while AWOL from the U.S. Army, said that around that time, “A majority of the men that I met in the service were opposed, but didn’t know how to voice their opinion.” The opposition found voice in antiwar GI coffeehouses and in an underground antiwar GI press. Jeff Sharlet, a veteran of two tours in Vietnam, including time in Army intelligence during which he was trained in Vietnamese, edited an early underground GI paper, *Vietnam GI*. His publication began in January 1968 and specialized in interviews with just-released soldiers. While occasionally including a pro-war voice or two, the paper took a largely—and proud—antiwar stand. Dozens of Chicago volunteers got the paper into the hands of soldiers in Vietnam through plain envelopes and a rotating set of real and respectable return addresses such as charities and churches. *Vietnam GI* circulation peaked at 10,000; it had both “in-country” and stateside editions.

In 1967, only three GI Press titles existed, but by 1972, the Pentagon estimated the number at 245. Usually, these were base-specific papers with titles like *A Four-year Bummer*, *Fatigue Press*, *Rap*, *Shakedown*, *The Short Times*, *Now Hear This!* and *Fed Up!* (Zeiger 2005; Ostertag 2006, 117-159). A typical GI underground newspaper consisted of a simple black-and-white set of pages with no ads but plenty of articles assailing the military and promoting GI rights. Cartoons showed soldiers turning their guns on war plutocrats or gung-ho officers. “Demand and disciplinary action ran neck and neck” (Peck 1985).



CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO

VVAW's Barry Romo at event commemorating the 30th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. He speaks as well about the GI Press.

Video courtesy of VVAW.

Cartoons, covers, and photographs from the GI Press may be found linked here:

http://www.sirnosir.com/archives_and_resources/galleries/gi_papers.html

Until 1968, the majority of U.S. newspapers accepted the validity of the U.S. war in Vietnam and the military's assertions of victory; thus, the GI papers served as an outlet for the stories the GIs believed were squelched (Tischler 1992). Antiwar soldiers and GI press editors ran a big risk of reprisal. Between 1966 and 1969, the average sentence imposed by court-martial on GI activists for antiwar actions was five and one-quarter years at hard labor (Lewes 2003).

In those GI papers and elsewhere, the army's own recruiting slogan "Fun, Travel, Adventure" (FTA) often was modified to "Fuck The Army." Actors Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland adapted FTA for Free Theatre Associates, a series of off-base performances, the antiwar counterpoint to a Bob Hope show (Zeiger 2005). Even soldiers not holding an antiwar attitude adopted the slogan (Hart 2001).

Other forms of protest also occurred. Soldiers held at Long Binh Jail in Vietnam were brought back under control only after a violent conflict with fellow Americans. African American troops at Fort Hood met to discuss whether they should accept riot-control duty at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Military police, some using their bayonets, beat up some of the meeting participants. The army, forced to purge its planned Chicago roster of “subversives,” deployed a contingent to Chicago, but kept them off the streets. One could make a case that it was no longer certain which side the GIs were on (Zeiger 2005). Indeed, Joe Miller (2000) claims that nearly five hundred VVAW members were among the protesters on the streets of Chicago. VVAW had been planning an orderly peace protest featuring one clean-cut, antiwar vet “delegate” from each of the fifty states. “That action would be mooted by the police violence and demonstrator anarchy that subsumed protest in Chicago in 1968,” wrote Prados (2002, 405).

Significance of the VVAW

From the very start, VVAW and its predecessor groups recognized the importance of public perception, media, and visuals. In 1967, early member Sheldon Ramsdell told one of the founders, Jan Barry, “We’ve got to do media. I’ve been trained in the military and at Union Carbide.” Ramsdell had studied at the Carnegie Endowment, held a job in public relations, and also had studied photography. He proposed, “Let’s put it to work against this war policy” (Ramsdell 1997a). The first media event came on November 19, 1967, when VVAW had pulled together enough money and signatures for a full-page *New York Times* ad opposing the war. Immediately, the FBI, at the direction of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, began probing the background of anyone who signed the VVAW ad (Prados 2002, 405).

Despite shared FBI concerns, the VVAW also had to maintain a separate identity from other protest groups, and it strove to maintain a peaceful identity. The Madison Veterans for Peace formed in 1967. Regarding their own history, they wrote, "At our meetings in 1967 and 1968, we debated what our tactics should be; some favored supporting any and all efforts for peace, others counselled caution and the strategic use of our reputation in an effort to persuade the public that it was respectable to be for peace." Not all were satisfied, but a majority agreed on a statement of purpose. It read:

Therefore be it resolved: That dissent having come to be unfairly and unfortunately confused in the public mind with lack of concern for democratic processes, lack of patriotism, lack of support for our fighting men, and lack of fortitude, that we, as veterans who oppose the war in Vietnam, should deal with the situation as it is realistically, and not as it should be in some wholly idealistic framework. We see little purpose in talking solely to ourselves or to others who share our views; we see real potential to be in leading the uncommitted and confused portions of the public to recognize that dissent cannot be categorized in this unfortunate manner. . . . We as veterans should take every possible advantage of the special consideration our society holds for those who have served their country in the armed forces, in order to communicate our concern to the community at large. We see as potentially very harmful to our acceptance by the community any action which would associate members of Madison Veterans For Peace in Vietnam with other forms of protest, however righteous and justified these protests may be, but which

have objectives other than persuasion of the public through education and discussion. (Madison Veterans for Peace 2009)

The VVAW gathering in Detroit for “Winter Soldier” testimony about war crimes was one of the more peaceful outlets for soldierly outrage against the war. Television barely covered the event, even though it tied in well to the simultaneous war crimes trial of Lieutenant William Calley. A lot of people, including those connected with news organizations, did not let themselves believe that many of the VVAW actually were Vietnam veterans (Thorne and Butler 1971, 10).

Given the historical significance of the VVAW, the group deserves a closer look at its organization and its depiction in the media. VVAW still exists. Ironically, as its membership has shrunk, recognition of its historical significance has grown. An early VVAW leader, John Kerry, became a U.S. Senator and Democratic Party presidential nominee in 2004. The book *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976) by one early and active VVAW member, Ron Kovic, became a major motion picture (Ho and Stone 1989).

Former VVAW member David Cline laid out the persuasive potential of antiwar veterans during the war:

The Vietnam War caused a lot of the conditions that were accepted generation after generation to become no longer what they were in the past. The veteran of the last war has historically been used to convince young people to fight in the next war. Well, Vietnam began to change that when the veterans came home and said, “Whoa, they’re lyin’ to you people.”

That played a major role in getting America to change its opinion against the war. It’s easy to dismiss college

students or intellectuals. For middle America, if the blacks, or the hippies, or the Chicanos don't like it, who cares, but when the guy [who] came home was like your own son and daughter, it had an impact. (2007, 131-132)

Charles DeBenedetti (1990, 310), reflecting on the day VVAW members threw away medals, said, "The VVAW protest carried the weight of tested patriotism, seeming to arise from the Vietnam conflict itself. It conveyed no ideology except love of country. It did not represent a political demand so much as it expressed disillusionment and the anguish of anger turned inward: [from a popular Walt Kelly cartoon, "Pogo"] "... the enemy ... he is us."

The VVAW could have served as a media gateway to understanding post-Vietnam veteran adjustment issues. In December 1970, psychiatrists Robert Lifton and Chaim Shatan held the first of many veteran rap sessions in the New York City offices of VVAW. More than two hundred people attended these sessions over the next four years, two-thirds learning about the sessions through contact with VVAW (Egendorf 1975).

Furthermore, VVAW and its many protest events could have provided important clues to the press for understanding the government misdeeds collectively known as Watergate. John W. Dean III told the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities that President Nixon's paranoia about antiwar demonstrations was first revealed to Dean during a VVAW demonstration in the spring of 1971 [Dewey Canyon III]. Nixon wanted a firsthand report from Dean, then White House Counsel. Nixon also asked to be kept abreast of developments, and Dean responded by sending very frequent status reports (Gold 1973, 267; Dean 1976, 42).

Watergate burglar and former CIA agent James McCord told the same committee that during the last two weeks of May 1972 he was

receiving almost daily reports from the Internal Security Division of the Justice Department on VVAW-McGovern links and supposed plans for violence at the Republican National Convention. McCord further testified to his belief that in the summer of 1972 Washington, D.C.'s Democratic National Committee offices also held VVAW offices (Gold 1973, 166, 169-170, 177). McCord was caught burglarizing those offices in the Watergate building on July 17, 1972.

Later that summer, another connection between the Watergate burglars and the VVAW was revealed during the Republican Convention. The Miami Police Department recruited Pablo Fernandez, a Cuban exile who had worked for burglar Bernard Barker, with instructions to infiltrate the VVAW and provoke the group to violence. Watergate burglars Bernard Barker and Frank Sturgis also recruited a freelance spy named Vincent Hannard to disrupt and discredit VVAW protest actions by inciting trouble or riots (Holder 1973; Lembcke 1998, 64-65).

The VVAW was a nearly forgotten impetus for the White House "plumbers." Furthermore, the VVAW was singled out as an "enemy" organization by White House special counsel Charles Colson, who ordered an inquiry into withdrawing VVAW's tax-exempt status (*Facts on File* 1973, 683). White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman put it bluntly in an internal memo to Colson: "The President should know that we are continuing the effort to discredit VVAW" (Brinkley 2004, 364).

Significance of U.S. Network Television News regarding Vietnam

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, CBS, NBC, and ABC evening newscasts were very significant within people's lives. There was no internet, almost no cable TV. A typical home, even in a large market, may have had only five over-the-air viewing options: the big three

plus a public TV signal and maybe an independent station. The big three networks had an audience of nine of ten homes with the set on, and *TV Guide* had the largest circulation among magazines in the country. David Halberstam (1979, 407) pointed out that the big three network TV newscasts reached a combined sixty million Americans every night.

The year 1963 was a key one for U.S. network television news. In late November that year, the nation grieved together the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and much of that grief was shared through TV coverage. On September 2nd of 1963, CBS extended the *CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite* from fifteen to thirty minutes a night (minus commercials, of course). NBC followed suit, going to a thirty-minute format a week later. The first of those extended CBS broadcasts, incidentally, included an interview segment with President Kennedy that included a question on the faltering Diem government in South Vietnam (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984, 52; Cronkite 1996, 244-246).

Furthermore, a 1963 Roper Poll for the first time found more people responding “television” to its oft-asked question, “I’d like to ask you where you get most of your news about what’s going on in the world today—from the newspapers, or radio, or television, or magazines, or talking to people, or where?” (Mayer 1993; Roper 2009) One could quibble that the wording emphasis on “today” and “the world” (as opposed, for instance, to the county courthouse) tilts in television’s favor. Since that time, we have learned that when people say “TV” that does not necessarily mean a local or network newscast; it could mean anything from sports programs to chat shows to comic monologues. Certainly, it’s also possible that “television” is the default answer for those who don’t have a regular source of news information.

Nevertheless, it's clear that during the time period under study—the growth of antiwar veteran protest in late 1960s through the fall of Saigon at the end of April 1975—TV newscasts were a very important source of news information, a touchstone for a shared understanding of what was happening. All the key players knew the stakes. Antiwar demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic National Convention shouted, often while being pummeled by police, “The whole world is watching.”



CLICK TO LISTEN

Pacifica Radio's coverage of the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Reported by Steve Bookshester and Dale Minor, interviews by Julius Lester. Features Julius Lester's interviews with Black delegates on the confusion and corruption of the process, as well as his reports on the clash between police and demonstrators. Includes reports by Elsa Knight Thompson about the demonstrations, and Alan Ginsberg's address to demonstrators and the Chicago police. BROADCAST: KPFK, 28 Aug. 1968. (60 min.) Courtesy of Pacifica Radio Archives.

Audio coverage of the convention and demonstrations. Courtesy of Pacifica Radio Archives (Creative Commons).



CLICK TO LISTEN

A Night in Chicago, reported by Dale Minor, Phil Watson, and Bob Fass. Produced by Elsa Knight Thompson. Documentary report on the demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Includes comments of Bobby Seale, Black Panther Party co-founder outside the Convention Center at a Black Panther rally; Dick Gregory at President Lyndon Johnson's "birthday" party; and reports from Allen Ginsberg and Studs Terkel about police brutality at a religious prayer vigil. RECORDED: Chicago, 27 Aug. 1968. BROADCAST: KPFA, 19 Dec. 1968. (60 min.) BB2159. Courtesy of Pacifica Radio Archives.



CLICK TO LISTEN

Interview of Dr. Quentin Young by Elsa Knight Thompson, about Young's voluntary medical team who treated injuries during the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. (50 min.) BB2160. Courtesy of Pacifica Radio Archives.

Politicians certainly knew the importance of television through events such as Richard Nixon's Checkers Speech, the Kennedy-Nixon Debates, and the LBJ "daisy" commercial. The network TV reporters, many of them first- or second-generation "Murrow Boys," absorbed from Edward R. Murrow strong standards of accuracy, ethics, challenging authority, and seriousness of purpose.

Lyndon B. Johnson's "daisy" commercial is available on the Museum of Moving Image's, Living Room Candidate website at

<http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1964>.

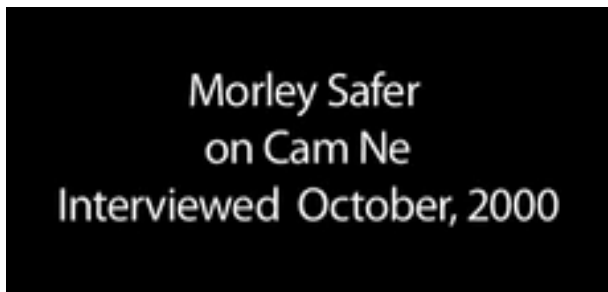
Network television's Vietnam documentaries, of course, were important. Charles Collingwood, on March 8, 1965, presented an overview of the conflict and featured opposing views from Senators Gale McGee and George McGovern. Michael Murray (1994, 115) reports the documentary has been credited "for legitimizing dissent on the issue of American involvement and providing an alternative view on official Vietnam policy, but from within the government." Four months later, CBS presented a dialogue on Vietnam in which McGeorge Bundy presented the Johnson Administration view and a panel of professors led by Columbia's Zbigniew Brezinski represented the opposition. This debate was followed by four *Vietnam Perspective* documentaries, the first three on State Department and Pentagon perspectives and the last on a day in the life of soldiers in the field (M. Murray 1994, 115).

The *Vietnam Perspective* piece on the air war drew the ire of Michael Arlen (1969, 45-50). He accused CBS of a "fundamentally chicken" piece of journalism that uncritically presented the military view for roughly fifty-eight minutes, before giving passing mention of serious reasons for doubting the effectiveness. Arlen (1969, 61-65) had kind words for the gritty reality of the CBS hour-long special *Morley Safer's Vietnam*. He also praised John Laurence, then a 27-year old gung-ho radio reporter pressed into telling the TV story of Vietnam. His growing skepticism of the war and growing empathy for the "grunts" (Arlen 1969, 86-102) later came through in his Emmy-winning *World of Charlie Company*. That documentary's story concerned a GI revolt because a "troops first" captain had been replaced with a "by-the-book lifer" who immediately ignored the life

lessons of his predecessor (M. Murray 1994, 117). The troops were ordered to go down a road. The soldiers knew they should avoid trails, much less roads, because of snipers and ambushes (Laurence 2002). The parallel to the national road taken in Vietnam is unspoken but clear, and the similarities to the plot of *Platoon* are eerie.

Documentaries offered something rare in the overall television coverage—context. Hoskins (2004) lamented that the individual mini-dramas, such as air raids and attacks on ammunition dumps, gave an illusion of military progress that may well have been out-of-sync with the reality of the wider war.

The interactions between government officials and network TV news leaders reflected a mutual understanding of the significance of the form, especially regarding nightly newscast words about and images of Vietnam. One of those shocking visual moments happened in August 1965, when CBS reporter Morley Safer and his cameraman encountered American Marines on patrol in the Vietnamese village Cam Ne. One Marine put his cigarette lighter to the dry thatch of a roof, catching the home and the village on fire, as the Vietnamese fled. In a voice-over, Safer says, “This is what the war in Vietnam is all about.”



CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO

Morley Safer, interview by Dr. Ralph Engelman, Archive of American Television, October 26 and November 13, 2000. Excerpt courtesy of Archive of American Television. <http://emmytvlegends.org/>



CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO

Morley Safer, interview by Dr. Ralph Engelman, Archive of American Television, October 26 and November 13, 2000. Excerpt courtesy of Archive of American Television. <http://emmytvlegends.org/>

Walter Cronkite and his producer viewed the footage, were shocked, and agonized for hours about whether to use it. They chose to air it, and the backlash arose almost immediately. Phone calls and telegrams denounced CBS News and Safer. Outraged writers claimed that our Marines never would do that, therefore the footage had to be faked (Schoenbrun 1989; Gates 1978). As Gary Paul Gates wrote, “In 1965, the prevailing image of the American fighting man was still an idealized one. After all, these young Marines in Vietnam were the sons of the GIs who had passed out candy bars to street urchins in Europe, and the grandsons of doughboys who marched off to the trenches merrily singing ‘Over There.’ Most Americans had not yet lost their innocence about Vietnam” (1978, 161).

Official reaction also came swiftly. A Defense Department official stopped just short of accusing CBS News of treason. President Lyndon Johnson awakened CBS President Frank Stanton with a phone call, yelling, “Yesterday your boys shat on the American flag.” CBS and its news division stood firm (Schoenbrun 1989; Gates 1978).

Another major early clash came out of the normally sedate 1966 Fulbright hearings on Vietnam. Early war opponent Senator Wayne Morse was questioning General Maxwell Taylor:

MORSE: You know we are engaged in historic debate in this country, where there are honest differences of opinion. I happen to hold the point of view that it isn't going to be too long before the American people as a people will repudiate our war in Southeast Asia.

TAYLOR: That, of course, is good news to Hanoi, Senator.

MORSE: I know that that is the smear that you militarists give to those of us who have honest differences of opinion with you, but I don't intend to get down in the gutter with you and engage in that kind of debate, General.... If the people decide that this war should be stopped in Southeast Asia, are you going to take the position that is weakness on the home front in a democracy?

TAYLOR: I would feel that our people were badly misguided and did not understand the consequences of such a disaster. (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984, 72)

Taylor's equating dissent with disloyalty was a tactic that antiwar protesters encountered frequently. Thus, war images on TV and the firsthand experiences of antiwar veterans proved critical for persuasion regarding the folly of the war. The Fulbright Hearings took one casualty at CBS News. Fred Friendly, former Murrow producer, stepped down from leading the news division after the company refused to pre-empt mid-day sitcom reruns to continue to carry the hearings live (Friendly 1967).

At NBC and ABC the stunning war moment came during the 1968 North Vietnamese and Vietcong Tet Offensive. Both networks

carried video of South Vietnamese marines taking a prisoner to General Nguyen Ngoc Loan. NBC cameraman Vo Suu kept filming as General Loan shot the prisoner in the head. The network showed the shooting to twenty million viewers. ABC missed that moment, but substituted a still photo. That still from Associated Press's Eddie Adams appeared on the front pages of many newspapers and won a Pulitzer Prize (Pach 1998; Frank 1991).

Tet also prompted a Vietnam visit by Walter Cronkite, a trusted and popular newsman well regarded in American living rooms. His half-hour special on February 27th concluded with the commentary: "But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could" (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984, 152). Cronkite was surprised to receive no White House feedback. He later learned that President Johnson, after watching the broadcast, turned off the television set. Presidential press aide Bill Moyers quoted Johnson as saying, "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America." Five weeks later Johnson announced he would not seek re-election (Cronkite 1996, 258). David Halberstam called it "the first time in American history a war had been declared over by an anchorman" (Halberstam 1979, 514).

Peter Braestrup (1983, 491-505) pointed out that before the Tet Offensive overt hawks were rare, except at *Time* magazine, and that overt doves also were rare, except at the *New York Times*. The bulk of editorial reaction reflected impatience at the war's length and concern about its horrors. Tet heightened both. Cronkite, in his radio commentary, asked pointed questions about whether President Johnson had become a prisoner of his own policies. Eric Severeid, in his television commentary, dismissed popular support for the war in light of what was being learned. On March 10th, NBC ran a special

in which Frank McGee methodically challenged the administration's war claims. On the other hand, NBC's Chet Huntley, on radio, relied on captured documents to claim that military results would force the enemy to the bargaining table.

ABC Anchor Howard K. Smith remained a hawk, advocating escalation on a massive scale. *Time's* views never faltered, and became so strong that the magazine routinely attacked antiwar reporters in its "Press" column (Halberstam 2003, 123).

Certainly, much attention has been paid to the Cronkite conclusion, the Cam Ne village burning, and the prisoner shooting. One could add the 1972 footage of an errant napalm strike in which South Vietnamese pilots mistook their own civilians for North Vietnamese troops. Yet, we must remember that these events were atypical of the coverage. As Daniel Hallin (2009) pointed out, "Blood and gore rarely were shown. A bit less than a quarter of film reports from Vietnam showed images of the dead or wounded, most of these fleeting and not particularly graphic." He also noted that most early coverage was upbeat, beginning with a battlefield map update based mostly on the dubious claims of the daily press briefing. "These reports had a World War II feel to them—journalists no less than generals are prone to 'fighting the last war'—with fronts and 'big victories' and a strong sense of progress and energy." Michael Arlen (1969, 105) argued that one might expect this situation when reporters are on a six-month rotation, don't speak Vietnamese, and must chase whatever "fire engine" story the New York editors and producers are pushing. Pre-Tet, few reporters questioned the war beyond quibbling over tactics; post-Tet, reporters who questioned the war still had to battle the usually hawkish editors back home (Moorcraft and Taylor 2008, 85).

Bob Schieffer (2004) reexamined the CBS program *Face the Nation* and discovered that half of its programs in 1967 were devoted to Vietnam. What struck him was how many official and unofficial

pronouncements and predictions in that year, and others, proved to be so wrong. Although the post-Tet environment was difficult to describe as heavily “dove” or “hawk,” Americans definitely still sought answers in official sources. Peter Braestrup (1983, 490) tallied the guests on Sunday talk shows in February and March 1968. Nearly all of the guests were elected or appointed officials, but Braestrup found them evenly divided between pro- and anti-Administration.

The Vietnam War certainly was an important topic for the network newsrooms. For years, the Saigon bureau was the third largest of any network, eclipsed only by New York and Washington. Typically, five camera crews were on duty in Vietnam, and it was dangerous duty. Nine network personnel died in Indochina; many more were wounded. It took days for the film to reach the New York editors, so the reporters got lots of “bang-bang” footage, but also compelling stories of the soldiers themselves. Contrary to popular mythology, network TV news did not lead the way to disillusionment with the war. Public opinion already had turned by the time reporters began ignoring the claims in the “Five O’Clock Follies” press briefings. Domestic protest and soldier disaffection with the futility of the war had the curious effect of legitimizing one another, leading reporters to more stories on the human cost of the war. Vietnam may have been, in Michael Arlen’s famous phrasing “the living room war,” but the pictures in that room were a lagging indicator of other factors happening elsewhere (Hallin 2009; Bliss 1991; M. Murray 1994).

Johanna Neuman (1996) properly cautioned against overstating the role of television. Newspaper coverage played a role, but so did escalating U.S. casualties and President Johnson’s failure to spend political capital in the early selling of the war. To that list, one could add *Life* magazine. In 1969, the magazine published an issue containing page after page of photos of U.S. soldiers killed in Vietnam in a single week (Deane 1983).

Amid the rising doubts after the Tet Offensive, public support for the war remained remarkably steady, even as job approval for Lyndon Johnson fell. These factors led Peter Braestrup (1983, 505) to conclude that no evidence exists of a direct relationship between post-Tet media themes and changes in public opinion about the war.

Attempts at historical revisionism already were underway. General William Westmoreland, appearing at a conference at the University North Carolina ten years after Tet, asserted that if it weren't for television no one would have known about the war. Robert Northshield, then at CBS, shouted in rebuttal, "Then thank God for television!" (Lichty and Fouhy 1987). Paul Moorcraft and Philip Taylor (2008, 214) quite properly questioned the media "stab in the back" thesis. They wrote, "Few who believe that the United States lost the war in the living rooms of middle America seem to question how a democracy could wage war for another five years [post-Tet]—longer than U.S. involvement in World War II—with such alleged hostile media coverage. Nonetheless, the myth of 'the Vietnam syndrome' has informed debates about the relationship between war and the media ever since."

Morley Safer lamented that young military officers were being trained based on the myth that the only mistake the U.S. military made was in allowing press access (2003). As the nation readied for the Gulf War, it was taken as a given that the press would not be allowed to tell an independent story for fear of what was imagined to have happened in Vietnam (Garfinkle 1995, 252).

As the Vietnam War dragged on into the Nixon administration, antiwar U.S. Senators recognized the need to use television to rally support for their cause. On May 12, 1970, Senators Mark Hatfield and George McGovern bought a half-hour on NBC to make a nationwide appeal for their amendment asserting congressional authority over the war-making process. Viewers were asked for

donations to cover the cost of the air time and promotional ads. The effort raised \$480,000, enough to cover costs and donate \$110,000 to charity (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984, 331). On the other side, President Nixon pre-empted prime time network television seven times between November 1969 and April 1971 to explain and defend his war policies (Donovan and Scherer, 1992). At the end of that period, VVAW members positioned themselves on the mall outside the Capitol, compelling TV coverage by the power of their message and the credibility of their messengers.

Highlights

GI opposition to the Vietnam War arose early and grew rapidly, sometimes expressed through a vibrant underground press. In 1967, much of that opposition took the form of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).

The VVAW quickly developed strategies of non-violence and maintaining a separate identity from other antiwar groups. These methods fit into a media strategy that took advantage of VVAW credibility with the public on Vietnam War matters.

The VVAW could have been a gateway link to other news stories such as veteran adjustment problems, official suppression of antiwar groups, and even Watergate. News media, however, arrived rather late to those stories.

Network television evening newscasts were a dominant U.S. news source in the 1960s and 1970s. However, contrary to popular mythology, television news generally did not lead the way on questioning the war. Major questioning emerged only after the Tet Offensive and with validation of that criticism through official sources.

The Past as Prologue: Antiwar Coverage before the VVAW

Since August 1968, Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, has maintained a Television News Archive. Every ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly newscast has been videotaped and an outline prepared of the newscast stories and segments. The outline is *not* a transcript, and the timing is kept only in ten-second increments. The tapes themselves, however, are a valuable historical tool and are, by definition, a primary record of the coverage—a videotape time capsule of live newscasts that poured into millions of American living rooms. *Found, Featured, then Forgotten* relies on these recordings as a record of network TV newscast coverage from the fall of 1968 onward.

Link to the Vanderbilt Television News Archive,
<http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>

Sadly, records preceding August 1968 are scattered and incomplete, leaving researchers to piece together what they can from the recollections, surviving documents, comments about coverage controversies, and incidental references. Certainly, network television news reports of the very early antiwar protests were skeptical, if not hostile. Peter Jennings introduced an October 27, 1965, ABC report with these words: “While Americans fight and die in Vietnam, there are those in this country who sympathize with the Viet Cong.” Of course, protesters could, and did, object to the war without supporting the enemy (Streitmatter 2008).

Jan Barry, a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, recalls that as early as April 1968 antiwar veterans were developing a sense of the power of their visual image, making a deliberate choice to wear dress uniforms at protests. “You can imagine the effect this had upon cops and lots of other people. Holy shit! These people are for real—a whole bunch of medals” (Barry 1997a). The use of military dress was not entirely new. For instance, the documentary *Sixth Side of the Pentagon* (Marker 2007), shows Veterans for Peace members in military-style caps, clean cut, some in suits, on their way to toss pamphlets at the feet of MPs in an October 21, 1967, clash at the Pentagon.

Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan (1984) date the first antiwar protest regarding the U.S. and Vietnam as August 1963. In Philadelphia, members of the Student Peace Union marched in front of the federal building, carrying signs protesting U.S. foreign policy regarding Vietnam. In New York City, two young members of Catholic Workers, Thomas Cornell and Christopher Kearns, walked up and down in front of the Manhattan residence of Vietnam’s observer to the United Nations. For nine days, Kearns and Cornell walked alone. On the planned final day, about 250 people from other New York peace groups joined them. ABC filmed the protest, showing the demonstration on the evening news. The authors were not specific as to whether the film aired on the New York local newscast or the network program.

Arlen (1969, 6-9, 84) described and critiqued much of that early Vietnam War coverage. He lambasted the early war newscasts for “their almost unvarying implicit deference to the importance of purely military solutions” and an emotional, excessively simple “our guys versus their guys” theme. Few people questioned bombing or “sweep” effectiveness or body counts; few asked about civilian casualties. Domestic coverage concentrated more on doubt and anxiety

than on protest or opposition. As Herbert Gans (1979, 58-59, 280) pointed out, antiwar protest was treated in the news as a social disorder question. It was a national story because of the public institution it targeted, but it would take an establishment source to lead the networks to broader antiwar questions. NBC's Sander Vanocur summarized the congressional mood at the end of 1965: "There is a kind of bipartisan uneasiness over the war in Vietnam, and it is perhaps more pronounced among Democrats than among Republicans. At the same time there is no war fever of jingoism. Congress regards the war in Vietnam as unpleasant but perhaps necessary, and it sees no honorable way out that is going to be quick and easy" (Hill 1967).

Though President Johnson frequently and loudly condemned news coverage of Vietnam, only rarely did network reports question his decision to fight. Most stories emphasized the scale and sophistication of American military technology. Johnson and his Secretaries of State and Defense were virtually guaranteed a minute or two on all network newscasts every time they gave a press conference or major speech. ABC commentator Howard K. Smith, who later became an anchorman, defended the war policies in college speeches and in a July 1966 broadcast, concluding, "It is entirely good what we're doing" (Pach 2002).

The executive producer of NBC's *Huntley-Brinkley Report*, Robert Northshield, did not like reporters using the construction "our" soldiers, ships, or planes; but reporters and even anchors routinely used it. Anchor Chet Huntley objected to his reputation as a hawk, but he did insist, in 1966, that "there is no alternative in Vietnam to fighting it out." Anchor David Brinkley insisted that he despised the war and regularly said so, but little that he said in 1965 or 1966 would lead one to that conclusion. CBS anchorman Walter Cronkite went to Vietnam in the summer of 1965 and told military briefers he "was impressed with our effort" and embarrassed by the

“rude challenges” of “younger reporters” covering military briefings (Pach 2002).

From 1965 through 1967, public opinion began to turn against the war, while most TV news reporting still favored administration policies. By 1968, however, antiwar protest became simply too big to ignore. Between January and June of that year, at least 221 demonstrations occurred at 110 colleges, and a total of 3,463 separate acts of campus protest took place. Ten campuses were firebombed. A million students boycotted classes on April 26th. The next day, a hundred thousand people marched in New York City (J. K. Davis 1997).

Perhaps the mistake of viewing television as a leading, rather than trailing, factor is influenced by memory of the power of the images themselves (Hallin 1986, 163). And not all images were used. CBS had footage of GIs cutting off the ears of a dead Viet Cong soldier, but showed footage that did not include the mutilation. NBC told the story of a Marine colonel with a shattered leg without showing his wound or surgery. But some of the images the networks chose to show are indeed haunting. CBS carried a story in September 1965 about Vietnamese civilians scavenging in a garbage dump containing live ammunition. Two months later, CBS showed a tearful widow at Fort Benning, Georgia, holding her baby and reading a letter from her fallen husband. ABC's Ed Needham wrapped up a report on a heavy-casualty battle with the image of a helmet on the ground with a hole ripped through it. “It hardly seems worth it,” he said (Pach 2002).

Television news film, of course, was a technological cousin to its predecessor, newsreels. The rapid growth of antiwar protests in 1967 coincided with the last year of Universal Newsreels (1929-1967). Newsreels were very different forms compared to television news reports. Movie production houses created newsreels for showing in theatres. No reporter was seen, just images of the serious, shocking,

and silly accompanied by the voice-over announcer and a musical score. Three surviving newsreels from that year foreshadow some of the coverage problems later faced by antiwar protesters in general and VVAW in particular.

An April 18, 1967, newsreel had the full-screen title “Peace March.” Following a crescendo of ominous music, announcer Ed Herlihy tells of a hundred twenty-five thousand people marching from New York’s Central Park to the United Nations. He describes them as “students, housewives, beatnik poets, doctors, businessmen, teachers, priests, and nuns.” Providing pictures to match, he proclaims, “Makeup and costumes were bizarre.” The newsreel shows demonstrators burning draft cards, and the narration tries to minimize the impact by first saying that demonstrators claimed [vocal emphasis on “claimed”] that two hundred cards were burned but that no accurate count could be determined and that “reporters and onlookers were jostled away on purpose.”

The narrator admits the event was mostly peaceful, but then says, “Shouted confrontations were frequent and fiery,” as the film shows a U.S. Army logo on a jacket and then pulls out to show a clean-cut young man yelling at a hooded demonstrator. Following brief footage of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. walking to the U.N. to protest the war, the newsreel shifts to fifty thousand “pacifists and hippies together” in a San Francisco protest. Protesters carry the blame as the narrator states, “Antiwar songs and speeches trigger a short scuffle between pro and con factions.” The event is described as “sponsored by a loose coalition of left-wing pacifist and moderate antiwar groups.”

The story ends with the official line and implicit threat: “President Johnson meanwhile let it be known that FBI is closely watching all antiwar activity.” The newsreel then transitions to antiwar protests in Rome where the announcer lapses into casual, almost gleeful, chatter as he describes police and firemen turning hoses on sit-down

protesters. “The solution H-Two-O applied freely under high pressure. . . . The strong water jets bowled over demonstrators one after another. They dried out in the pokey.”



[CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO](#)

“Peace March: Thousands Oppose Vietnam War” by Universal Newsreel, voiced by Ed Herlihy, April 18, 1967, Public Domain (Creative Commons)

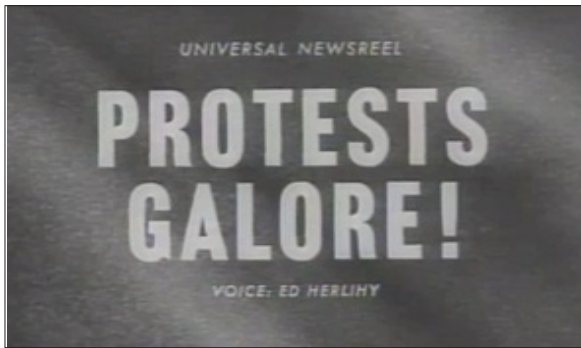
A May 5th Universal Newsreel entitled “Protests Galore!” starts in London with footage of police and crowd pushing one another as the announcer states that four thousand Londoners “were decrying British support for U.S. action [note that the word “war” is not used] in Vietnam.” The announcer admits to only a “few minor scuffles, but no arrests” and states that the demonstrators were stopped [by whom not stated] from approaching Prime Minister Wilson’s Downing Street home. The newsreel makes no mention that the home is the official residence of all prime ministers, likening the event to White House protests. That segment concludes with news that “mimics of Queen Elizabeth presented mock medals, and said the war was a wicked obscenity.”

The themes of disrespect and danger carry on when the scene switches to protests at Madrid University. Ed Herlihy bellows, “Posters, leaflets, slogans, and student speeches all carried a virulence

seldom seen here before,” a statement at odds with scenes of happy, clapping crowds. The audio and video come back into match as the copy and film both address the burning of an American flag. The announcer wraps the segment by declaring, “Both President Johnson and Francisco Franco were vilified, a new low in public protest added strain on Spanish-American relations.” The last phrase, of course, is both an unsubstantiated assertion and blatant editorializing. The segment is accompanied by alarming horn sounds.

The newsreel abruptly shifts to upbeat music and pictures of people wearing balloons and flowers. Now, viewers are in Detroit at a “social phenomenon sweeping the country.” The Love-In is a “close relative to the be-in, sort of a happy happening laced with the rites of spring.” The narration and video align in showing hippies, would-be hippies, colorful scenes, high frolic, and folks dancing. The announcer notes, “Group therapy like this outdrew the Detroit Tigers that day. The end, man.” Any protest in this “Protests Galore!” segment was missing.

The newsreel then shifts to official aerial footage of Vietnam air raids. The narration states that the bombers “blasted” communication and boat repair and “annihilated” targets, and then asserts, “Our pilots hit only military targets.” Maintaining the illusion of a front and a traditional war, the newsreel states that the jets struck close to North Vietnamese capital Hanoi once again and that ground troops moved to within ten miles of the North Vietnam border. To drive home the Cold War connection, the newsreel closes with footage of soldiers, weapons, and Soviet leaders in the annual Moscow May Day parade, complete with reference to speeches by Kremlin leaders accusing the U.S. of “criminal war in Vietnam.”



[CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO](#)

"Protests Galore!" by Universal Newsreel, voiced by Ed Herlihy, May 5, 1967,
Public Domain (Creative Commons)

The October 24th, 1967, newsreel, "Antiwar Demonstrators Storm Pentagon," starts with ominous music. Protesters carry a "Support Our Troops . . . Bring Them Home" banner, but the camera only shows "Support Our Troops . . . Bring." The narrator mentions scuffles and calls the organization a "loose confederation of some 150 groups" that "included adults, students, even children." Subtle status-quo shading can be found in both film and narration. The stand-off at the Pentagon is described as a "test of strength," an odd phrasing when one side is armed. Military police "contain" the crowd, and the MP perimeter is described as a "protective line." In the subsequent clashes, the narrator intones, "Two soldiers are injured [no mention of injured protesters] and tear gas is used" [passive voice hiding the military as the actor using the tear gas].

Newsreel coverage of the second day begins with a crowd kicking around garbage that looks like books or pamphlets and with a campfire. The narrator notes that the fires are to hold off the autumn chill, while the footage shows a smaller crowd, focusing on a bearded protester and a clean-cut MP. As the music changes to an upbeat swell, the narrator talks about nationwide demonstrations supporting GIs

in Vietnam taking place the same weekend. Abandoning any pretense of objectivity, Ed Herlihy concludes, “The two-day protest ends with over six hundred arrested and the widespread opinion that the demonstration made everyone a loser.”



CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO

“Anti-War Demonstrators Storm Pentagon” by Universal Newsreels,
voiced by Ed Herlihy, Oct. 24, 1967, Public Domain
(Creative Commons)

British Pathe’ newsreels of the Pentagon protests, unfortunately retained as silent footage, present two of the same protest days with some intriguing differences. The British film of the October 1967 protests uses more extreme long shots showing the large size of the gathering in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Like the U.S. newsreel, Pathe’ 71984 shows minor scuffles and arrests. Unlike the American counterpart, the British film shows the entire banner “Support Our G.I.s . . . Bring Them Home.” The British newsreel also notes that “[A]t the same time a peaceful anti-Vietnam demonstration [is] taking place in San Francisco. Ex-army organizations take part along with ordinary public.” The video appears to be standard parade-formation of American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars members and their flags, and may actually be a pro-war parade.

Link to British Pathe’: <http://www.britishpathe.com/>

The British Archive erred in its listing regarding the April 1967 protests, mistakenly listing them as 1966. Once again the British used wider shots than Universal Newsreel had done to show the large crowds. Universal only showed Dr. Martin Luther King walking toward the U.N., while Pathe' 83341 showed him speaking to microphones and cameras. The first moments of the newsreel, however, give a lot of time to the counter-demonstrators, their placards visible in medium shots and close-ups. One demonstrator calls the protesters cowards. Another proclaims, "Victory, Bomb Hanoi," and another echoes "End Hanoi Sanctuary." Some antiwar signs are seen in long shots, only one quick medium shot shows an antiwar sign, which reads: "Vietnam for Vietnamese. Let's Get Out." Later, the Pathe' film does show large numbers of people marching, and viewers see additional placards in the San Francisco march. That footage also shows the large Kezar Stadium crowd, but a "Support Our Men in Vietnam" banner is center screen.

British Pathe' Newsreels also had footage and sound of several British antiwar protests: a March 21, 1968, demonstration that ended in chaos and became known as the Grosvenor Square riots (45122); a March 28, 1968, "Mothering Sunday" march (45136); color footage [all other newsreel footage examined is black and white] of a July 25, 1968, demonstration in front of the American Embassy (45365); an October 31, 1968, march to Downing Street (45509); an April 1969 Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament march (45754). The newsreel archive also contains a color collection of "offcuts, selected scenes, out-takes, [and] rushes" from various Vietnam demonstrations (45366).

The Grosvenor Square narration had such strong editorializing that the archive added a "[c]ataloguer's note: commentary very biased in favour of police—in contrast with the actual footage showing shocking examples of police brutality." Indeed, the footage begins

with the most inflammatory posters: Mao, a hammer and sickle, and Ho Chi Minh. The film devotes attention to the presence of actress Vanessa Redgrave. Then the narrator warns about hate-makers, hard-core troublemakers, determined to “drag the majority of well-intentioned demonstrators to their sickening level.” As snare drums increase tempo, viewers hear, in passive voice, “Riot was being incited.” The footage then just offers natural sound and shows incidents of tear gas, demonstrators wrestled to the ground by groups of police, and at least one instance of police kicking the prone demonstrator. The narrator concludes with praise for the police restraint.

In contrast, the “Mothering Sunday” march was presented with fewer machinations, though the peaceful march to the U.S. embassy was paired with a Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament youth anti-war rally in Trafalgar Square. The narrator reminds viewers of the previous week’s violence, and as footage shows police pushing back against the crowd, the narrator opines, “The police had reason to fear another flare-up.” He concludes with the glib statement, “London had not suffered more violence in the cause of peace.”

The march from Trafalgar Square to the U.S. embassy on July 25, 1968, followed a similar route and a similar pattern of newsreel coverage. It begins with the narrator describing the protesters as young and sincere, withholding the implied and condescending term “naïve.” Most of the banners shown are ones with Soviet or communist icons. At the embassy, the mood shifts abruptly as viewers are warned that there are “hawks, aggressors, troublemakers, and anarchists” in the crowd. Their offense appears to be stepping over some bushes and a small garden-style mesh fence about a foot tall. As police grab offenders and push them back, strong editorial narration begins: “There are those who complain that the police use undue violence. Others more likely compliment them on their restraint when faced with thugs, bullies, and flaunters of the law. How can

anyone ever hope to have pleas for peace seriously considered when their terms are so violently and wrongly presented?" The film ends with a musical flourish and the burning of an American flag.

The October 31, 1968, demonstration shows the large crowd as the narrator tells listeners what side they were on: "It was a day that many Londoners had dreaded for many weeks. Past experience had shown that bitter violence could take control." Viewers see an Australian flag in flames as the narrator says, "Flag burning hurts national pride, but breaks no heads." After praising police and the majority of demonstrators, the camera follows a breakaway group that the narrator at various times calls "fringe fanatics," "self-described Maoists," "troublemakers," "hooligans," "anarchists," and "an uncontrollable faction." This newsreel spends 60 percent of its time on clashes between this group and police, the narrator boldly asserting, "Nobody, not even the troublemakers themselves, could condemn the police for standing their ground and giving as good as they got." The narrator concludes that the other protesters thus "lost some of the sympathy and understanding they might have earned."

The April 1969 CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) rally took place on Easter weekend. The crowd at Trafalgar Square looks larger than the narrator-provided number of five thousand. The narration praises the march to the square as done by "orderly sober citizens." A handful of young anarchists who "tried to stir up trouble" were "quickly dealt with before the mass reached Trafalgar Square." How? Viewers are not told. The crowd heard from the woman who was the North Vietnamese delegate to the Paris Peace Talks. Viewers see her at the microphone, but do not hear her in this newsreel. The crowd shots include one with a banner of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

The newsreels provide coverage clues for all antiwar protesters, but they highlight news habits particularly informative for U.S. antiwar veterans:

- Reporters will assume all veterans support the war and that only pro-war demonstrators “support the troops.”
- Negative actions by police will be lessened by blaming the victim or by using passive voice—no subject doing the negative action.
- Conflict, no matter how unrepresentative or minor, will get a lot of camera time.
- Default news themes for antiwar protests are ones of protester disrespect and danger to the community.
- Reporters will seek out a pro-war speaker, even if only a few are present or if one who did not attend has to be found for a quote. These pro-war speakers almost invariably will equate war opposition with cowardice or support for an enemy.
- Great effort must be sustained to separate highly credible voices such as antiwar veterans. The news tendency will be simply to list participating groups.
- No matter how well organized the protest may be, it likely will be presented as a convenient, if naïve, casual assemblage of groups.

News coverage generally will comment often on the behavior of the protesters rather than on the merits of the protest’s argument. Thus, the news conundrum for social movements is established and maintained. No threat of conflict likely means little coverage, but if conflict occurs, the conflict gets covered instead of the group and its message.

Highlights

Since August 1968, Vanderbilt University has maintained a Television News Archive, making it possible to search for stories by topic and to examine actual video of every ABC, CBS, or NBC evening newscast from that point forward.

Records from before August 1968 are sporadic and often anecdotal, but generally point to coverage relatively uncritical of Administration war policies. The dying gasps of the newsreel industry certainly reacted negatively to early antiwar protests.

The early coverage gives clues to the news obstacles to be faced by VVAW. Reporters initially tend to assume all veterans groups support the war and that only pro-war demonstrators “support the troops.”

Conflict, disrespect, and danger are default protest coverage themes, and protest generally will be treated as a confusing social disorder.

Documenting the Coverage

The author conducted in-depth interviews with four leaders of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and also searched for and obtained poll data from the era. The key element of the research, however, was a search of the Television News Archive maintained at Vanderbilt University, using keywords such as “VVAW,” “Vietnam Veterans Against the War,” “vets,” and “antiwar veterans.” The resulting stories then were copied onto videotape for review and critical analysis.

The Television News Archive has videotaped, indexed, and made available for scholarly use every network TV (ABC, CBS, and NBC) evening newscast since October 1968. Thus, the archive covers the time period of nearly every significant VVAW activity.

A quick summary of those activities will help the reader understand what is covered and what is not:

- February 1970—In its first major event, VVAW held hearings on American war crimes in Vietnam. Vietnam veterans assembled in Annapolis, Maryland, and Springfield, Massachusetts, to testify to atrocities they had participated in or observed (Lembcke 1998, 57).
- August 1970—VVAW members confronted American Legionnaires at that group’s national convention in Portland, Oregon (Thorne and Butler 1971, 8).

- September 4-7, 1970—Operation RAW (Rapid American Withdrawal) was a four-day “military sweep” across New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The 100 to 150 antiwar veterans, outfitted in combat fatigues and carrying plastic M-16 rifles, staged mock combat patrols and war atrocities along the eighty-mile route from Morristown, New Jersey, to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The route replicated much of Washington’s retreat to Valley Forge; the vets then joined fifteen thousand other antiwar demonstrators in a Labor Day rally (DeBenedetti 1990, 293-294; Prados 2002, 407). Vietnam Veteran Ed Damato (2000) recalled seeing Jane Fonda on a late-night talk show commenting on the upcoming Valley Forge march by VVAW. Damato joined the march. Later, he related that he “began a life of fighting against the war that I thought was wrong. Up to this point my big antiwar statement was giving the finger to President Richard Nixon while he rounded 50th Street in his limousine” on his way to a New York City event.
- January 31 to February 2, 1971—Winter Soldier Investigation: At a Howard Johnson’s motel in Detroit, a hundred soldiers and sixteen civilians testified about Vietnam War crimes that they themselves committed or observed other U.S. soldiers committing. VVAW leader Bill Davis (2007) later said that Winter Soldier “broke open the atrocities and the level of genocide that was being carried out in the name of the American people in Vietnam. It was so effective that it is still being attacked to this very day by the people it diminished.” As Tod Ensign (1999) pointed out, the road to a successful investigation was not easy; competing groups had different ideas about how to proceed and even celebrity supporters, such as actors Donald Sutherland and Jane Fonda as well as JFK assassination lawyer Mark Lane, had to be dissuaded from distracting missteps.

The road to national coverage was even tougher. Senator Mark Hatfield entered the proceedings into the April 6-7, 1971, *Congressional Record*, but news media paid little attention (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984, 355; Gitlin 1987). Jan Barry spoke at Winter Soldier and recalled that CBS sent a camera crew but never used the material. A *New York Times* reporter was there for the whole event, but only one brief story appeared. On the first day of the event, the *Detroit News* challenged the vets, relaying a statement that the Pentagon didn't even have any information that these people were real veterans. Barry recalls that after the first day much better newspaper coverage appeared in Detroit, Chicago, and the Midwest (Barry 1997b). The *Chicago Tribune* ran a seven-paragraph wire story summarizing some of the stated atrocities, minimized under the headline "Viet Nam 'Crimes' Told at Mock Probe" (Associated Press 1971).

Just before Winter Soldier, the *Chicago Tribune* also carried, in its "Action Express" column (1971), responses to reader questions, the following inquiry: "I wonder if you could supply Jane Fonda's address for me. I'm fed up with these 'sob sisters' and 'do-gooders.' I think it's about time for at least one member of the silent majority—me—to go into action!" The paper then explained its search process and gave 967 Emerson Street, Detroit, as the address, describing it as "the office of the Winter Soldier Investigation, an unofficial 'war crimes trial' being planned to condemn United States 'war crimes' in Viet Nam." One is struck immediately with the poor judgment of providing to an angry person determined to "go into action" a street address for the focus of that rage. The column also shows how easily VVAW events could be commingled with disdain for supporters. The VVAW message could have been lost by opponents redirecting the discussion to personal attacks on a controversial supporter, a technique honed to perfection in much of today's talk radio.

John Zutz (2008) recalls that despite sporadic media coverage of the Winter Soldier testimony, soldiers in the field in Vietnam got

enough news to know what was happening. “The Neanderthals in the company were beating on their chests to show how tough they were,” he wrote. “At the same time, a number of my buddies mentioned they were ashamed to be a member of the military. I believe they had good reason to feel that way.” Nearly three thousand GIs, just like John Zutz, joined VVAW in 1971 while still serving in Vietnam (Miller 2000).

In 1972, a documentary called *Winter Soldier* came out. The dramatic testimony was shown primarily on U.S. college campuses. In Europe, it became a hit, winning awards and appearing both on television and in theaters. The film’s director, Lucy Phenix (2009), declared, “We independent filmmakers were filming because we knew that the mainstream media would NOT cover what was going on there—which was, I think, epic and groundbreaking—young American soldiers willing and brave enough to tell the truth about a war against civilians.” The 2004 John Kerry presidential campaign brought renewed interest in the documentary. In Chicago, the film showed eight nights to packed houses at the Gene Siskel Film Center, followed by long question-and-answer sessions with VVAW members (Romo 2005).

From April 19 to 24, 1971, Dewey Canyon III, a series of VVAW protests in and around Washington, D.C., took place. These protests included flinging away medals on the steps of the Capitol, throwing medals over the White House fence, marching to the Pentagon, and attending congressional hearings. Vets roamed congressional office buildings to make their case. One “suit” yelled, “Get a job and make something of yourself” to a one-armed combat vet who proceeded to chase the man into the rotunda, where the coward found safety behind a guard (Hartford 2001; Longley 2008). Several congressmen, mostly without publicity, came to the veterans’ campground to listen to them.



Dewey Canyon III in front of the Capitol.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

On April 23rd, some seven hundred vets marched from their mall campsite to the west side of the Capitol. Each man solemnly announced his name and unit, and then threw his medals over a makeshift fence (DeBenedetti 1990, 309-310). The vets originally had considered putting their medals in a body bag but—“to our everlasting credit”—opted to toss the medals. This decision reflected well on the democratic operation and choices of the organization (Damato 2000).

George Moss (2010, 313) and Kyle Longley (2008) relay that VVAW membership at the time topped twenty thousand. Some of the thousand to two thousand vets participating in Dewey Canyon

III came in wheelchairs; some were missing arms or legs. With emotions that ranged from quiet weeping to angry rage, the hundreds of vets who tossed medals directed their actions toward a government that would not end this war. Carl Rogers recalled, “The words and emotions that poured out were the most poignant and angry words I had ever heard in opposition to that dirty stinkin’ rotten little war. . . . I walked away from that moment in tears, but never more proud to have been part of the founding group of brothers who created VVAW” (Barry 2007c). These Dewey Canyon III events had the added topicality in that less than three weeks earlier a military court had sentenced Lieutenant William Calley for mass murder for his role in the My Lai massacre (Moss 2010, 313).

Other events followed:

- May 31, 1971—Four hundred Vietnam Veterans inverted the Paul Revere ride and trekked twenty miles from Bunker Hill to Boston Common for a Memorial Day rally. Later, roughly a hundred vets and three hundred sympathizers were arrested for violating curfew in Lexington by sleeping on Lexington Green, the largest mass arrest in state history; it appears that riot police detained another hundred people, but no charges were filed (Kaledin 1999).
- July 4, 1971—Five hundred VVAW and supporters marched in a three-mile antiwar candlelight parade in Kansas City, Missouri.
- December 24, 1971—Vets rallied at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City to read aloud the names of the war dead. VVAW members also carried out simultaneous encampments at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania; Berkeley, California; Killeen, Texas; and Chicago, Illinois (Prados 2002, 409).
- December 26-29, 1971—Fifteen VVAW members barricaded

themselves inside the Statue of Liberty, leaving only after a U.S. district judge ordered them to open the doors. While that protest was underway, twenty-five protesters, mostly VVAW, occupied the Betsy Ross house in Philadelphia for an hour. Eighty-seven veterans were arrested in Washington for blocking the Lincoln Memorial entrance. In San Francisco, a group barricaded themselves inside the South Vietnamese consulate (DeBenedetti 1990, 322; Prados 2002, 409).

Setting out for the Statue of Liberty protest, Don Bristow-Carrico asked Vin Maclellan from the *Boston Phoenix* what media coverage the protesters could expect. The answer was downbeat: arrested in fifteen minutes and maybe page nine of the *New York Times*, if they were lucky. The protesters planned to stay in the “Lady” for only a few minutes. They had to fashion a statement to satisfy the press when they ended up staying for three days, eating food found in the lounge refrigerator. “A reporter from France told us that if we took a flag up to the head he would get it in every paper in the world. We put it there and he did it! He rented a helicopter and got a great shot,” said Bristow-Carrico. “Our lawyers told us we could stay and get arrested or walk out free. They felt we had milked the press as much as we could and that it would end up costing a lot to defend the ‘Liberty Fifteen.’ We walked out to a press conference and a good meal.” The protesters later received Christmas cards from John and Yoko Lennon (Bristow-Carrico 1999). The flag photo even made it to the pages of *Stars and Stripes* (Longley 2008).



A second Statue of Liberty protest with a banners displayed from the crown.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

Numerous protests took place over the next few years:

- April 19, 1972—VVAW members occupied the U.S. Naval Reserve Center in North Hollywood for seven hours. Later in the month, sixteen VVAW members took over the Air Force recruiting office in San Francisco. A crowd of two thousand served as a buffer between the vets and police while the vets

watched recruiting films. Two days later, at the Naval District Headquarters in San Diego, fifteen members turned themselves in as war criminals (Hunt 1999, 145; “We Are Everywhere” 1972, 10).

- April 29, 1972—Four hundred people attended a VVAW rally at Fort Ord, California. The vets demanded an end to intensified bombing in Vietnam (Hunt 1999, 145; “We Are Everywhere” 1972, 10).
- May 10, 1972—In Fresno, California, VVAW’s Gary Alexander carried a flag as he led eight hundred protesters decrying the mining of Vietnamese harbors (Hunt 1999, 145; “We Are Everywhere” 1972, 10).
- May 11, 1972—Eight VVAW members and supporters took over the King County Republican Party Headquarters. They were charged with criminal trespass. Two days later, in Seattle, a thousand demonstrators marched in opposition to the mining of Vietnamese harbors. Earlier in the month, VVAW members from Western Washington State College “mined” Bellingham harbor with a hundred multicolored balloons (Hunt 1999, 145; “We Are Everywhere” 1972, 10).
- May 1972—Eight hundred members of the Potsdam, New York, chapter of VVAW led a takeover of a federal building. VVAW members in New England seized the captain’s quarters on the *USS Constitution*. A VVAW blockade in Boulder, Colorado, led to the closing of Highway 36 for twenty-four hours. Police used tear gas. The Greeley, Colorado, VVAW held a “forced march” forty miles to Denver to participate in a rally. In Laramie, Wyoming, thirty-five members participated in a silent vigil (Hunt 1999, 145; “We Are Everywhere” 1972, 10).

- July 6-14, 1972—Workshops and candidate education events took place at the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach. The non-delegates were assigned to the Par 3 Golf Course for accommodations; VVAW selected a portion of the course separate and distinct from other demonstrators (“Come to Miami!” 1972, 6). At the Democratic convention, “the veterans were lionized, afforded opportunities to make public statements, [and] admitted to the convention floor” (Prados 2002, 410).
- July 29-August 23, 1972—Last Patrol. A series of VVAW convoys converged on Miami Beach to protest at the Republican National Convention. The VVAW’s Bill Davis said that one Last Patrol event, the march to the Fountainbleu, “is considered one of the all-time famous antiwar marches” (2007). For that reason, a detailed account of it appears in the next chapter.
- July 1972-August 1973—The Tallahassee Six, later the Gainesville Eight. Seven VVAW members and a supporter were accused of a plot to disrupt the Republican convention using bombs and violence. Indictments, pre-trial maneuvers, and a trial followed. Several embarrassing government tactics were revealed, not the least of which were two FBI agents found sitting in a closet next to the defense attorney’s office with electronic surveillance equipment. The judge refused to dismiss the case, but the jury acquitted all eight accused.



The Gainesville 8.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

Officially, the jury took four hours, but reports indicate that jurors actually needed only ninety minutes and that they spent the remaining time playing with a slingshot that was a prosecution exhibit (Shunas 2008). One juror said, “What was there to deliberate? They never showed us any evidence. We could have come back with a verdict in 10 minutes.” Another said, “I wish I had understood all these things about the government 20 years earlier” (“Gainesville 8 Innocent” 1973, 3). As Charles DeBenedetti (1990, 361) wrote, “This was the eighth major antiwar conspiracy case brought to trial and lost by the Justice Department’s Internal Security Division. It became increasingly clear that the administration’s attack on antiwar critics was only part of a broader pattern of arbitrary, secretive, and illegal activity.”

- January 20, 1973—VVAW joined other peace groups on a cold, muddy day in a giant protest of Nixon’s second inauguration (B. Davis 2007). Some demonstrators pelted the Nixon motorcade with tomatoes. The VVAW also chose to participate in the Nixon Administration’s “Peace with Honor” parade in New York City two months later. The selected military in the review stands turned their backs on the protesting “grunts” in the streets, inadvertently but effectively assisting the VVAW point (Prados 2002, 411).
- Fourth of July weekend, 1974—Five thousand VVAW members marched in Washington, D.C. to demand amnesty for war resisters (Moser 1996, 125).
- Dewey Canyons IV and V were held in Washington, D. C. Protests in later years were designed to draw attention to inadequate veteran benefits and the health problems from the war defoliant Agent Orange (B. Davis 2007).



1981 demonstration for veteran benefits and victims of Agent Orange.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

These events represent a set of antiwar veteran protests around which media could fashion news stories. The resulting coverage offers valuable insight not only about journalistic habits but also about the interaction of a heretical social movement with established and powerful news media.

Highlights

The VVAW began major antiwar protests in 1970, though most of these events received only sporadic and skeptical coverage, generally restricted to the local media at the protest site.

The VVAW made an important historical record of Vietnam War atrocities at the Winter Soldier hearings in Detroit in early 1971. A film documentary of the event reached European audiences, but U.S. coverage of Winter Soldier was minimal.

The VVAW's greatest protest success was Dewey Canyon III, a week-long series of events in Washington, D.C., in April 1971. Established sources validated coverage by their reaction to the vets.

As quickly as media attention rose during Dewey Canyon III, it fell off almost immediately afterwards. Some news attention came to the Gainesville Eight, a failed government attempt to prosecute VVAW members on very dubious charges.

In the mid-1970s, VVAW turned its attention to veterans issues, notably Agent Orange exposure and health problems.

No Winter Soldiers but a Spring of News Discovery

Based on the Vanderbilt Television News Archive, U.S. network TV newscasts did forty-four stories involving Vietnam Veterans Against the War or other antiwar veterans during the period of the war. Notably, however, twenty-six of the forty-four stories occurred in April 1971, when antiwar veterans went to Washington, D.C. and tied themselves to traditional news sources (Congress, Pentagon, Supreme Court) within shouting distance of the network Washington bureaus. The protest title “Dewey Canyon III” was designed to draw attention to not-so-secret U.S. and South Vietnamese military invasions of Laos, Dewey Canyons I and II (B. Davis 1996).

Network TV newsrooms, of course, get some story ideas and seek validation of their own news judgment in what is covered by the *New York Times*. Jerry Lembcke (1998, 106) pointed out that in February 1971 that paper ignored the Winter Soldier event and turned down an op-ed piece on post-Vietnam health syndromes. Events of March 29th, however, drew media attention. Lt. William Calley was convicted for the premeditated murder of civilians at My Lai. Veterans, atrocities, and reconsidering Vietnam then became acceptable, but still faced push back. When CBS’s Mike Wallace interviewed one of the U.S. soldiers who participated in the My Lai massacre, one viewer accused him of “pimping for the protesters” (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984, 350).

Much like the *New York Times*, network TV news ignored Winter Soldier but covered many of the Dewey Canyon events of April 19-24, 1971. The networks generally did not pick up on clues in the name or even use the name Dewey Canyon. *NBC Nightly News*, however, on Sunday April 18th, did an “advancer” story on the upcoming VVAW protests. Vet Brownie Carlson talked about how the U.S. really was taking Vietnam from the Vietnamese. Veteran Robert Bilger showed ears cut from dead enemy soldiers and talked about that policy. Reporter Ron Nessen closed by asserting that the VVAW represented a small percentage of those in Vietnam but that the group knew what they were demonstrating against. The same day, in the third news block, CBS ran a pair of advancer stories. Tony Sargent reported that a thousand veterans were expected and that they might give their medals back to the government. John Kerry spoke about the credibility of veterans. Reporter Bruce Morton covered the Concerned Officers Movement, one that included active duty officers opposed to the war. Three officers who were quoted stressed their effort to work within the system. They also noted that high-ranking officers could say whatever they pleased but that lower-ranking officers got harassed for antiwar dissent.

On the first day of Dewey Canyon III, more than a thousand veterans marched to the gates of Arlington National Cemetery. The mothers of GIs killed in Vietnam, Gold Star Mothers, were not allowed to place wreaths on soldier graves. The Reverend Jackson Day, who had resigned just days earlier as a military chaplain, led a brief ceremony for the war dead on all sides. The ceremony took place on a small plot of grass outside the cemetery and beneath John F. Kennedy’s grave and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Gold Star Mothers laid two wreaths at the gate. Some vets tried to scale the gate, but others pulled them down and cautioned patience; a lot of protest lay ahead. The march re-formed, went to Congress, heard from three

congressmen, and then VVAW member Jan Crumb presented a series of sixteen demands to Congress. A three-judge panel rejected a government request to bar the vets from camping on the Mall (Hartford 2001; Thorne and Butler 1971, 26-27).

All three networks did reporter packages (field reports), and the antiwar events became the lead story on the *CBS Evening News*. Gerald Nicosia (2001, 116) described the story as a short but sympathetic piece by Walter Cronkite, an anchor who spoke as something of a national conscience.

The CBS field report from Bruce Morton included a sound bite from John Kerry, characterizing as disgraceful the failure to allow the grieving at Arlington. The anchor tag to the report was a claim by Pennsylvania's U.S. Senator Hugh Scott that the demonstrators were only a fraction of a percent of the total Vietnam Veterans. NBC and ABC both placed the story in the second news block and relayed congressional sound bites about the events. ABC used Congressman Paul McCloskey. NBC used McCloskey and Bella Abzug. The NBC report was preceded by a troop withdrawals package, citing how such withdrawals depressed business for the Vietnam hotels, bars, and bar girls. A trailing copy story relayed charges of rampant South Vietnamese corruption and GI heroin use.

The second day, Tuesday April 20th, featured guerilla theater, mock search-and-destroy missions on the steps of the Capitol. Single-file, the vets crossed the Lincoln Memorial Bridge and returned to Arlington. This time, after some initial reluctance from the cemetery superintendent, they were allowed to conduct a memorial service. Some two hundred vets attended Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on antiwar bills. Senators Claiborne Pell and Phillip Hart held a fundraising party for the veterans. During the party, the vets got word that Chief Justice Warren Burger had lifted the Court of Appeals injunction. The veterans now supposedly

had until 4:30 p.m. the following day to leave the camp (Thorne and Butler 1971, 27-28).

All three networks did packages. None were lead stories. CBS quoted Senator George McGovern praising the antiwar veterans. Veteran Gordon Gillies said that anyone who served in Vietnam really was a casualty. Arlington Cemetery Superintendent, John Metzler, claimed the previous day's refusal had been a misunderstanding. The anchor tag relayed that there had been 209 "fragging" incidents in the last year, according to Senator Mike Mansfield. ABC also quoted McGovern at the hearings, but showed a bit of the mock search-and-destroy missions and mentioned the return to Arlington for a memorial service. NBC reporter Paul Duke stuck to covering the hearings, using clips from antiwar Senators Jacob Javits and Mark Hatfield.

On day three, Wednesday April 21st, some seventy-five vets marched to the Pentagon to turn themselves in for war crimes, tying themselves to the Calley story. A California VVAW member, Sam Schorr, was one of three members who, accompanied by the press, were allowed into the building. Daniel "Chappie" James, the first black general, met them.

Schorr recalls that the conversation went as follows:

JAMES: What do you want?

VETS: We want to turn ourselves in. We're war criminals.

JAMES: We don't accept war criminals here. That's a police matter.

SCHORR: What do you mean? You've got Calley in jail.

JAMES: Let's go to my office.

[They go down the hallway.]

PRESS MEMBERS: Keep working him! Keep working him!

JAMES: Well, we can't accept you as war criminals.

SCHORR: Who can accept us?

JAMES: If you really think you've committed a crime, you should turn yourselves in to the police.

SCHORR: Do you have any representatives of the Hague Court here? Maybe an international court will accept us.

JAMES: We don't commit war crimes.

SCHORR: Well, you better let Calley go then.

JAMES: We can't do that because he's under military criminal law.

SCHORR: You're just full of shit, you know that? We're getting out of here. (Nicosia 2001, 127)

Backlash quotes began to emerge at this point. An unidentified woman in ABC's lead story whined that the vets should get jobs and go to work. An argument between an unidentified vet and General James played out on ABC. CBS used General James to reply to an unidentified vet's claim that the war was racist and imperialistic. CBS and ABC each did an impressive trio of lead story reporter packages,

totaling about five and a half minutes on each network. Also, CBS and ABC both concluded with commentaries, by Eric Severeid and Howard K. Smith respectively. NBC gave significantly less attention—one story on the congressional hearings, more than eleven minutes into the newscast, and after two commercial breaks.

CBS and ABC also led with the newest angle on the story—the Supreme Court. Congress had validated VVAW coverage in the first two days, including visits by some members (Edward Kennedy, Ron Dellums, Shirley Chisholm, and others) to stay with their local vets (Romo 2000). By day three, however, the Supreme Court inadvertently had validated further coverage.

Thursday's coverage is best understood after something of a judicial backtrack. Late in the day on Tuesday April 20th, Chief Justice Warren Burger, on his own, had heard an emergency petition from the Justice Department. The government wanted to reinstate a lower court order to evict the vets. The Solicitor General argued that the protesters had a stated intent of shutting down the government. Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark appeared for the vets; he argued that the government had no business anticipating unlawful conduct (Woodward and Armstrong 1979, 133-134). Burger sided with the government but delayed his order until the next day. On Wednesday, the following day, the full court heard the matter again. Court police arrested a dozen vets who had delivered a letter to Burger. The other justices reluctantly chose not to embarrass the Chief Justice by overruling him. The order was signed by 5 p.m. The vets voted 480 to 400 to stay on the Mall, but the administration, after using overstated claims to force a dubious precedent, backed down on evicting the vets (Woodward and Armstrong 1979, 134-135). *The Washington Star* headlined the clash "Vets Overrule Supreme Court" (Halstead 1978, 606).



Vets camped near the Capitol for Dewey Canyon III.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

The next morning, Thursday, April 22nd, vets once again appeared on the Supreme Court steps to demand that the Court rule on the constitutionality of the war. The vets sang “God Bless America,” recited the Pledge of Allegiance, and waved American flags and toy M-16s. Chief Justice Warren Burger ordered the Marshal of the Court to clear the steps, even though the vets maintained a corridor on the steps. For the first time on a day the court was open, the thirteen massive bronze doors slammed shut. As D.C. riot police moved to arrest the vets, they turned and waved to former Chief Justice Earl Warren as he watched from his office window (Woodward and Armstrong 1979, 135). A total of 108 vets were arrested and charged with disturbing the peace and were led off with their hands clasped behind their heads. That evening, VVAW members conducted a candlelight march around the White House, carrying an upside-down American flag as a sign of distress (Thorne and Butler 1971, 30).

The big event that day, however, occurred when John Kerry gave testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Kerry's remarks are best remembered for his phrase "How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?" His closing words, however, were just as dramatic:

Finally, this Administration has done us the ultimate dishonor. They have attempted to disown us and the sacrifices we made for this country. In their blindness and fear they have tried to deny that we are veterans. Or that we served in Nam. We do not need their testimony. Our own scars and stumps of limbs are witness enough for others and ourselves.

We wish that a merciful God could wipe away our own memories of that service as easily as this Administration has wiped away their memories of us. But all that they have done and all that they can do by this denial is to make more clear than ever our own determination to undertake one last mission—to search out and destroy the last vestige of this barbaric war, to pacify our own hearts, to conquer the hate and the fear that have driven this country these ten years and more, so when thirty years from now our brothers go down the street without a leg, without an arm, or a face, and small boys ask why, we will be able to say "Vietnam" and not mean a desert, not a filthy obscene memory, but mean instead the place where America finally turned and where soldiers like us helped it in the turning. (Kerry 1971, 24)

The three leading networks covered the arrests and testimony, but not as the lead story. All three began with the death of Haitian dictator Francois Duvalier. ABC and CBS both carried protest backlash stories. ABC showed Veterans of Foreign Wars commander Herbert Rainwater accusing the media of overplaying the VVAW. Rainwater also noticed young women, likely not combat veterans, among the VVAW. An unidentified protester retorted that non-vet supporters were there and that they readily admitted so. An unidentified vet estimated that three-quarters of vets opposed the war and said that Rainwater didn't know what he was talking about. ABC anchor and war hawk Howard K. Smith tagged the story with the explicitly prejudicial aside that North Vietnam's negotiators at the Paris peace talks expressed support for the protesting veterans. CBS also used Rainwater's comments and the Kerry testimony. NBC showed the arrests, but reporter Liz Trotta's story derived mostly from Kerry's testimony.

Certainly, the VVAW presence was making the Nixon Administration nervous. "VVAW's very existence frustrated Nixon," noted Horace Coleman (2004). "VVAW was the real thing, controversial but undeniable people who'd been there, done that, fought and bled." Nixon, of course, would not acknowledge the vets; he made it a point to watch football instead (Dzagulones 2004). He held a long morning meeting with aides about how to handle the Supreme Court action on the veterans and camping on the mall (Haldeman 1994, 278). On the evening of April 22nd, the Nixon Administration had Opinion Dynamics do a nationwide telephone poll of 541 adults. Seventy-seven percent of respondents had "heard, or read about the Vietnam Veterans Against the War demonstration in Washington D.C. this week." When asked, "In general, do you approve or disapprove of this demonstration?" 32 percent approved, 42 percent disapproved, and 26 percent had no opinion (Opinion Research Corporation 1971a).

Day Five, April 23rd, featured the famous footage of VVAW members throwing away their medals. The story was the lead item on NBC as a voice-over story with sound bites. Later in the newscast, NBC carried a report correcting the rank of VVAW's Al Hubbard, who had stated it falsely on *Meet the Press*. ABC's Stephen Geer reported on the medal tossing, but the story was placed after a Bob Windsor lead package about Attorney General John Mitchell denouncing demonstrators as worse than spies and predicting violence in the large, upcoming antiwar events. ABC concluded with Harry Reasoner's commentary praising Kerry's testimony. CBS led with a Soviet space launch and then carried a Bruce Morton package on the medals being thrown away. Morton's package included taps being played by the father of a GI killed in Vietnam. CBS then carried Mitchell's claims and ominous predictions.



The medals toss included plastic toy weapons as well.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

Jeffrey Kimball (1998, 251) wrote, “Of all the demonstrations in the spring of 1971, this one unnerved Nixon the most. It was well covered by the news media, and Nixon sensed that the veteran’s antiwar message was getting across to the public. This point was driven home on April 23, when the Administration’s own quick poll showed a three-point drop in Nixon’s approval rating, which to them was inexplicable but for the VVAW’s demonstrations.” The administration indeed attributed to the VVAW the downtick in presidential popularity, blamed the media, and considered sending out Agnew with more media and protester bashing (Haldeman 1994, 278).

Also on Friday, April 23, 1971, Congressman Jonathan Bingham held hearings with former intelligence and public information officers regarding the distortion of news and information during the war. Senators George McGovern and Philip Hart held hearings on U.S. Vietnam War atrocities. The veterans broke camp. David Thorne and George Butler (1971, 31) summarized the situation: “A tree, donated by the veterans is planted as a symbolic plea for the preservation of all life and the environment. The quadrangle on the Mall is vacant. Not one act of violence has been committed. They came in peace. The war in Indochina continues.”

Only CBS had an evening newscast Saturday, April 24th. The reporter packages from Bruce Morton and Bob Schieffer totaled five minutes and forty seconds and dealt with the transition from the vets to a larger, general antiwar protest in D.C. John Kerry was shown calling on the crowd to demonstrate until the war’s end and to make politicians end the war or vote them out of office. Anchor Roger Mudd then introduced a report from Richard Threlkeld on an antiwar protest in San Francisco where vets led college students, trade union workers, and others. Crowd estimates ranged as high as 250,000. CBS closed the newscast with Nelson Benton’s report on a National Cathedral service for GIs killed in Vietnam. Three hundred

GIs in uniform attended. The Reverend Channing Phillips explained the church's "exchange of peace" ritual. The overflow crowd heard the service close with taps. The event had been sponsored by the Concerned Officers Movement, and included not only VVAW but also Gold Star mothers (Halstead 1978, 607).

President Nixon stayed at Camp David and communicated with H. R. Haldeman in Washington to keep track on the protests. During one phone call, Nixon told Haldeman of the need to counteract the effect of the veterans and talked about how the media had "super-covered" them (Haldeman 1994, 279). During the following week's May Day demonstrations, Nixon's paranoia about the war protest ran so deep that he was demanding updates every half hour from White House counsel John Dean (Dean 1976, 42).

VVAW Media Sophistication and Dewey Canyon III

Throughout Dewey Canyon III, many VVAW members were almost giddy not only at how media events had changed in their favor but also at how well they were outmaneuvering an increasingly angry and desperate Nixon Administration. Bill Branson recalled, "A bunch of guys from California went down to the Pentagon and tried to turn in a bunch of guys as war criminals. We took over everything—the Lincoln Memorial, the Rotunda—we walked in the streets. Nobody stopped us." Terry DuBose confirmed that Michigan Senator Philip Hart helped by providing a room that served as a place to congregate and a great spot for making media contacts.

Jan Barry said, "When Nixon was quoted as saying he didn't think these were real Vietnam veterans, one group decided they were going to parade at night around the White House with the flag upside down. It was tremendously dramatic." Sheldon Ramsdell added that "Ron Ziegler [press secretary] had said, from Nixon, that this was just a bunch of hippies. A woman came down to the Mall from the

AP or UPI, [and] collected nearly 1,000 combat cards—you know, military service cards (DD-214s). She put that in the paper the next day. Nixon was totally discredited” (Romo et al. 1997, 246). White House aide Dick Howard tried to discredit the VVAW as a “group that are apparently not veterans, who are apparently trying to compensate for some guilty feelings” (Brinkley 2004, 364).

Barry Romo recalled the larger media strategy. Americans “saw the war on TV. They had to see us on TV. People’s experience was not being in a rice paddy, but watching someone in a rice paddy. We had to interrupt their seeing the war on TV with their seeing veterans demonstrating against the war on TV. . . . We know, and they don’t. We’re telling you that what you see on TV is not it. It’s part of it, but it’s not it, and it’s wrong and you’ve got to bring people home” (Romo et al. 1997, 247).

In the same interview, Jan Barry cited a *Time* magazine retrospective that declared Dewey Canyon III probably the most memorable demonstration of the peace movement. Barry also recalled, with glee, getting an advance copy of what Walter Cronkite would say that night. “It was very positive and made this a major nationwide and international news story, because the Cronk was it. Cronk says, Take notice of this, America. This was the guy who had written what the Cronk was to read, and he rushed over there to hand it to us. At that point, I knew that the White House had lost the public on this issue” (Romo et al. 1997, 250).

Bill Davis (1996) was ecstatic that “the VVAW emblem became a mighty fixture on national network news.” The CBS truck on the scene and the VVAW logo as an over-the-shoulder graphic for Cronkite were very important to Sheldon Ramsdale. “It all changed, just like that,” he said. “Look how far we had to go to get any kind of credibility at all. A reporter from a news service collected our cards, and suddenly we’re real. What the hell’s been going on all this time? Nobody’s been wanting to believe it!” (Romo et al. 1997, 251).



VVAW member Mark Hartford in San Bernardino, California, organizing for Dewey Canyon III. Photo courtesy of VVAW.

Scott Camil (2009) joined VVAW during Winter Soldier, was involved in the planning for Dewey Canyon III, and later became a defendant in the Gainesville Eight trial. He notes that Dewey Canyon planning revolved around the missions of raising public awareness of the truth about Vietnam and influencing elected representatives to stop the war. The media were to be used as much as possible to achieve these goals. He also recalls that the vets understood the following about media:

- We needed the media to get our message out to the country.
- The media needed us to provide them with news.

- The more graphic our demonstrations were the better chance that the media would cover them.
- They used us to get good stories, and we used them to get our message out.
- Most important is that without our credibility we have nothing! Never lie to the public or the press.

Camil also observed that when the government said something, it was depicted as true, but when VVAW said something, it was “alleged.” He said, “As time went on we cultivated friendly relationships with reporters and our credibility grew. We also learned which press and which reporters were sympathetic and which ones would distort what we would say. We learned that the more we said the more they could chop it up and distort it so we learned to say what we wanted them to print and hold the rhetoric down.”

Camil cultivated a good relationship with reporters. He tipped them about upcoming events and took them along as he dealt with the FBI. They helped him get in to see reluctant congressmen. He observed, “We were the ones who had the most direct knowledge of the war. It was hard for the government to blow us off with the usual spin they laid on the rest of the antiwar movement: unpatriotic, unwilling to serve our country, not knowing what they are talking about, communist sympathizers.”

The protest on the Capitol Mall clearly broke through most past coverage obstacles. The vets had come to Washington with greater media savvy after Winter Soldier. They had made media coverage more likely by making it easier, visual, and dramatic. The high-water mark came the day they took to the Capitol steps, standing in front of a ramshackle wire fence that kept them from going no farther. The medals and ribbons that some five hundred vets threw over that fence (Longley 2008) plunked down at the feet of a statue of John

Marshall, the first Chief Justice of the United States. Veterans from all branches of the service would offer “their names, units, and citations, and then rid themselves of their mementos in disgust” (Brinkley 2004, 374).

Neil Olsen, a vet one observer described as having a small-town, gentle face, lifted his trumpet to blow taps, holding the last note as long as he could for the newspaper and television cameramen jockeying for position. One by one, vets came forward to the standing microphones. “I hope someday I can return to Vietnam and help rebuild the country we tore apart,” said one vet as he threw his medals over the fence. Another hurled his Bronze Star at the symbol of power and said, “I wish I could make them eat it!” One man threw away his cane. Another said, “Here’s my merit badges for murder.” One vet said softly, “I just want to ask for the war to end, please.” An ex-sergeant from New York threw away his medals but held aloft two Purple Hearts, saying, “I’m keeping these in memory of my friends” (Bryan 1976).

Paul F. Winter prayed for forgiveness as he hurled a Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Distinguished Service Cross over the fence, and limped away. Another vet calmly stated, “Robert, New York, I symbolically return all Vietnam medals and other service medals given me by the power structure that has genocidal policies.” One soldier shouted, “Here’s a bunch of bullshit,” as he slung away a handful of medals (Brinkley 2004, 375).

Former helicopter pilot Rusty Sachs tossed his Bronze Star over the fence but noticed one newsman and then another picking up the medals. He started yelling some loud objections, only to be held back and calmed by another vet, Ron Ferrizzi. Then Ferrizzi explained that his disapproving wife would divorce him and his parents would disown him if he turned in his medals. He looked down at those medals, and said, “I’m not proud of these medals . . . of what I did

to receive them.” He spoke of dead colleagues as Rusty Sachs started to cry. Ferizzi stepped back and flung his medals as far as he could. Sachs and Ferrizzi wept and clung to each other as news photographers shouted to the other vets to move because they were blocking the shot. Just days earlier, the Nixon Administration anonymously suggested that fewer than 30 percent of the vets had ever seen service in Vietnam. That wholly false concoction fell apart at that moment (Bryan 1976).

For three hours, the vets paraded by the fence, tossing decorations earned with bravery and blood back at the federal government that had sent them to Vietnam. Some were silent. Others spoke into the microphone. “My name is Peter Branagan,” one said. “I got a Purple Heart, and I hope to get another one fighting these motherfuckers.” An African American veteran said, “I pray that time will forgive me and my brothers for what we did.” Another young man spat out the names of friends who had died and the medals they had earned. He concluded, “I got a Silver Star, a Purple Heart, an Army Commendation Medal, eight Air Medals, National Defense, and the rest of this garbage. It doesn’t mean a thing.” He plunked a heavy handful of medals over the fence, walking away in tears. The pile grew bigger; no official spoke to the vets (Ostertag 2006, 117-118).

The vets, engaged in a cat-and-mouse game with the Nixon Administration, clearly got the better of the exchange. Nixon’s Justice Department had forced the issue of camping on the Washington Mall by taking it to the Supreme Court. Thus, the administration brought into the coverage each network’s Supreme Court reporter and provided a fresh angle to the story. Nixon, however, was unwilling to evict the vets by force. Before the Supreme Court ruling, he made it “perfectly clear” to presidential aide John Dean that, regardless of the court case outcome, nothing was to be done to the vets. “Get a hold of the District Police,” he ordered Dean. “They’re not to

touch them. They're to do nothing. Just let them raise hell" (Nixon 1971).

Certainly, some troops or police could have been found to enforce the eviction, but many people clearly were grateful that the order never came. When Fred Halstead (1978, 606) walked through the VVAW camp that night, he found visitors from all around the area, including many active-duty GIs. One young man with close-cropped hair introduced himself and some others nearby as part of the honor guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He spoke of solidarity with the vets. "If they try to call the troops out against you, there'll be hell to pay," he predicted. Douglas Brinkley (2004, 367-368) concluded that D.C. Police sympathies rested largely with the vets, thanks to the courtesy of the vets as well as to a friendly letter to "our brothers in blue" written by VVAW member Mike Oliver and posted widely in D.C. police stations.

In his biography of John Kerry, Brinkley (2004, 364) described the scene on the Mall as beginning to resemble a mini-Woodstock. Eight-track players inside custom vans blared Phil Ochs's "Draft Dodger Rag" and the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's "Ohio" protest song about the shootings at Kent State almost a year earlier. Vets and supporters played with plastic machine guns in some impromptu guerilla theatre. Disabled vets joined in, pointing their crutches at pedestrians. Banners declared "End the War." Neil Olsen of Russell, Pennsylvania, played "Taps" all day long to mourn his son's death in Vietnam. A member of the Daughters of the American Revolution confronted a Vietnam vet: "Son, I don't think what you're doing is good for the troops." He replied, "Lady, we *are* the troops."

Veteran Jack Smith contends that the Nixon Administration was feeling incredible pressure from the presence of the VVAW and thus the administration was capable of irrational behavior and violent outbursts. Smith states the VVAW leaders at the time were thinking

a lot about the Bonus March of 1932. That year, World War I veterans were camped in D.C. to demand promised service bonuses. President Hoover sent General Douglas MacArthur, whose troops used tear gas, bullets, bayonets, and torches to destroy the veterans' camp and drive them away. Smith believed that Middle America likely sided with the police against hippies on the streets of Chicago in 1968, "but the veterans, longhaired and shabby as many of them were, touched the heartstrings of America in a way the hippies never had. That these men had the guts to speak out about what they had seen earned them even more approval from the general public" (Nicosia 2001, 116-117).

Smith relished the fact that Nixon had focused attention on the campsite itself and on what that said to the general public:

A nation that for almost a decade had felt beleaguered by a war it could not win, and ostracized by much of the world community for its actions in South Vietnam, now found itself identifying with those weary-looking veterans, who apparently had no home except that pitiful cluster of pup tents, bedrolls, and lean-tos outside the Capitol, and whose own government had now raised its hand against them. (Nicosia 2001, 125)

Nixon soft-pedaled the whole question when asked about it at a press conference. He contended that the lawsuit was only to establish the principle against camping on the Mall. "Having established that principle, there was only 36 hours left in which to remove them, and thereby, of course, to engage in a confrontation which could have been, we thought, rather nasty," he said. "I saw no reason to go in and to arrest the veterans and to put them into jail at that time"

("Transcript" 1971). Nixon had decided not to speak directly to protester claims, but to use Vice President Spiro Agnew and administration speechwriters to attack both news media and protesters. The themes were simple: support for the president was patriotic; opposition to his policies was not (Halberstam 1972). Agnew's 1969 attacks on the networks yielded an unprecedented one hundred thousand contacts to the networks from viewers agreeing with Agnew. The reaction was fleeting; a poll taken a month after Agnew's first speech found 52 percent agreeing with him, but six in ten people saying that the networks overall had been fair to the White House (Gans 1979, 263).

After fumbling the campsite issue, all the Nixon Administration could do was to have pro-war Veterans of Foreign Wars spokespeople ask for "equal time" from the television networks, be turned down, and then use that rejection as a talking point against both the press and the antiwar movement (Kimball 1998, 251-252; Haldeman 1994, 278).

Dewey Canyon III even inspired coverage on public television. David Susskind, interviewer for noncommercial television, went to veterans' hospitals and elsewhere to find six veterans willing to go on television for a freewheeling two-hour conversation airing on WNEW-TV, New York (Robinson 1971). "They all agreed the South Vietnamese Army could not hack it and that the North Vietnamese were filled with an almost evangelical fervor," he said. "In 13 years in this business, I can't ever remember a show that racked me up so."

The VVAW also responded quickly to a problem that could have undercut credibility. Both John Kerry and Al Hubbard appeared on *Meet The Press*, the Sunday morning television interview program. The interview was repeated later in the day on NBC-affiliated radio stations ("Radio" *New York Times*, April 18, 1971). Hubbard, however, claimed to be an Air Force pilot and captain. He was a sergeant,

and his claimed time in Vietnam could not be documented. Host Lawrence Spivak complained to Kerry about the deceit. Kerry attacked Hubbard mercilessly in front of the other leaders of the group, but at the same time, argued against drumming him out. Hubbard later appeared on the *Today Show*, where he admitted to lying about his rank but insisted he had been in Vietnam as a flight engineer. Fellow VVAW reacted nonchalantly to the news, but some members worried privately about backlash. They decided the on-air humiliation was enough and that no further reprimand was needed. Hubbard would become a less visible spokesman as VVAW went forward (United Press International 1971; Hunt 1999, 111-112; Nicosia 2001, 128-129).

In one of the more surreal moments of Dewey Canyon III, several VVAW members attended a fundraiser for them, a Georgetown cocktail party courtesy of Senator Phil Hart. Brinkley noted, "It was an odd event. Blue-collar veterans with mud on their boots—men who were sleeping on the Mall—walked around on plush oriental rugs, with old Harper's Weekly covers framed hanging on the wall. They were mixing with lobbyists and politicians in Brooks Brothers suits" (2004, 366-367). Scott Camil pressed antiwar Senator J. William Fulbright about his vote for the Gulf of Tonkin resolution authorizing the war. Yet, even that tense moment rebounded in the VVAW's favor. Fulbright was impressed by the calmer approach taken by Kerry, and that likely played a role in an invitation for Kerry to give his powerful statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Overall, Dewey Canyon III was a success for the VVAW message. The vets clearly had a sharper notion than the Nixon Administration as to what makes good television. Barry Romo (2000) credits the protests with a quick turn in public opinion against the massive bombing of North Vietnam. "The reality of our experience overwhelmed

the force of his [Nixon's] office," he said. Yet, after Dewey Canyon III, the press attitude became one of "we covered you, so why do we have to cover you again?" As Romo expressed it, "If you don't do something spectacular the media don't want to cover you . . . and you can't throw your medals away every week."



Dewey Canyon III, aftermath of the medals toss.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

Dwindling TV Reports of VVAW

Seven of the eighteen network TV newscast stories outside the realm of Dewey Canyon III were about the Gainesville Eight trial. ABC and CBS did packages about the veterans' trek after the 1972 Republican National Convention to protest at the arraignment. ABC did an anchor reader story about the opening of the trial and a package about the shaky testimony of an informant named William Lemmer. All three networks ran packages on the not-guilty verdicts, using much of the same post-trial statements on the courthouse steps—and also mentioning frequent government losses in protest-related prosecutions.

On August 24, 1972, ABC and CBS each ran field reports on the trial, from David Snell and Bruce Hall respectively. Both relayed the same statement from defendant Scott Camil that they were only trying to tell the truth to the American people and that the government's "only way to try to discredit us is by building up these phony charges." On August 31st, ABC also carried a Bill Wordham trial report. The report included several courtroom drawings and the statement from Camil to the jury: "They came for us in the summer of 1972. When will they come for you?"

The varied protests of December 28 to 29, 1971, got some attention. NBC and CBS ran voice-over stories of the Statue of Liberty and Lincoln Memorial arrests. The CBS report, read by anchor Charles Collingwood, curiously had no natural sound of the Lincoln Memorial protest. The same type of story ran on NBC, but with the sound of the protest audible. Anchor John Chancellor noted that the vets surrendered with their hands on their heads in imitation of prisoners of war. ABC presented a Stephen Geer package using the two sets of arrests and incorporating the camp out at Valley Forge. In what had to be a setback following Dewey Canyon III, Geer referred to a "group calling itself the Vietnam Veterans Against the War"

and opined, “These veterans trying to revive the antiwar movement apparently have chosen new tactics.” The following day, ABC ran a package from affiliate KGO and reporter Van Amburg on the brief VVAW takeover of the South Vietnam consulate in San Francisco. All these reports mentioned the peaceful and orderly arrests.

Five news items involving the VVAW can be considered miscellaneous in nature. CBS’s Nelson Benton ran a long and thorough piece in 1969 on the G. I. Underground Press, a surprisingly early recognition of antiwar veterans from a press corps otherwise oblivious to the phenomenon. CBS also did a June 1971 David Culhane package on the VVAW giving the antiwar movement a new look. Critics are mentioned in passing in the filmed report, but the anchor “tag” quotes the Vets for Just Peace. An ABC profile piece in 1972 covered John Kerry’s bid for Congress. While the piece mentioned VVAW, it concentrated on the district, its politics, and the opponent.

On June 1, 1971, NBC, the network with the least Dewey Canyon III coverage, felt compelled to carry a rambling 110-second sound bite from John O’Neill. CBS also carried O’Neill’s statement. His exaggerated claims for his newly created pro-war Vietnam veterans’ organization went unchallenged. O’Neill also was one of four pro-Nixon sources in a curious July 28, 1972, ABC piece on the presidential election. The piece briefly mentioned that many VVAW members supported Democratic nominee George McGovern only as introduction to the rebuttal group. O’Neill’s group was created by the Nixon Administration during Dewey Canyon III. At the time, Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace consisted of just a desk in the White House and one pro-war veteran (Hunt 1999, 90). It was still a very small group when the *Christian Science Monitor* presented it in July 1971 as a counterpoint to VVAW (Rubin 1971). White House aide Charles Colson was busy trying to get newspapers interested in an anti-Kerry article and creating pro-war front groups. The latter effort

still hadn't yielded much by the time of the Republican Convention. A Concerned Veterans for Nixon breakfast in July 1972 mustered only fifty guests (Hunt 1999, 90, 199).

Network television news stories of the Silent March to the 1972 Republican Convention and a month-long series of related protests, collectively known as the Last Patrol, were scant and uneven. NBC carried no story. ABC devoted four minutes and ten seconds to convention coverage the day of the Silent March, but only a few seconds to the vets. A package by Gregory Jackson mentions the earlier clash at Miami Beach High School with guardsmen, noting that the vets call the guardsmen "brothers," but the police "pigs." Viewers briefly see two vets in wheelchairs. Jackson relays that six vets who scaled the walls were arrested. Coverage then goes directly to Lem Tucker's field report that lumps all protesters together as non-delegates. His theme was whether the mass arrests would lessen the tension. No veterans are seen or heard. The ABC reports had an anchor tag about Students for a Democratic Society protesters outside an event hosted by First Lady Pat Nixon and about the two people who crashed the event.

CBS had a two-minute Robert Schackne package. Like Tucker, Schackne showed and referenced burning parade bunting, presumably lit by protesters. Unlike Tucker, he referenced a burning flag, but that is not shown on camera. He also referenced the mass arrests, praising them as a textbook case in how it should be done. The vets are mentioned in passing as participating in an earlier march and are seen only in one overhead extreme long shot.

Considering the significance of the Last Patrol, lack of coverage can be viewed as signifying a lost opportunity on the part of the networks and other news organizations. To reinforce this point, a more detailed description of the event is in order in the next chapter. One also should note that the *New York Times* followed a pattern similar

to the network newscasts in their VVAW coverage. Dewey Canyon III earned 209 paragraphs of coverage: 78 on the campsite controversy, 38 on the medals tossing, 41 on other activities, 21 on vets at various hearings about the war, 21 in a profile of Kerry, and 7 in a guest column by Jan Barry, accompanied by an editorial cartoon. In addition, the paper carried six photos of VVAW events. Only the three paragraphs on Al Hubbard's admission of lying about his rank could be considered negative press. Last Patrol coverage was dramatically diminished, just forty-two paragraphs in the *New York Times*.

Incidentally, one prominent news organization after Dewey Canyon III still clung to dismissive attitudes about antiwar veterans. *Newsweek's* general protest articles and its sidebar article on VVAW are particularly instructive on press difficulties with disgruntled veterans. *Newsweek* insisted that VVAW was "peaceable and not very political" and that the group "carried a moral and symbol freight in the demonstrations far beyond its claimed total of 11,000 members" ("Demonstrations" *Newsweek*, April 26, 1971).

Newsweek further argued that the demonstrations were predictable, benign, and overshadowed by the actions of Congress:

In any earlier year, the presence of these antiwar Viet vets might have given great extra impetus to Congressional doves. But in the spring of 1971, the Congress had acquired its own momentum. Washington greeted the cadre of fired up, outspoken veterans—a number of them wearers of the Purple Heart, a few of them amputees—with comparative nonchalance. Indeed, about the only controversy the vets could generate centered around the question of where they would be allowed to bivouac while in the Capital ("Once More" *Newsweek*, May 3, 1971).

While *Newsweek* congratulated VVAW as poignant and “a provocative new voice against the war,” the reporter could not conceive that VVAW represented a constituency beyond those present. “Given the fact that 3 million GI’s have served in Vietnam since 1964,” the magazine reported, “the numbers are trifling” (“Once More” *Newsweek*, May 3, 1971). The press and television finally had discovered the VVAW, but it’s clear that a few laggard news organizations still didn’t know what to make of them.

The documentary *Vietnam: A Television History*, a companion piece to Stanley Karnow’s book, has a good four-minute segment on Dewey Canyon III at the close of its sixth volume, *Homefront USA*. The documentary shows one unidentified VVAW member explaining to onlookers that he went to Vietnam because his government asked him to do so, that his politics changed because of what he saw, but that he remains non-violent, believes in the system, and is visiting his U.S. Senator. Incredulously, he relays that the House Un-American Activities Committee ranks VVAW as the third greatest threat to internal security, behind the Weathermen and the Black Panthers (Deane 1983).

John Kerry’s eight-millimeter films of his experience in the Mekong Delta appear in the documentary, as does an audio excerpt of his testimony. Kerry also explains Dewey Canyon III in clear terms: “People did not listen to the veterans of the war. The press itself had difficulty in perceiving of a group of Vietnam veterans being opposed to the war. And it was a story of profound importance—why the war itself was wrong, and why we were not going to be successful, and why we have to recognize that. We just felt that story had to be told, and the only way to tell it was to take it to Washington in that form” (Deane 1983).

Highlights

The leadership of VVAW clearly learned from the relatively light coverage of Winter Soldier in Detroit. The next big demonstration, Dewey Canyon III, was visually striking, easy to cover, and filled with dramatic images.

The Supreme Court unwittingly aided the VVAW cause by drawing attention to the campsite. The confrontation over this question only added to news coverage. This act was at odds with the Nixon Administration policy of publicly ignoring the vets while privately keeping close track of them.

The connection to another breaking story, the Calley conviction for the My Lai atrocities, also added to the news appeal of Dewey Canyon III.

John Kerry's gripping congressional testimony and the event where vets tossed away their medals clearly were the high water marks of VVAW activities and are the historical fragments most likely to be remembered.

Network news attention slumped after Dewey Canyon III, paralleling decreased *New York Times* coverage. Some gripping protest events, notably the Last Patrol's Silent March at the 1972 Republican Convention, occurred. But these events went nearly uncovered because they conflicted with the news theme that the war was "winding down."

Reconstructing the Last Patrol

On August 22, 1972, a group of twelve thousand Vietnam Veterans Against the War lined up for a Silent March in Miami Beach, Florida. They formed platoon-like neat rows of four, with three disabled vets in wheelchairs taking the lead. Some of the veterans had come three thousand miles in long convoys for this moment in the Miami sun, a chance to tell their commander-in-chief that his Vietnam War policy was wrong (Truscott 1972a).



The Silent March.
Photo Courtesy of VVAW.

They left the VVAW campground in Flamingo Park and marched the four miles up Collins Avenue, a six-lane boulevard through the heart of the hotel district and a Jewish retirement community. Their

goal was the Hotel Fontainebleau, Republican convention headquarters (Truscott 1972a; Thompson 1973, 387-88). The vets wore battle fatigues, helmets, and combat boots. Some were on crutches and a few carried full-size plastic M-16s (Thompson 1973, 387; Vonnegut 1972). By all accounts of both observers and participants, the march had an eerie silence to it, punctuated only by the thump of leather on asphalt and the rattling of an open canteen top. All the “stop, start,” “fast, slow,” and “right, left” commands were given as hand signals of platoon leaders walking to the side of the main column (Thompson 1973, 387).

Miami Beach’s senior citizens watched tight-lipped as the marchers passed before their hotel porches (Thompson 1973, 387). A few onlookers cheered, and one or two saluted (Truscott 1972b). The Republican delegates, five hundred heavily-armed police, and the shipboard partiers on the *Wild Rose of Houston* at a nearby marina, all accustomed to noisy encounters with other protesters, stood silent as the vets approached (Thompson 1973, 388; Camp, 1972; Markowitz and Camp 1972). The platoon leaders directed the marchers into a tight semicircle, blocking all three northbound lanes of Collins Avenue. For five tension-filled minutes, the two groups stared at each other, the police clearly off balance. One of the VVAW platoon leaders then spoke through a bullhorn, “We want to come inside” (Thompson 1973, 388).

Conflict was avoided when Rep. Pete McCloskey, a Republican from California, shoved his way through the police line. McCloskey arranged a meeting between a few VVAW leaders and the Republican liaison with hotel management, the only Republican leader the vets would get to see. The vets assured McCloskey that they didn’t want to charge the hotel; they only wanted to be turned away in front of the nation’s press and TV cameras (Thompson 1973, 390; Valentine and Taylor 1972; Associated Press 1972b).

McCloskey and a few VVAW leaders addressed the crowd, which became increasingly difficult because two Army helicopters now hovered overhead. The only one who could be heard above the din was an ex-Marine sergeant from San Diego, Ron Kovic, one of the wheelchair-bound vets (Thompson 1973, 392). He spoke in a hoarse holler, frequently interrupted by cheers:

And we're smelly, and we're a little dirty now, but it's for a reason: because for the last week and a half we have traveled from across the United States of America, because we feel it is our obligation to tell the American people that these people are liars. . . . You have lied to us too long, Mr. President. Too many babies have been burned. Too many lives have been lost. You might have taken our bodies, but you have not taken our minds. (Truscott 1972a)

This account of the Silent March was pieced together through the reports of observers and a handful of nontraditional journalists working for alternative publications. As mentioned earlier, network TV news coverage of the Last Patrol was minimal. Only CBS and ABC covered the event, and they spent most of their time on the Yippies, Zippies, and other protesters and only a few seconds on the antiwar veterans.

Novelist Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., covering the convention for *Harper's*, correctly anticipated the dearth of news coverage:

If the police don't act immediately, and if the humanitarians behave in a manner that is dignified or beautiful or heart-breaking, there is still something nice people can do.

They can ignore the humanitarians.

This is what the nice people did when one of the most honorable military reviews in American history took place on the afternoon of August 22, 1972, in front of the Hotel Fontainebleau. This date will not go down in history, because nice people do not want it there. (Vonnegut 1972)

The Silent March was the climax of the Last Patrol, but certainly not the only newsworthy portion. However, other Last Patrol events captured relatively little news attention, press or broadcast, relative to what had happened barely more than a year earlier during Dewey Canyon III.

Most Last Patrol events did not require much digging by the press. The Last Patrol's plans included a number of press opportunities as well as visually striking and tense confrontations that should have brought news attention. The eastern branch of the Last Patrol passed through Boston and New York and camped one night on the suburban outskirts of Washington, D.C. (Huth 1972; "Large Auto Convoy" *New York Times*, July 30, 1972).

Later, the patrol leafleted Fort Bragg, North Carolina, revealing their peaceful intentions to the two thousand riot-trained soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division, who would later confront them in Miami Beach (Nordheimer 1972a).

The eastern branch met the midwestern branch in Fort Pierce, Florida. Concerned about snakes in the swampy terrain, some of the vets slept on the hoods of their cars (Zastrow 1984).

About thirty vets at Fort Pierce set out on a March Against Murder, walking seventeen or eighteen miles a day to Miami Beach. More vets and other supporters joined them along the way. When the group reached Miami Beach, 137 miles later, they numbered 65 walkers and 285 in trailing vehicles (United Press International 1972c).

The western branches started from Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The Portland and San Francisco groups met in Salt Lake City. The Los Angeles group passed through Houston, camped in Louisiana, and met the other western branches in Georgia (Kovic 1976, 158, 161; “Large Auto Convoy” *New York Times* July 30, 1972).

The first wave of the patrol, a caravan of 130 cars, buses, trucks, and jeeps, many sporting flowers and peace signs, rolled over the bridge leading into Miami Beach with horns blowing, headlights burning, and flags waving. The caravan stretched for a mile and a quarter. The vets drove through every red light and stop sign on the way, shouting to the well-wishers who greeted them. Yippies and Zippies hugged them and dumped handfuls of joints into their cars (Kovic 1976, 160-161; Lindquist 1984; Davis 1984; Zastrow 1984). Another forty-five vehicles, part of the western branch held up by a series of uneventful weapons checks, rolled into town a few hours later to a similar reception, with the March Against Murder arriving moments after that (Lindquist 1984).



The Last Patrol's arrival in Miami.

Photo courtesy of VVAW.

The vets in the first part of the convoy looked at the main Flamingo Park campsite, a walled-in stretch of grass already occupied by other demonstrators, and instantly moved to maintain VVAW identity. They established their camp a quarter-mile south in a corner of the park secluded by tall hedges. One vet said their deployment was “just like a perimeter back in Nam” (Truscott 1972a).

The Last Patrol’s first hours in Flamingo Park were marred by violence. A group of twenty-two American Nazis had forced Carol Kitchens of the Miami Women’s Coalition from a low truckbed that served as a speaker’s platform. They tore the microphone from her and shoved her to the edge of the stage. A few minutes later, fights erupted between the Nazis and forty VVAW members in a human corridor who were trying to keep other members of the crowd from mobbing the Nazis. The two-minute fist fight injured seven Nazis, four vets, and two CBS cameramen before the VVAW established order in the area (Winfrey 1972; Associated Press Wirephoto 1972a; Baxter 1972; Baxter and Camp 1972; Zastrow 1984; Lindquist 1984).

Later, some elderly Jewish residents of the community came to Flamingo Park to say thanks to the veterans. After the fight, the vets realized the need to maintain security from counter-demonstrators and FBI infiltrators. The VVAW earned praise from the police for forming “human walls” to separate the angry groups. Using elaborate walkie-talkie communication, VVAW patrols also provided escorts for female demonstrators and turned in dope dealers and the holder of a private cache of arms (Zastrow 1984; Cunningham 1972; Wheat 1972; Bellows 1972).

The VVAW planned one protest activity per day. On Monday, August 21, while the delegates took care of convention business, the VVAW marched on Miami Beach High School where a thousand National Guardsmen were headquartered (Associated Press 1972h). The vets chanted to the beat of a drum, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Tricky Dick has got to go,” and “One, two, three, four; we don’t want your racist

war.” In the 85-degree heat, several barefoot vets walked gingerly on the asphalt (Dillin 1972a; Associated Press 1972j; Kifner 1972a).

National Guard officers ordered the shades and curtains drawn inside the high school, so few guardsmen saw all of the “guerilla theatre” depicting a guardsman defecting to the VVAW. A few guardsmen sneaked a peek, grinned, and flashed a peace sign or obscure gesture. Some vets tried to climb to the flat roof of the two-story building, but after a brief scuffle, retreated from the helmeted, flak-jacketed guardsmen. Seven of the vets tried to climb up again and were arrested (Baxter 1972; Associated Press 1972k; Zastrow 1984).

On Tuesday, the Silent March occurred, followed by a democratic and seemingly interminable VVAW meeting, chaired by Peter Zastrow, about what to do Wednesday, the evening Richard Nixon would accept his party’s nomination. Some VVAW members joined the protest outside Convention Hall; others went to Gainesville and Tallahassee to protest (B. Davis 1984; Zastrow 1984; Elder 1972a).

Ron Kovic, however, had gotten into Convention Hall on the press pass of a TV producer from California. Kovic worked his way to the front of the hall only to scuffle with convention security workers. The scuffle drew the attention of CBS’s Roger Mudd, who interviewed Kovic live for about two minutes—enraging White House Press Secretary Ron Ziegler (Kovic 1976, 164-166; Barrett 1973).

Kovic then found fellow wheelchair-bound vets Bobby Wheeler and Bill Wieman, who had obtained passes from Congressman McCloskey. They locked their wheelchairs and waited for the right moment (Kovic 1976, 166). Nixon was five minutes into his acceptance speech when the three vets began shouting, “Stop the bombing! Stop the war!” (Quinn 1972). Angry delegates screamed and spat on them. Security guards wheeled them to a side door, locking the veterans outside and the reporters inside the hall. The vets hugged each other and cried (Kovic 1976, 168; “Antiwar Veterans” *Miami Herald*, August 24, 1972).

Highlights

The story of one of the most dramatic VVAW events, the Last Patrol's Silent March to the 1972 Republican National Convention site, had to be reconstructed not from major media coverage, but from the accounts of participants and a handful of observers from alternate media outlets.

News media seemed to revert to VVAW coverage patterns more reminiscent of events before Dewey Canyon III. Most events received little attention outside of the local newspaper. VVAW stayed non-violent and kept its own identity, but journalists took the course of least resistance by lumping them together with Yippies and Zippies in "last gasp of war protest" stories.

A Summer of (Largely Ignored) Discontent

If paragraph count can be used as a rough guide, the *New York Times* gave Dewey Canyon III five times the attention it gave the Last Patrol. To be certain the *Times*' comparatively skimpy coverage of the Last Patrol was not an aberration, the author decided to examine further its coverage and that of eight other newspapers: the *Washington Post*, like the *Times* an elite paper-of-record, widely circulated, and frequently a leader for other news organizations; the *Los Angeles Times*, an elite west coast newspaper covering a city from which a branch of the Last Patrol departed; the *Miami Herald*, located at the site of the 1972 Republican Convention, the Silent March, and other Last Patrol protests; the *Tallahassee Democrat*, home newspaper to the site of the trial of six members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War on charges of planning violent disruptions of the Republican National Convention; the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Christian Science Monitor*, national newspapers with reputations for news analysis; the *Chicago Tribune*, a large-circulation Midwestern newspaper and hometown newspaper to several VVAW leaders; and the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, a Gannett newspaper serving a city where several Last Patrol leaders resided and through which a branch of the patrol passed.

For the purposes of this analysis, the Last Patrol is defined as beginning with the announcement of the event on July 29, 1972, and ending with the last day of the Republican National Convention on

August 23, 1972. In addition to analyzing newspaper coverage of the Last Patrol, the author also surveyed magazine coverage of events within that period.

The *New York Times* was the only surveyed newspaper to report on the announcement of the Last Patrol (“Large Auto Convoy,” July 30, 1972). The *Times* also carried a sixteen-paragraph advancer story filed from Fayetteville, North Carolina, near Fort Bragg. It told the tale of one of the convoys moving toward Miami, a story that included some local arrests. It closed with one arrested vet asking the MP to turn on the blue dome light to add authenticity to the arrest, making the effort seem sad, nostalgic, and outdated (Nordheimer 1972a). The only convention “solo” story about antiwar vets was a five-paragraph wire service account of the four vets, three in wheelchairs, who got into the convention hall and shouted at Nixon during his acceptance speech (United Press International 1972b).

The VVAW got two paragraphs deep into a story about the bizarre carnival of Jesus Freaks, Yippies, Zippies, and assorted causes that made up the Miami Beach Tent City (Semple 1972). Curiously, the same story appeared with only minor changes in the next day’s edition but without byline or headline; that version had one more brief mention of the vets. The VVAW standoff with National Guardsmen at Miami Beach High School got three paragraphs, two in the lead plus a photo, in a broad convention wrap story. In reporting that story, John Kifner (1972a) apparently lost all institutional memory about the group, referencing “a contingent of about 800 that calls itself Vietnam Veterans Against the War.” VVAW also was mentioned in four paragraphs in a mass-arrests story (Kifner 1972b), two paragraphs in a soldiers-arriving-for-security story (Kifner 1972c), a one-paragraph story about a VVAW member and a radio reporter initiating a lawsuit after being stripped of convention press credentials (Associated Press 1972a), and a mention in the news summary

index. The *New York Times* did a long story on post-traumatic shock and Vietnam Veterans (Nordheimer 1972b) but missed entirely the drama of the VVAW's Silent March in Miami.

Other newspapers had similarly spotty coverage. The *Washington Post* carried five paragraphs, a wire service story, and otherwise ignored the Tallahassee Six (Associated Press 1972d). The eastern branch of the Last Patrol was covered by a *Post* staff writer when the group camped in the Maryland suburbs of Washington (Huth 1972). With that exception, the *Washington Post* treated the VVAW as just another remnant of a dwindling protest era, carrying a column by Joseph Kraft proclaiming the death of the war protest era (Kraft 1972). The face-off between Guardsmen and VVAW at Miami Beach High School was not covered by the *Washington Post*. The Silent March was limited to five paragraphs beginning with the twenty-fourth paragraph of a general protest article under the headline "Police Hold 200 Protesters in Mass Arrests." No veteran was quoted, and not a single veteran grievance was mentioned (Valentine and Taylor 1972). The *Washington Post* also carried a staff report on the ejection of the three veterans heckling Nixon (Quinn 1972) and a note about the low-turnout Veterans for Nixon event ("50 Vietnam Vets," August 24, 1972).

The *Los Angeles Times* ran an extensive article by Jack Nelson on William Lemmer and the Tallahassee Six (Nelson 1972a). The paper also carried a long feature profiling the lives and treatment of wounded Vietnam veterans, including Ron Kovic (Langguth 1972). It ran two wire service reports on the trial in Gainesville (Associated Press, 1972e; Associated Press, 1972f). *Los Angeles Times* coverage of events in Miami was uneven. The paper carried a brief wire report on the arrival of the vets, with emphasis on the vets in what the reporter dubbed "the so-called 'March Against Murder'" (United Press International 1972c). The heckling of Nixon was covered by an unnamed

staff reporter, but the Silent March was missed (“Crippled Veterans,” August 24, 1972). The paper also carried a brief piece on the low-turnout Veterans for Nixon event (United Press International 1972a). Staff writer David Lamb (1972) put together an intriguing front-page feature comparing three young men, a delegate, a policeman, and a VVAW protester. The National Guard incident was buried in two passing references on an inside page and in a general protest article. The article noted eight arrests but never gave the number of demonstrators or quoted anything beyond the marching chants (Nelson 1972b).

Though the *Tallahassee Democrat’s* number of VVAW articles is impressive, the newspaper displayed an amazing lack of curiosity about the trial taking place in its own city. The *Democrat* ran a series of brief wire accounts, mostly on inside pages, about the Tallahassee Six (Wire Reports 1972). Only one brief report apparently came from a local reporter (“Vets Against War,” August 10, 1972). It and two other VVAW stories (Wire Report 1972; Moore 1972) were dropped in later editions. The local reporter’s account of the return of the accused vets to the Leon County Jail ran without a byline and was dropped in a later edition for photos of Panacea’s Junior Women’s Club collecting trash at Silver Lake campground. No follow-up story appeared on the VVAW charge that their Tallahassee lawyers had members’ phones tapped (Associated Press 1972g).

The *Democrat* took its convention coverage from wire accounts that put brief VVAW accounts in larger protest compilations. *Democrat* staffers may have been following the editorial stereotyping of their editor, Malcolm Johnson, who dedicated one of his front-page columns to a convention protest preview: “They will be led by ‘unemployed Vietnam Vets’ (dare not inquire for what reasons they are jobless),” he wrote. “This appears to be most of the noisy ragtag groups gathering at Miami Beach to promote every cause from boycotting

lettuce-eating to elevating homosexuality to total respectability” (Johnson 1972).

The *Miami Herald*, a Knight-Ridder paper (like the *Democrat*) with a conservative editorial bent, offered clearly the best coverage of the Last Patrol. Though it did not cover every trial development, the *Herald* did confirm that a decision was made in Washington to time prosecution moves to the publicity-opportunity times of the Democratic National Convention, and eventually the Republican National Convention as well. This revelation came in an illustrated feature article about the Tallahassee Six. The author profiled each of the six vets. The story, which began on the front page below the nameplate, was continued on, and occupied all of, an inside page (Elder 1972b).

The *Herald* also ran stories on the clash with the Nazis, the arrival of the March Against Murder, the VVAW security patrols, the Silent March, the heckling of Nixon, and carried a piece comparing Ron Kovic and John Todd, a pro-Nixon veteran. Almost all of these articles ran in the local news section. One ran atop the classified section. The paper provided local and state news that, aside from a few problems like two different misspellings of Ron Kovic’s name, was done well. In fact, local Miami coverage of VVAW filled three VVAW clipbooks (B. Davis 1984).

The Last Patrol didn’t quite make it as national news. The *Wall Street Journal* had no VVAW stories during this period, though it did run a long feature story on various domestic community service projects being completed by the Green Berets (Kramer 1972). The *Christian Science Monitor* editors attached the headline “Is anyone listening?” to a protest article including information about the march on Miami Beach High School (Dillin 1972a). Apparently people were not listening. That was the paper’s only reference to the VVAW or a Last Patrol event. Likewise, *The Cincinnati Enquirer* carried a brief wire story of the same incident, one paragraph on the Silent March

in a general protest article, a feature on life in Flamingo Park, and otherwise ignored the Last Patrol, following the general line of an Associated Press article carried by the *Enquirer* on the death of the protest era (Associated Press 1972h; Wheat 1972; Associated Press 1972c). The *Monitor*, however, did run a piece praising Miami Beach Police Chief Rocky Pomerance, contrasting his Miami tasks with those done by Nixon (Waugh 1972).

Chicago Tribune coverage was true to the conservative editorial tradition of the paper. One article stressed protester plans to disrupt the convention but noted how a deal had been struck with Pomerance. As long as protesters told of actions beforehand, arrests were to be done without physical violence. VVAW was mentioned as one of six participating groups. The reporter listed protest events, including “war crimes” [reporter’s quote marks] featuring actress Jane Fonda (Moreau 1972a).

Fonda is mentioned derisively several more times in the *Tribune*, the only newspaper analyzed that covered the Celebrities for Nixon event at the Doral Hotel. Jimmy Stewart, Ethel Merman, former Miss America Mary Ann Mobley, as well as TV stars Chad Everett, Dennis Cole, and Gary Collins, all attended. The GOP claimed that four hundred celebrities would be announcing support for Nixon. John Wayne was there and said he hadn’t heard of Flamingo Park or the denunciations of him there. Actress Terry Moore offered to buy Fonda a one-way ticket to Red China, though when pressed, she could not name any unpleasant thing Fonda had said. Actor Glenn Ford retorted, “You know why I’m here, and that’s all I have to say.” The chair he was sitting in slipped off the platform edge, and he tumbled over backward (Moreau 1972b).

The *Tribune* carried a photo with no story, showing Ron Kovic and Bill Wieman in their wheelchairs at the front of the Silent March; Kovic is carrying a U.S. flag hanging upside down. The caption reads

only, “Viet Nam veterans march near the convention hall in protest of the war” (Associated Press Wirephoto 1972). The only VVAW-centered *Tribune* story stressed the arrest of eight vets in the confrontation with guardsmen at Miami Beach High School. Seven people were arrested for trespassing and one for indecent exposure after “disrobing during the march and doing acrobatic flips.” The article mentioned a scuffle with a pro-war preacher and that a sit-down at Convention Hall did not happen because the pavement was too hot. Protests by women’s groups and Cubans got some attention. The last paragraph in the story focused on a Fonda press conference (Moreau and Sneed 1972). Journalistic tendencies to stress conflict, to tie to other groups, and to denounce indirectly through association with controversial speakers all played out in the *Tribune* coverage.

The author also searched all magazines listed in the *Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature, 1972*. Several categories were checked. The most productive were: “National Conventions, Republican”; “Vietnamese War, Protests, demonstrations, etc., against”; and “Vietnam Veterans Against the War.”

Major U.S. magazines largely ignored the Last Patrol. *Time* devoted six pages of text to the 1972 Republican Convention. One of the six articles dealt with protesters; two of the twenty photos were of the demonstrators. References to the Last Patrol were incidental. “Moments before Nixon proclaimed that the nation’s Viet Nam veterans should be given ‘the honor and respect they deserve and they’ve earned,’ three such veterans in wheelchairs shouted ‘Stop the bombing!’—and were summarily escorted from the hall by convention security personnel,” reported *Time* (“New Majority,” September 4, 1972).

The protest story, “The Last Jamboree,” noted, “Of the 4,000 or so demonstrators who did show up, only the Viet Nam Veterans Against the War remained well disciplined throughout. . . . Al Hubbard, a

V.V.A.W. leader, walked off in a huff. ‘If trashing is the thing, if assaulting delegates is the thing, then we will have no part of it’” (*Time*, September 4, 1972).

Newsweek devoted fifteen pages to the 1972 Republican National Convention, including nine articles approaching the convention from various angles. The convention cover story included an illustration, an editorial cartoon, and nineteen photos. The VVAW again were treated as bit players in a protest carnival. *Newsweek* described the restraint of Miami Beach Police Chief Rocky Pomerance “against the occasional sorties yippies, zippies, SDSers, Vietnam Veterans Against the War and associated antiwar groupies from their base in Flamingo Park” (“New Majority,” September 4, 1972).

Peter Goldman’s (1972) convention diary for *Newsweek* portrayed Flamingo Park as a counterculture carnival and tourist attraction full of “peace people, hippies, yippies, zippies, Viet vets, trashers, feminists, homosexuals and even a black self-help group incongruously for Richard Nixon.” The diary included a drawing of two wheelchair-bound vets looking sleepy and bored.

U.S. News and World Report spread its cover story on the convention over twenty pages, including full texts of the Nixon and Agnew acceptance speeches. One of the ten articles was entitled, “How Protesters Lost the ‘Battle of Miami Beach.’” None of the four photos showed a Vietnam Veteran. The only reference to the Last Patrol was a begrudging compliment: “In contrast with some protesters—who harangued and jostled Convention delegates, set fire to flags and bunting and screamed obscenities—about 1,200 Vietnam Veterans Against the War staged a silent, well-disciplined ‘protest march’ near the Convention’s headquarters hotel, the Fontainebleau” (September 4, 1972).

Mademoiselle ran a convention account (Cunningham 1972) that mentioned the VVAW role in patrolling the Flamingo Park protest

camp. With two exceptions, judging by the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, the remainder of U.S. major magazines ignored both the Last Patrol and the Tallahassee Six. *Saturday Review* ran two articles by Lucian Truscott IV (1972a; 1972b) examining the Silent March and the VVAW in great detail. *Harper's* ran the Kurt Vonnegut (1972) piece and a wide-ranging article on the informer William Lemmer and how the FBI had used him (Donner 1972).

Television news, also, seemed to ignore the Last Patrol. Bill Knowles (2009) was a television news writer and producer in 1972, one of many ABC newsmen who went to Miami Beach for what he termed a "Nixon coronation." His network was scaling back its gavel-to-gavel coverage in favor of "unconventional convention" coverage, though that did not include much coverage of demonstrators. Knowles recalls the demonstrators not being too close to the convention center; it had been turned "into a heavily secured compound." As he remembers it, the press and television were focused on—and trying to make sense of—the Watergate burglary and related items like the break-in of the psychiatrist's office of antiwar activist Daniel Ellsberg. The antiwar issues were being presented by opposition presidential candidate George McGovern.

ABC, CBS, and NBC, as the tallies and descriptions of network stories presented earlier indicate, were looking elsewhere when the Last Patrol took place. The rapid decline in media attention, print and broadcast, to VVAW between Dewey Canyon III and Last Patrol is particularly telling and will be considered in the next chapter.

Highlights

New York Times coverage can serve as a good benchmark for the declining coverage of VVAW. That paper gave five times the column inches to 1971's Dewey Canyon III than to 1972's Last Patrol.

Stories about the VVAW's Last Patrol at the 1972 Republican Convention rarely stood alone. More often, VVAW received a few paragraphs in larger stories about the convention and/or the protests.

The conservative editorial bent of the *Tallahassee Democrat* and the *Chicago Tribune* was reflected in both the quantity and focus of VVAW coverage. Another conservative paper, the *Miami Herald*, offered the best Last Patrol coverage. Of course, convention protests were a local story for that newspaper.

The VVAW rarely broke through the general news meme that the war was in decline. Newspapers and magazines often treated the VVAW as a noble group, but a lingering remnant of an outdated concern.

Featured then Forgotten

News coverage of VVAW eventually waned. The four leaders of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (Barry Romo, Bill Davis, John Lindquist, Peter Zastrow) who were interviewed for this research all claimed that news attention to them peaked during Dewey Canyon and slumped into nearly nothing by the time of the Last Patrol. Analysis using the Vanderbilt Television News Archive and articles from periodicals confirms that claim. The findings from this study are in line with what has been found in other social-movement-related research. Several studies have shown that the mainstream news

Kelly Daugherty and Barry Romo on the “Legacy of GI Resistance” panel at the 2008 Winter Soldier event. Photo Courtesy of VVAW.



organizations have a tendency, despite initial attraction to the unusual, to uphold the status quo (Donahue, Tichenor, and Olien 1973; Olien, Tichenor, and Donahue 1989; Lazarsfeld and Merton 1948).

Threats to the dominant ideology or even to policies maintained by the societal and political elite often are disparaged or ignored. News coverage of dissent increases and expressions of opposition become voiced only during times of intense controversy and within the context of a particular idea or policy. If a majority of the elite is in agreement regarding an idea or policy, then the opposition experiences a “blackout” or vilification (Cagan 1978; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Morris 1973). Bennett’s indexing hypothesis (1990) looks at this point in the inverse, namely that elite conflict leaves an opening for mediated attention to discordant social movements. Bennett’s claim does not square with idealist, materialist, or constructionist views of social movements, but fits nicely with Sidney Tarrow’s (1998) concept of political opportunity structure, the synthesis of social movement theories with the cultural meta-narrative.

The network coverage of VVAW generally followed along the lines predicted by Bennett’s indexing hypothesis, and the decline in coverage followed well what one would expect from Patricia Hipsher’s (2007) understanding of heretical social movements. The attention paid to Dewey Canyon and the subsequent decline in VVAW coverage fit well into Jules Boykoff’s point (2006) about the news media penchant for the novel, Andrew Rojecki’s (2002) observation about “evolving sympathy,” and findings from Kevin DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples (2002) about symbolic violence.

For all this general support regarding past work on social movements, this research found some patterns at odds with the specific claims regarding elite consensus. A review of available polling data from that era is particularly instructive.

The American National Election Study in 1964, 1966, 1968, and 1970 asked what Americans should do now in Vietnam. In 1964,

almost half the respondents said we should “take a strong stand” while 38 percent opted for “keep trying to get a peaceful settlement.” Only 13.5 percent of the respondents said “pull out entirely.”

By 1966, however, the figures for Strong Stand and for Peaceful Settlement were nearly identical (44.6 and 44.2 percent); Pull Out was just 11 percent. In 1968, after the Tet Offensive, Strong Stand fell to 37 percent; 41 percent hoped for Peaceful Settlement, but Pull Out doubled to 22 percent. Pull Out achieved a plurality by 1970 with 36.7 percent, 36.2 for Peaceful Settlement, and 27.1 clinging to Strong Stand.

Public opinion showed a brief surge in war support in reaction to the January 1968 Tet Offensive, but the change did not last long. A Gallup poll found that two weeks after Tet, 61 percent called themselves “hawks” on the war, wanting to step up the U.S. military effort. In December, the figure was 52 percent. Seven in ten favored continued bombing of North Vietnam, up from 63 percent in October. However, in one sign of wavering, more than six in ten thought the war would end in a compromise. Only two in ten thought the war would end in a decisive U.S. victory. A Harris poll found a post-Tet jump in war support, from 61 to 74 percent, but six weeks later, support had fallen to 54 percent. In March, Gallup found almost half the respondents saying the U.S. had made a mistake by getting involved in Vietnam, doubling the percentage who said so in August 1965 (Zaroulis and Sullivan 1984, 155-156).

CBS News polls also documented the dramatic shift. In 1969, only one in four respondents favored immediate withdrawal of all American troops; 67 percent opposed. By May 1970, the percentage favoring immediate withdrawal was up to 36 percent, and opposition slumped to 58 percent. By the end of the next month, the numbers had swung even more, 47 percent choosing immediate withdrawal and 49 percent opposed. Further, of those who opposed immediate withdrawal, only 29 percent said “stick it out in Vietnam, and do

whatever is necessary to win.” Nearly two-thirds wanted a gradual withdrawal, letting South Vietnam take on more of the fighting. Among all respondents, 53 percent thought “we are in a war in Asia that we can’t get out of,” while four in ten disagreed (Chandler 1972, 182).

One should caution that these shifts in public opinion were not necessarily because of the efficacy of antiwar protests or because the change in public opinion moved Congress. Doug McAdam and Yang Su (2002) found that extreme tactics by protesters had some limited effect in attracting media attention and even in moving public opinion but that extreme measures produced something of a backlash in influencing the House and Senate to not vote on war matters. Large, peaceful demonstrations were linked with more congressional voting on war items, but actually correlated with a depressed likelihood of pro-peace outcomes. Hawks like Senator Bill Brock (1971), a Republican from Tennessee, caricatured antiwar protests as “partisan caterwauling” and “crying wolf” against what he argued were valuable tactics like bombing Cambodia and Laos. Brock twisted the protests into impediments to the return of POWs and a negotiated settlement to what even he was calling a “tragic war.”

Certainly by 1969, despite congressional hesitation, Vietnam War consensus had broken down, if not outright shifted to a new position. It’s hard to see, however, that the breakdown overall was elite-driven. The researcher cross-tabulated the American National Election Study (SDA 2008) results with education levels and discovered that people with only grade school educations were the leading war opponents. College-educated respondents were the strongest war supporters. These findings are consistent with past research (Hahn 1970; Hamilton 1968; O’Brien 1974; Lunch and Sperlich 1979). Bruce Franklin (2008) points out that “every study of class composition of the antiwar movement has concluded that opposition to the war was inversely proportional to both income and education.”

The same pattern held true in a 1972 exit poll during the Florida primary (Meyer 1972). Overall, 79 percent of respondents opted for “mostly agree” with the statement “The U.S. government should be moving faster to get out of Vietnam.” This sentiment, once again, was strongest among those in the lowest income (87%) and the least educated (86%) groups. The highest income group (71%) and the college educated group (75%) actually were the slowest to decide against the war.

Slowly growing disillusionment with the war also may be found among respondents to an April 1973 poll of business and military elites, specifically among executive vice-presidents of major United States corporations and military officers attending the five war colleges (Russett and Hanson 1977). Not surprisingly, military elites thought it was correct for the U.S. to send combat troops to Vietnam: 434 to 171. Business elites tilted in the opposite direction: 210 to 299. Some 286 said they’d held their current position since the beginning of the war, but almost as many (264) picked a year between 1965 and 1972 when their opinion formed or changed.

At least in this case study, elites were not driving the breakdown of consensus. Rather, they were trailing a lower class that had endured the bulk of the draft, danger, and death of the war.

By 1968, U.S. public consensus about the Vietnam War already had fractured. Polling in April showed identical percentages: 41 percent calling themselves hawks, and 41 percent doves (Gallup 1968a). In February, 49 percent thought the U.S. made a mistake by sending troops to Vietnam, compared to 42 percent who disagreed (Gallup 1968b). Two polls in September found the “mistake” percentage had risen to 54 in 1968 (Gallup 1968c), then to 58 percent in 1969 (Gallup 1969a).

When VVAW was presenting media-savvy antiwar protests, the problem no longer could be called elite consensus for the

war—consensus had broken down, and the breakdown was not led by elites. Instead, the VVAW ran smack into backlash and issue avoidance stemming from the cognitive dissonance and angst the war was generating.

By the time Dewey Canyon III hit Washington, 62 percent of poll respondents thought the U.S. would have to reach a compromise war settlement with the Communists (Louis Harris 1971a). Some 58 percent thought the war morally wrong (Louis Harris 1971b). Sixty-six percent wanted their congressman to vote for a proposal to bring all U.S. troops home by the end of the year (Gallup 1971a). The public, however, clearly resented the drumbeat of events—especially the coverage of events forcing those conclusions.

Antiwar protesters never were popular during the Vietnam War. In 1968, two-thirds of respondents disagreed with the proposition that the demonstrators in Chicago had their protest rights taken away unlawfully (Louis Harris 1968), and 56 percent approved of the way Chicago Police dealt with the young people protesting the war (Gallup 1968d). Some 71 percent agreed that the “country would be better off if there was less protest and dissatisfaction coming from college campuses” (National Opinion Research Center 1968).

In 1969, some 77 percent of poll respondents disapproved of public protests against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Further, 62 percent thought public protests hurt our chances of reaching a peace settlement with North Vietnam; only 13 percent thought the protests helped. When presented with Nixon’s characterization of a silent majority with war opponents as a vocal minority, respondents opted to think of themselves as Silent Majority as opposed to Vocal Minority, 74 to 21 percent (CBS News 1969; Chandler 1972., 165-183). Eighty-four percent of white “Middle American” adult respondents thought demonstrators on college campuses had been dealt with too leniently; the same percentage thought the same of black militants (Gallup 1969b).

One 1969 study of adult men posed the question, “Tell me if you think about these [nine-item list] as violence. I don’t mean if they lead to violence, but if you think of them as violence in themselves.” Thirty-eight percent thought of student protest as intrinsically violent (Survey Research Center 1969). A 1970 survey of women found 65 percent of respondents somewhat or strongly opposed to the actions and goals of student protest (Louis Harris 1970a).

In 1970, 37 percent of the respondents thought protests against the Vietnam War should be declared illegal (Louis Harris 1970b). Roughly a quarter thought protests hurt our ability to deal with the Communists (Gallup 1970). Harris (1969) phrased the question in terms of “people who picket against the war in Vietnam” and found 59 percent calling these actions more harmful to American life; only 18 percent said more helpful. When Nixon polled in advance of Dewey Canyon III and other April 1971 protests, 65 percent of respondents disapproved of the demonstrations (Opinion Research Corporation 1971b).

Blaming the messenger also took place. Six in ten said the “press and TV (television) should never have reported statements by the soldiers because all the publicity about My Lai [massacre] can only hurt our cause in Vietnam” (Louis Harris 1971c). Among 310 respondents who had heard about the Pentagon Papers, nearly four in ten disapproved of the *New York Times*’ decision to publish the secret, retrospective report on the deceptions and errors leading to the Vietnam War. Twenty-six percent thought the *New York Times* broke the law. Respondents split evenly on whether the *Times* had acted responsibly (Opinion Research Corporation 1971c). Of course, the press always makes a good scapegoat, especially when it tells people things they’d prefer not to hear, read, or see (Halberstam 2003, 126).

During the time VVAW and other protest groups were riddled with informants, the public still held a favorable inclination toward law enforcement. In 1971, 41 percent of the public thought the FBI

had not done enough in its investigations of political and protest groups. Further, 31 percent thought it had not done enough in “having agents or informers pose as members of militant protest groups.” For both questions, only 14 percent said the FBI had gone too far (Gallup 1971b).

Protest remained unpopular in 1972. Half the respondents to one survey (Louis Harris 1972) thought presidential candidate George McGovern had too many ties to radical and protest groups; 31 percent disagreed. Nearly half the respondents to a 1973 Harris survey thought student demonstrators who engaged in protests did more harm than good. In the same survey, 43 percent agreed with the rights-chilling statement “All protest meetings should be reviewed in advance by government authorities to be sure that what people are protesting is legitimate and they will not urge others to overthrow the system.”

TV news crews themselves were not particularly fond of protesters. Roger Mudd (2008) reported that the cameramen hated all the tear gas and rock throwing and largely “were very hawkish at one point and resented the war protestors, as we all did.”

TV News—and one could argue nearly all of journalism—arrived late to the story of antiwar veterans, well after consensus opinion barriers about the war had fallen, even as the public retained lingering doubts about protesters. VVAW, of course, was not a typical protest group, and its credibility was undeniable, even if belatedly discovered. Then, true to one of the more maddening conventions of journalism, news media dropped the story of VVAW almost as quickly as they had found the story. Like children with attention deficit disorder, newsrooms went off in search of something fresh, shiny, and new. Though many of the VVAW events after Dewey Canyon were just as large or dramatic, the VVAW was yesterday’s news—in today’s slang, “been there, done that.” David Halberstam won a

Pulitzer Prize for his Vietnam reporting and later summed up this tendency, putting much of the blame on the medium of television itself:

As television made things grow larger much more quickly, it also had a tendency to let them die more quickly too, the roots were not as deep, more of the country was living on electronic sand rather than on real soil. The saturation point and the point of boredom came sooner. People were bored with an issue before it was solved, finished, or decided. Television heightened the interest in the war in Vietnam, heightened for the first time the enthusiasm for it, probably quickened its demise, and left people saturated, long before the war was in fact over; it was over in people's minds while it was still unfinished upon the battlefield. (1979, 407)

Longtime network TV news correspondent Marvin Kalb (2009) was kind enough to respond to the author's inquiry about the decline in VVAW coverage. He wrote:

One difference was leadership. In 1971 John Kerry was a prominent leader. He was mainstream opposition, smart, media savvy, brilliant talk before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. His glow, which upset the White House profoundly, covered the protesters too. But Kerry left the group in the summer of '71, after he and other leaders argued about tactics and philosophy. He thought they were turning too extreme, too ideological, in some cases too anti-American. When he broke with the group, other moderates followed his example. When the

group arrived at the GOP convention, I don't remember them being as large as you say, but in any case they had lost much of their earlier luster—and relevance. Nixon was pulling troops out of South Vietnam, and he was in the midst of foreign summitry with Russia and China that won him credit and admiration. The VVAW was a kind of sideshow by then. Antiwar demonstrators didn't cut it much anymore.

Peter Zastrow (1984), a Last Patrol participant who later served on the VVAW national board, said, "The press perceived us as becoming too radical and therefore somehow losing credibility." Both Zastrow and John Lindquist (1984), another Last Patrol participant who later served on the VVAW national board, believe that, in retrospect, the FBI infiltration was partially successful in breaking up the southern wing of VVAW. One also should add James Dickerson's (1998, 134) tally of U.S. Army counterintelligence units with code names such as Punch Block, Lantern Spike, Rose Bush, and Steep Hill. He claims those operations had more than fifteen hundred plainclothes agents who would dress in street clothes, sometimes pose as news reporters, and compile files on more than a hundred thousand citizens, mostly for antiwar and civil rights activity. George Moss (2010, 212) notes that during the Vietnam era, the FBI, Secret Service, IRS, Justice Department, and even the CIA—the latter in violation of its charter—all were investigating antiwar organizations and individuals. Scott Camil (2009) believes that after the Gainesville Eight trial, many members quit VVAW because of the large amount of government infiltration and intimidation. Further, with the perception that the war was winding down, fewer people were doing the work of garnering media attention.

In the literature reviews and interviews concerning VVAW activities, it became apparent that the activities were viewed as a threat to the elite initiatives. Initially, the VVAW were the victims of a coordinated and continuous government effort to harass and discredit the organization. The four veterans interviewed for this report all mentioned harassment of VVAW by the FBI, the Committee to Re-Elect the President, and the Justice Department. The trial of The Tallahassee Six, later the Gainesville Eight, was essentially a prolonged device to drain resources and create a negative public image.



1972 VVAW protest outside the Committee to Re-Elect the President offices in New York City.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

The FBI targeted VVAW in a program of surveillance and disruption of individuals and groups judged to be radical. The targeting often included an agent provocateur pushing the group to illegal acts (Doyle 1977; Gitlin 1980, 186-189). The national VVAW office identified twenty to thirty FBI agents in local chapters; many were women encouraged to befriend members. The most famous was Sarah Jane Moore, the troubled woman who later fired a gun at President Gerald Ford (Zastrow et al. 1997).

The other targets of COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) activity included the Ku Klux Klan, the Black Panther Party, and Jane Fonda. One FBI agent wrote a book of regrets for his role in infiltrating VVAW, stating that VVAW was the protest group most committed to non-violence (Payne 1979, 84).

Another informant, Mary Jo Cook, told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that the FBI advised her to gain the confidence of emotionally unstable members of VVAW by acting as a “big sister” for them. She came to regret what she had done and later testified:

The more I understood and defined VVAW/WSO [Winter Soldier Organization] as a process, the more I became aware that the FBI’s response to this process was inimical. The picture painted for me by the FBI as a group of “crazies” was replaced by my experience of VVAW/WSO as an extended family, a community of people engaged democratically in a self-help program. I became confused and then alarmed that a real involvement in the democratic process was not regarded as a positive thing. I resigned from the FBI in November 1974 certain that VVAW/WSO was a legitimate and valid organization. This resignation was a matter of moral principles and patriotic duty. (Senate Select Committee 1975, 114)

Gary Dotterman (2007) tells how the VVAW eventually figured out “that the FBI had been paying a VVAW coordinator from Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Kansas. He would try to provoke violence in the rank and file of the vets,” Dotterman wrote. “He would corner some vet, then talk about a need to collect weapons and train for a rebellion. He spoke to vets about how it might be a good idea to kill a senator and congressman.”

The government's effort to discredit the VVAW was coordinated with the Committee to Re-Elect the President. Both Attorney General John Mitchell and Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian had moved over to the committee by the time of the Last Patrol. Mardian regularly provided Justice Department Internal Security Division reports on VVAW to James McCord, even after Mardian supposedly had left the Justice Department (Kendrick 1974, 370-71). The threats of violence were somewhat self-fulfilling. FBI informers infiltrated VVAW meetings with the thought of provoking the group into illegal action (Kendrick 1974, 71; Zastrow 1984; Lindquist 1984; Pilisuk 1975). The FBI also planted agents in Flamingo Park and may have been responsible for the six mystery explosions that sent war-weary veterans into a frantic but fruitless search for the bomber (Lindquist 1984; Baxter 1972; Bellows 1972). In fact, VVAW patrols, some of which included recovered drug addicts, caught a few people attempting to sell Quaaludes and heroin to the vets. Miami Beach police released the drug pushers because the pushers were FBI agents (Lindquist 1984).

The VVAW also had reason to suspect people who presented themselves as reporters. Herbert Gans (1979, 272), in compiling his own fieldwork and congressional investigations, concluded that during the era of Vietnam War protests, some news executives allowed CIA agents to view network TV film outtakes and magazine reporter notes. Local television stations also voluntarily supplied film outtakes of antiwar protests to the CIA, FBI, or local police "red squads" to help them identify individual demonstrators. Sheldon Ramsdell (1997b) recalled people who were taking photographs and holding microphones, but recording only when vets were giving their names, addresses, and serial numbers. "We take a picture and escort him off. He would be very upset. It only happened two or three times, but once was enough."

That summer, the federal government had William Lemmer, a shadowy figure apparently sent to prompt VVAW to acts that would discredit the group, as its star witness. The *New York Times* found circumstantial evidence that he had been paid to inform on the VVAW (Kifner 1972d). The local police also had infiltrators Pablo Fernandez and Vincent Hannard trying to prompt the VVAW into some discrediting act. The head of the Miami Police Department's special investigations section, Adam Limkowski, told the press "we were hoping for an overt act necessary to produce a charge of conspiracy." VVAW did not take the bait (Lembcke 1998, 64-65). Watergate operative G. Gordon Liddy even had a plan to use informants to identify the most effective protest spokesmen and kidnap them during the convention to keep them away from television cameras (Dean 1976, 81-87).

With the government's efforts to portray VVAW as a menace to the establishment, it is of no surprise, given the research on media coverage of social movements, that major news organizations adopted a weary and wary attitude toward the group and its efforts. By not highlighting the activities of this group, news coverage was essentially "protecting" the establishment. If any mention was made of VVAW activities, the report generally represented the group as largely passive and inconsequential—a technique often used by the press to minimize the sense of threat posed by a group (Gamson and Wolfsfield 1993; Tichenor, Donahue, and Olien 1980). As seen in the news reports of the VVAW protest in Miami, the veterans were described as "well disciplined" and as "sitting quietly in protest in the sun" (White 1973, 242). The non-threatening characterization clearly comes across.

Past observations regarding media and social movements claim that the only time voices of opposition are heard in the news is when conflict exists among the elite. If members of the elite cannot agree

on a particular policy stance, then the likelihood of seeing divergent views openly expressed in the news increases. By 1972, however, the Vietnam War themes adopted by the nation's elite were that the war was coming to a close and that social protests against the war were in decline. These were themes also adopted by newsrooms across the country.

In 1972, accredited correspondents in Vietnam numbered 295, down from a high of 637 during the Tet Offensive (Knightley 1975, 398, citing Military Assistance Command, Vietnam). The remaining correspondents were told by their editors to approach stories from the angle of the withdrawal of U.S. ground forces. The VVAW's pointing out the reality that a record number of persons in Indochina were being killed, maimed, or made homeless conflicted with the conventional wisdom that the Vietnam War was "winding down" (Knightley 1975, 398; Epstein 1973, 17, 250). The "winding down" theme had been in place at the networks for even longer. In March 1969, the executive producer of the *ABC Evening News*, Av Westin, asked the correspondents to shift focus "from combat pieces to interpretive ones, pegged to the eventual pull-out of American forces." Much the same was happening at NBC. In November 1968, the executive producer told the staff that the story was now the negotiations, not the fighting. Combat footage still was sent for the evening news, but use dropped from three or four times a week to three times in a two-month period (Epstein 1973, 17-18).

A number of factors contributed to this theme of the war "winding down." For instance, during the protest march in Miami Beach, reporters found it easy perhaps to stereotype the VVAW as an insignificant part of a dying cause. In fact, the war protest movement definitely was declining in the summer of 1972. The draft had ended, as had the ground combat role in Vietnam (Kraft 1972). Troop strength in Vietnam was down to 39,000 ("News in Brief" *Los Angeles Times*,

August 21, 1972). Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin had retired from street politics (Associated Press, 1972c). Other activists were busy working on the McGovern campaign.

Furthermore, Miami Beach was far from the center of protest activity and had few local radical groups (Kraft 1972, 23; Dillin 1972b). The original plan had been for a convention in San Diego, but the Nixon Administration eventually turned against that idea because of thousands of antiwar activists in Southern California (Magruder 1974; Dean 1976, 52fn). When only five to ten thousand protesters showed up in Miami Beach, the news story became the decline in protest activity (“Beach Weighs Request” *Miami Herald*, August 2, 1972). The ultraconservative *National Review* seized upon the small protest turnout and declared the protest a flop run by “disreputable drifters and spaced-out types.” *National Review* also chastised Rep. Pete McCloskey for distributing convention passes to a “war protester who seized this opportunity to heckle the President during his acceptance speech” (“Convention Notes” September 15, 1972). Through careful wording, the VVAW presence was not revealed; and Ron Kovic was not described as disabled or as a Vietnam veteran.

Repeatedly, VVAW made attempts to geographically and ideologically separate themselves from other protesters, but journalists chose the course of least resistance and lumped VVAW into the “last gasp of war protest” stories. Ed Fouhy (2009), longtime CBS producer and bureau chief, covered the convention and participated in editorial meetings before the live coverage; he does not recall the vets. He writes, “[T]here are so many demonstrations at political conventions it would have been difficult for the vets to stand out from the background noise at the ’72 GOP gathering in Miami. It may also have been that the police had so isolated demonstrators from the convention goers that I was not aware of their presence.”

Two U.S. magazines complained about press tendencies to arbitrarily categorize VVAW. John Osborne wrote in *New Republic*:

The tragedy for the country, though not for the Nixon people, was that the miscellaneous yippies, fags, dikes and extreme militants who monopolized the news during the first days of the convention obscured the steady discipline of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the main forces of dissent assembled by David Dellinger and Rennie Davis in the Miami Conventions Coalition. Watching the unkempt legions of the outraged and in some instances outrageous young at their work in the streets, I concluded that they were driven to excess by a sense of their own futility. I was torn between admiration for the best of them and regret that they were so effectively assisting the Nixon design. (1972)

Phil Tracy echoed the complaints for *Commonweal*, beginning with praise for the march on Miami Beach High School:

The veteran's protest parade on Monday was an exercise in dignified and justified outrage. The distance between that march and the marauding band of thugs who ran down Collins Avenue Wednesday night, slashing tires, disabling buses, breaking windows and beating up those whose only crime was trying to get home from work on the wrong day is the distance between moral outrage and nascent fascism. The bullies who pushed and shoved a middle-aged couple on their way to vote for Nixon-Agnew were little more than brown shirts in blue denim.

Whatever the causes, whatever atrocities have made them that way, these punks were libidinally linked to the current status quo and mock what the veterans marched for. (1972)

Unfortunately, neither *New Republic* nor *Commonweal* saw fit to redress that imbalance with detailed accounts of the Last Patrol. The two only made passing references to VVAW events. Furthermore, to lessen the threat of the VVAW, instead of disparaging the veterans, as they had done with the other protesters, they portrayed the veterans as passive. They described the veterans as being “dignified” and showing “steady discipline.” In other words, the veterans were safely contained. The novelty of their heretical social movement was gone. They weren’t a story anymore.

One key news expectation also worked against VVAW. With the nominations sewn up and the protest movement in decline, national news organizations went to Miami Beach working under the self-fulfilling prophecy that they would get little news and much hoopla. The *Los Angeles Times* was so moved by the dearth of news from traditional sources that it ran an account headlined “Top Stories Run Gamut as Media Face Slow Day.” The story described what the morning TV news shows and other newspapers were highlighting “in the absence of a major event” (Witcover August 22, 1972). As that report hit the newsstands on the west coast, the vets, fresh from the National Guard confrontation, began the Silent March.

Even the book publishing industry missed the importance of events such as the Last Patrol. For instance, in *The Making of the President 1972*, famed chronicler of presidential elections Theodore H. White failed to include accounts of the Last Patrol. He gives only passing mention to “lean, hard-muscled Vietnam veterans sitting quietly in protest in the sun on the street paving before the

Fontainebleau to protest the war.” This statement is the only reference to Last Patrol, VVAW, or Tallahassee Six that appears in the book.

Melvin Small (1987) cites boredom as the cause of waning media attention. He notes: “After several years of spectacular and unprecedented mass marches and demonstrations, the media became bored. Media inattention was one of the reasons why the antiwar movement came to an apparent halt in 1971.” The near daily and usually predictable activities were unable to sustain journalistic attention (Small 2002, 151; Spencer 2005, 65).

Some thirty thousand Americans had been killed in Vietnam when Nixon entered office. Almost ten thousand more perished during the first year of his presidency and another five thousand in the next three years. The war was drawing to its ignominious close and the eventual grim tally of 57,939 Americans dead or missing in action (Karnow 1984, 2, 601; Kraft 1972). The VVAW clearly wanted to hasten that end. For the first time in American history, thousands of returned veterans were protesting a war still in progress (Lindquist 1984; Davis 2007; MacPherson 2001, 55). Yet, through federal government commission and press omission, the VVAW simply flashed and faded as a news story on network TV and in the nation’s newspapers and magazines.

News coverage of VVAW yields mixed results from what social movement theory would suggest. One could argue that these high-credibility antiwar veterans threatened power elites. Certainly the organization threatened and worried the Nixon Administration, which responded with intense resistance, with actions ranging from legal harassment to manufactured countervailing groups. This lends support to Todd Gitlin’s observation (1980, 24) that an increase in coverage can lead to an increase in resistance in a battle to control and define the images key to the success of protest movements.

Daniel Hallin's point about avoiding cognitive dissonance (for reporters, editors, and for that matter the public) and Warren Breed's (1955) point about social conformity both are borne out repeatedly in historical accounts and in polling data from the era.

The one area where social movement theory clearly was at odds with VVAW news coverage was in the McLeod and Hertog expectation of a violence frame. This difference likely resulted from the VVAW's stress on discipline and restraint, even when engaged in civil disobedience. VVAW avoided even the FBI and police efforts to entice it to violence, a point validated by the verdict in the Gainesville Eight trial. VVAW tried its level best to separate itself from violent or chaotic groups. It largely succeeded in this regard, with the possible exception of the Last Patrol, where it was grouped together in a "last gasp of war protest" frame.

Patricia Hipsher (2007) claimed that heretical social movements must be cast as aberrant. That point generally held true, but only after Nixon loyalists created an alternate group for easy media access. It mattered little that VVAW was much larger than Veterans for a Just Peace. VVAW brought thousands of people to Miami for the Last Patrol, while Veterans for a Just Peace numbered fifty (B. Davis 2007). TV journalists tended to put one "pro" sound bite against one "anti" sound bite and to stop analysis at that point in a superficial act of bogus balance. This journalistic convention made it easier to dismiss VVAW.

After Dewey Canyon III, covering the VVAW made no sense to journalists. The prominent frame was the ending of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. The public and the journalists responding to that public were eager to get past the angst the war had generated. Antiwar veterans became a reminder of what the public wished would go away. The press and broadcast reporters saw no need to continue coverage or to find a fresh angle.

This variation in news coverage fits nicely with one of the earliest observations about the limits and flaws of journalism. Walter Lippman (1922) wrote about how journalism was like a spotlight endlessly moving about, moving one development and then another out of darkness and into light. This spotlighting had some beneficial effects but was insufficient to read by or to make informed decisions by, or to build a body of knowledge upon. From the point of view of social movements, major media can be counted on only as a “fleeting friend” at most.

Yet journalistic habit and Nixon Administration subversion alone cannot explain how the VVAW changed both in its internal dynamics and its public face as the 1970s progressed. Bobby Muller, one of the wheelchair-bound vets who heckled Nixon, had some good insights on how things changed and what those changes meant. His activism began early. He was injured in Vietnam in 1969, losing the function of his legs. His hospital ward was the centerpiece of a *Life* magazine cover story, May 22, 1970, about “Our Forgotten Veterans.” Muller became the ward spokesman as other media did follow-up stories. “I stopped shaving,” he said. “I had a beard and long hair. If you’re going to treat me like an animal, all right, I’ll look like one.” Congressional hearings also drew attention to the national scandal (Muller 2007, 209).

VVAW members sought him out; they shared common experiences and promoted a common cause. Though Muller never formally joined VVAW, he did a lot of media appearances for the group, for instance, on Dick Cavett’s and David Susskind’s shows. The operation didn’t require joiners or impose uniformity. Muller stated:

The thing that was beautiful about VVAW is that when we had a protest or we had a rally, you didn’t have to tell guys, “This is what you say.” You didn’t

have to tell them what the party line was. You just say, "Hey, what's your experience brother?" Each guy would tell his story and it was just understood that the war was ridiculous. We never had guys on the other side of that issue. There were a handful, but they were political hacks that had gotten recruited by the right-wing elements (Muller 1997, 210).

For Muller, and likely many others, VVAW was not just an anti-war statement; it was camaraderie, brotherhood, and therapy. Later, the group learned that many of their fellow vets shared their antiwar sentiments but did not feel comfortable expressing their views in the small, rural communities to which they returned. Their mood was more like "I don't want to talk about it. Let's get on with it" (Muller 1997, 210-211).

These operational characteristics that made VVAW credible, sincere, and effective, however, also made long-term sustained news coverage difficult. VVAW members often disagreed on tactics or on who spoke for them (Nicosia 2001, 117, 127; Brinkley 2004, 365; Halstead 1978, 610). Nicosia overstated the case when he blamed post-traumatic stress and quoted Jack Smith about "crazies" who "had taken too much incoming" as the cause of VVAW strife (Nicosia 2001, 117). The group had strong members who had strong opinions about goals and tactics. In the mid-1970s, the differences grew when members of a Marxist-Leninist group, the Revolutionary Union (later renamed the Revolutionary Communist Party) became active in VVAW. By 1978, that tension led to a split where those splinter members created VVAW-AI [Anti-Imperialist] while the larger group carried on with the goals of peace, amnesty, and veterans' care (Nicosia 2001, 312-313; Moser 1996, 127).

Philip Caputo (1977), who later would write a best-selling book on Vietnam, noted that many vets both opposed the war and felt emotionally tied to it. He drifted into the antiwar movement, joined VVAW, and naively believed that his 1970 mailing of his campaign ribbons to Nixon would have an impact. The medals were returned with a curt letter from a staffer. “My grand gesture of personal protest had been futile, as futile as the war itself,” he wrote.

Caputo, like Kovic, went to war with President Kennedy’s call to national service ringing in his ears. Both came from communities that unquestioningly supported their country’s call to war, and both believed they would be playing “cop” to communist “robbers” in an honorable fight. Both would write of their world of growing disillusion, a world of naïve but good young men sanctioned to kill, to build body counts. These men sank to a brutish state in a hostile country, facing a relentless enemy in an increasingly nonsensical mission (Martin 1993). It is no wonder that so many veterans became silent, haunted. This silence made interviewing difficult even for reporters who bucked the mediated “war winding down” theme and the later “let’s not talk Vietnam; it’s too painful” attitude.

VVAW merits only one paragraph in Robert Mann’s tome about Vietnam, *A Grand Delusion* (2001, 680), and most of that mention concentrates on the “gaunt, fatigues-clad” Kerry testifying to a congressional committee. A vet like Kerry was an easier “sell” to newsrooms and to a public dubious about the war but despising long-haired protesters. Kalb’s (2009) lauding of Kerry’s leadership shows how well Kerry played in newsrooms. The *Newsweek* coverage of Dewey Canyon contained a picture of Kerry with praise for both his heroic background and nonviolent protest technique.



CLICK TO LISTEN

Democracy Now: John Kerry in 2004 and during his 1971 senate testimony against the Vietnam War. Courtesy of Pacifica Radio Archives. Available from the Internet Archive at archive.org.

Journalists were attracted to Kerry as VVAW spokesman because of more than just his role as one member of the six-man executive committee at the time of Dewey Canyon III, his leadership skills, or even his speaking ability. Kerry, the patrician scion of a wealthy Boston family, volunteered for the Navy and for hazardous duty despite his reservations about the war. He was not some grungy, working-class draftee who turned against the war, grew his hair long, and might have seemed menacing to middle America, or at least middle- and upper-class America. Further, as Herbert Gans (1979, 58, 127) found when he studied network news and two news magazines, journalists from these elite media outlets tend to have trouble crossing social barriers to find new sources. They rely on a small set of peers, friends, relatives, other media, and elite sources. Thus, disorders in affluent areas or elite institutions are more likely to receive coverage than disorders happening elsewhere.

Television reporters of the time seem to have decided that American viewers were not ready to listen to the angry voices of their own frustrated working-class warriors but that they would accept carefully crafted words from a young man who could be an unthreatening guest at any dinner table. The irony is that, during this time, the working class who supplied the U.S. soldiers for the Vietnam War relied on TV news more than on other sources and used the medium more than the upper and middle classes did (Szymanski 1983, 334).

In the days following John Forbes Kerry's testimony before Congress, he became a "media darling, and thus a bane of the Nixon Administration" (Brinkley 2004, 379). Articles about him appeared in *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. An Associated Press profile of Kerry appeared in more than a hundred newspapers. A *Boston Globe* reporter, Barbara Rabinovitz, visited his Waltham home and found their conversation interrupted by phone calls, television tapings, and quick gulps of ginger ale and chocolate chip cookies. She noted that Kerry had put away the fatigues worn during Dewey Canyon III and was wearing "sports glen-plaid pants, wide orange and blue ties, and a blue shirt with the monogram 'JFK.'" A few weeks later, Morley Safer filmed a profile piece for *60 Minutes*. Safer was impressed by Kerry's thoughtful reflections and range of interests. "I was knocked out," Safer recalled, "I never heard somebody so articulate during all my days covering Vietnam" (Brinkley 2004, 379). The *60 Minutes* broadcast set off a second wave of mediated interest (Brinkley 2004, 381).

Of course, there are several inherent problems in having a one-man Rolodex for antiwar veterans. Kerry quickly became the focus of personal attacks from the other side. White House tapes verify that on April 28, 1971, President Nixon and aide Charles Colson had a phone conversation about the twenty-seven-year-old veteran who had turned against the war. They derided him as a phony and even exchanged some false information about where he slept during Dewey Canyon. Colson then wrote a secret memo about the need to "[d]estroy the young demagogue before he becomes another Ralph Nader" (Brinkley 2004, 378). The media attention to Kerry also magnified real differences and petty jealousies with other VVAW members. Kerry stuck with the group through the summer of 1971, but when he parted ways with VVAW, yet another factor was in place for the dramatic decline in coverage by the time of the Last Patrol.

Highlights

News treatment of VVAW generally followed the patterns suggested by various authors describing social movements and news media.

One notable exception was the notion that VVAW attention rose in response to fragmented elite consensus. Public opinion data show a breakdown of consensus about the war long before the media discovered VVAW. Furthermore, the greatest war opposition came from lower, not upper, classes.

The war itself grew increasingly unpopular over time, but public disapproval of antiwar protesters remained fairly high and steady throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Declining coverage can be explained by many factors: excessive news reliance on Kerry (who by 1972 had left VVAW), disagreements within the organization, an extensive government effort to discredit VVAW, and a news tendency to think “we’ve done our antiwar veterans story.”

A Broader Meaning

As time passed after the fall of Saigon, Vietnam Veterans faced media frames that weren't particularly desirable. Antiwar veteran Tim Pluta (2009) observed that coverage of Vietnam veterans "tend[s] to be at the extremes of the range of the many vets from that time. There are either stories of the drug addict, alcoholic homeless vet or the vet made good that got into politics. The vast majority of vets that fall in between appear to have slipped through the cracks of media interest and thus from the minds of much of the general public that is led and informed by media reports."

The news media's dichotomous Vietnam Veterans frames also showed up in one public opinion poll during the late 1970s. The Veterans Administration (1979), working with Lou Harris and Associates, asked the public whether certain characteristics applied more to "the average young veteran who happened to serve anywhere in the Armed Forces during the Vietnam era," or "to the average young person who didn't happen to serve during that time," or equally to both. The "equally to both" option achieved a plurality for all questions, and a majority for most. Nevertheless, the public opinion results revealed some differences in public perception of Vietnam-era veterans versus non-veterans.

Veterans outpaced their non-veteran cohort in public perception of certain admirable characteristics. Only 9 percent of respondents

called vets more unpatriotic, but 30 percent would apply that term comparatively to non-veteran civilians of the same age. Respondents were three times, 18 percent to 6 percent, more likely to say that the non-vets rather than the vets had lost respect for the family. Regarding “spoiled, expect things given to them,” 31 percent put that more squarely on the non-vets versus only 7 percent for Vietnam veterans. Only one in twenty would attribute being selfish and self-centered more to the vets, but nearly one in four said that about non-veterans. Further, 22 percent of respondents thought failure to keep tradition and an excess interest in changing things should apply more to non-vets; only 13 percent said more to vets.

Equal groups of 16 percent of respondents thought vets and non-vets willing to take active roles regarding issues and politics, but the public by nine percentage points thought the vets less willing to rebel or protest (27 to 18), and by ten percentage points (20 to 10) less likely to take part in school and community affairs. Neither group stood out for public scorn for loose morals; only 11 percent for non-vets, 9 for vets.

The image of the Vietnam veteran as noble but troubled and tormented war remnant comes through in this survey. The public rated assertiveness and being outspoken as roughly even between the vets and non-vets, but by five percentage points (20 to 15), the public chose non-vets as better able to get a job, and by four percentage points better at holding a job. Though the vets scored better than non-vets concerning their discipline and willingness to work to get ahead, the public was three times more likely to attribute drinking problems, four times more likely to attribute drug problems, and nearly five times more likely to attribute suicide attempts to Vietnam veterans as opposed to non-veterans of the same era. The public also by five percentage points was more likely to think of the non-vets rather than the vets as knowing what they want and having clear

goals, and 13 percent more likely to attribute being well educated, trained, and prepared for a job to the non-veterans.

Resurrecting History

Similar to media coverage, the historical record failed to adequately depict the reality of the war. The powerful documentary *Two Days in October* (Kenner 2005), based on the David Maraniss book *They Marched into Sunlight* (2003), tells the story of two events, both occurring on October 17 and 18, 1967. One was a massive protest at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The demonstrators wanted Dow Chemical, maker of napalm, not to be allowed on campus to recruit. Madison Police brutally evicted the student protesters who had been occupying a campus building. At the same time, forty miles northwest of Saigon, the U.S. Army's 1st Division, the Black Lions, suffered devastating losses in an ambush. Major Jim Shelton survived the ambush and was astonished to see the military brass try to spin it into a victory. "Who's to tell what really happened if that's the way history is written," he lamented (Kenner 2005).

Diaries, letters, oral history, news clippings, and documentary footage all are useful in rescuing the stories of soldiers, protesters, and protesting soldiers from the safe stereotypes of popular culture and mythology-resurrecting revisionism. Yet we should not allow social movements like those antiwar veterans' groups to be relegated to dusty, forgotten corners of the public record.

Historian Barbara Tuchman (1984) reminds readers—and historical records like the Pentagon Papers confirm—that ignorance was not really a factor in the American tragedy in Vietnam. The problem was one of refusing to accept the conclusions of mounting evidence that the goal was unobtainable, the cost disproportionate to American interest, and the ultimate effect damaging to America's reputation and disposable power in the world.

One certainly can find historical obfuscation not only of that uncomfortable conclusion but also about antiwar protests and antiwar veterans. W. D. Ehrhart (2008) on January 18, 1982, delivered remarks to students at the George School, Newtown, Pennsylvania. He expressed concern that the lessons of the Pentagon Papers had been ignored, that those responsible for the Vietnam deceptions still had high positions in the establishment, and that then-president Ronald Reagan referred to Vietnam as a noble cause.

Two recent books on Vietnam aimed at young readers make sloppy errors or misleading suggestions regarding VVAW. The Eye-witness Books series' *Vietnam War* (S. Murray 2005) contains a Miami Beach photo of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War marching behind a banner at the Last Patrol. The caption declares, "Many antiwar veterans threw away their medals in protest." This caption implies a simultaneous event, not one that had happened a year earlier. Further, the book points out, on the left margin, that one placard is a VVAW symbol and that a nearby flag is North Vietnamese. Other flags are not identified, and it's not clear who, on the edge of the march, is carrying it. A more straightforward account appears in *The Vietnam Antiwar Movement in American History* (McCormick 2000). This book has one paragraph on VVAW, an account of the medals event at the Capitol. Unfortunately, the date is wrong, and the text states, "They threw down the Congressional Medals of Honor they had won in combat" (McCormick 2000). A more accurate phrase would have read: Bronze Stars, Purple Hearts, and other medals and ribbons.

The media path traveled by the VVAW had unique moments but also historic parallels. Newsreels were the prime visual medium of 1932, but camera crews rarely showed up at the Bonus March camps, though cameramen were told to cover any outbreak of violence. Fox and Hearst cameramen had specific orders from New York headquarters to shun the vets. Paramount carried only one short item;

Pathe' carried two. Still photo coverage was better, and some vets supported themselves selling still photos as postcards. The Bonus March vets created a newspaper, *B. E. F. News*, that claimed street sales of fifty thousand and out-of-town sales of twenty-five thousand. As with VVAW in Miami Beach, the veterans' camp had a number of police spies and informers (Dickson and Allen 2004).

The VVAW serves as an important historic link between the Bonus Army and a later protest group, the Iraq Veterans Against the War. Indeed, VVAW members have appeared with Iraq Veterans at several peace conferences and forums. Veteran and peace activist Tim Pluta (2009) wrote to this author, "There are some younger folks that are beginning to research and interview Vietnam era vets with what I would consider a more open and broad-minded approach. Perhaps the lessons learned will be learned by this next generation rather than ours."

Disturbingly, however, the media patterns have been eerily similar. Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans held their own Winter Soldier testimony in 2008. Much like the original Winter Soldier hearings, the event largely went ignored by the nation's news media.



The Winter Soldier event returns, this time regarding Iraq and Afghanistan.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.



[CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO](#)

Journalist Aaron Glantz on his Project Censored Award for covering Winter Soldier 2008. Courtesy of Link Media, Inc.
Available from the Internet Archive at www.archive.org.

Bill Davis, one of the many VVAW quoted in this book, died on September 4, 2007. David Cline, also quoted, died eleven days later. Their deaths are a reminder that although many of these brave young men died in Vietnam, many others lived to face their mortality much later in life. Many of these anti-warriors are old men now. Years ago they thought of themselves as John Wayne, headed off to heroic battle in service of noble cause and country. Harsh reality taught them otherwise, and they said so. “In scores, if not hundreds of novels, memoirs, poems, films, plays, and works of criticism about the Vietnam War, John Wayne is parodied, debunked, reviled, rejected, and metaphorically and sometimes literally shot dead,” writes Katherine Kinney (2000).



Bill Davis, Chicago Veterans Day 2004.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.



[CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO](#)
Bill Davis and Peter Zastrow, VVAW Veterans Day Event, Nov. 11, 2003, in Chicago.
Courtesy of VVAW.



Dave Cline.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.



[CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO](#)

Dave Cline at the VVAW 25th anniversary event, May 30, 1992, in New York City.
Courtesy of VVAW.

The vets defied convention and the odds, finding creative ways, anywhere and everywhere, to tell their stories to people not quite ready to hear them. Then, as convention and consensus cracked in April 1971, the world became ready to see and hear. So in the same city where the American quagmire in Vietnam began in deceit and continued through delusion, they spoke with heart-rending credibility and clarity.



[CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO](#)

This student documentary is a good summary.
Courtesy of VVAW.

For a brief moment, the television lights swung in their direction, and the vets were ready. The lights quickly swung elsewhere, but the vets continued to fight against the war, against future wars, and for veterans' care. Their narrative is a part of our national story, a narrative that intersects so many other story lines—a paranoid president and his Watergate scandals, post-traumatic stress and other injuries suffered by our veterans, the parallels to the folly that is the Iraq War, the lies and lingering resentments of the “swift boat” veterans (an ad hoc political group that in 2006 misrepresented and attacked Kerry’s war record), the inconclusive national effort to reconcile ourselves to our history in Vietnam, and the superficial tendencies of our news media that still manage to stumble upon something profound.

Hunter S. Thompson (1971), the self-described “gonzo journalist” who later caught and relayed the drama of the Silent March, seemed to catch part of the meaning, even though at the time, he was reminiscing of San Francisco in the middle 1960s:

It seems like a lifetime, or at least a Main Era—the kind of peak that never comes again . . . a very special time and place to be a part of. Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run . . . but no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant. . . History is hard to know, because of all the hired bullshit, but even without being sure of “history” it seems entirely reasonable to think that every now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash, for reasons that nobody really understands at the time—and which never explain, in retrospect, what

actually happened. . . . There was madness in any direction, at any hour. . . . You could strike sparks anywhere. There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning. . . . And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply prevail. There was no point in fighting—on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave. . . . So now, less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.

If you look closely, you can see a similar high water mark, on the Capitol Mall from April 1971, courtesy of the VVAW. Frank Toner, a former Catholic altar boy in Middletown, New York, turned disillusioned soldier and VVAW member, wrote during a reunion gathering, “We have seen the positive impact a small group of people can have when they work together to promote brotherhood and sisterhood. . . . Just a few thousand people can wake up the consciousness of a nation and help end a war. We know, we did it” (Barry 1997c).

The men who triumphed in Vietnam now are gray-haired, and many of their lives have taken intriguing turns. Art Blank, a psychiatrist who served in Vietnam and who, in 1982, joined the Veterans Administration to run the Vet Center program, estimates that roughly 10 percent of the 567 Vet Center leaders were in VVAW. Many times, these men help their fellow Vietnam Vets who are suffering from delayed stress—an estimated 500,000 to 700,000 people,

a quarter of those who served in Vietnam, half of those who saw heavy combat (MacPherson 2001, 191, 236). Many VVAW members also took up the cause of amnesty for those who faced punishment for war resistance (Halstead 1978, 704).

Ron Kovic grew disaffected with VVAW, but also disaffected with what the Vietnam lies say about society. He and director Oliver Stone were nominated for an Academy Award for the *Born on the Fourth of July* screenplay, and both won the Golden Globe. Kovic also was profiled in a book series chronicling the lives of the physically challenged (Moss 1994). Bobby Muller went on to form Vietnam Veterans of America. Muller had survived a landmine blast in Vietnam unscathed, only to be paralyzed later by wounds from enemy gunfire. He went on to become a leader in an international group working to ban landmines, a group that, in 1997, won the Nobel Peace Prize (Clines 1997).



Bobby Muller (left) and Barry Romo (right) at a 2008 version of Winter Soldier for Iraq and Afghanistan.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

John Kerry made his mark in the U.S. Senate and secured the 2004 Democratic Party presidential nomination. He endured seven million dollars worth of attack ads from a group calling itself “Boat Veterans for Truth.” The spurious claims of these ads tried to cast doubt on whether Kerry had actually earned the Bronze Star he won for rescuing an imperiled Green Beret (Schorr 2007).

“Swift boat” ads may be found here, Living Room Candidate, Museum of the Moving Image. Link is <http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/2004>.

Yet the run-of-the-mill VVAW member is in many ways still fighting—fighting not the war itself, nor the battle to end it. Now their fight is one of fact versus fiction, a struggle for the historical memory of their social movement.

John Zutz (1998) pointed out, “The image of the Vietnam vet in the early 1970s was strongly antiwar. There is no place in the American memory for the factually accurate image of vets throwing their medals back at Congress. Their image had to be changed if the United States wanted to go to war again.”



John Zutz, March 2008.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

S. Brian Willson (2000) worried about the effort to reframe the loss of Vietnam into a noble cause, one better served in the future by using proxy forces and high-tech weapons. Such a reframing would lose important lessons about the lies and hubris. One long-time member of Veterans for Peace, David Taylor (2009), argues that mainstream media are too corporate to challenge government calls to “support the mission,” even if that mission is supported by claims as bogus as the Gulf of Tonkin incident or the many lies leading to the Iraq War.



[CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO](#)

VVAW member Joe Miller's closing remarks at the VVAW's 40th anniversary event, Aug. 4, 2007, in Chicago. Miller relays his Gulf of Tonkin experience and gives his perspective about factors that led to the war.

Courtesy of VVAW.

Lembke (1999) also put it well:

Remembered as a war that was lost because of portrayal at home, Vietnam becomes a modern-day

Alamo that must be avenged, a pretext for more war and generations of more veterans. Remembered as a war in which soldiers and pacifists joined hands to fight for peace, Vietnam symbolizes popular resistance to political authority and the dominant images of what it means to be a good American. By challenging the images of the betrayed Vietnam veteran, we reclaim our role in the writing of our own history, the construction of our own memory, and the making of our own identity.

The lingering VVAW struggle must be to preserve the nuggets of truth in the historical record and in some of the news coverage against the simplifications and distortions of popular culture. Those who struggle against power also struggle against common perceptions. Heretical, but significant, social movements like VVAW go through stages of treatment by the larger society. Initially, the groups operate undiscovered. When finally they emerge and protest, they are ignored or dismissed as simply not possible. Later the dismissal switches to an assertion that they are wholly unrepresentative of any larger phenomenon or group.

If the group continues to grow, it is stereotyped, the representations emphasizing some irrelevant characteristic or minor participant. If they continue to challenge power, some least-threatening leaders or messages are adopted within the power structure. Then with the passage of time, the group message is distorted to favor establishment themes, until the bulk of historical popular memory forgets them entirely.

Such a fate should not be allowed to happen to VVAW. The reasons, by now, should be obvious, but perhaps were best summarized that summer of 1971 by Pentagon analyst turned antiwar activist

Daniel Ellsberg (“Pentagon Papers” *Time*, June 28, 1971): “To see the conflict and our part in it as a tragedy without villains, war crimes without criminals, lies without liars, espouses and promulgates a view of process, roles and motives that is not only grossly mistaken but which underwrites deceptions that have served a succession of Presidents.”

Highlights

As time passed, an image of Vietnam veterans as noble but troubled ex-warriors emerged. This image was reinforced by both news coverage and popular culture entertainment.

Historically, one can see many similarities in news coverage of the 1932 veterans' Bonus Army, the VVAW of the 1970s, and today's antiwar Iraq/Afghanistan veterans.

VVAW thus represents an important resource for refuting popular, simplistic, and erroneous notions about antiwar veterans. The organization's greatest struggle now is to preserve the genuine history of antiwar veterans from popular redefinition into a form less threatening to the status quo.

APPENDIX

Social Movement Theory as Applied to VVAW *Co-authored with Dr. Catherine Luther*

This book looks at U.S. network television news coverage of Vietnam Veterans Against the War using social movement theory as a frame of reference. It critically analyzes how the organization and its activities during the early 1970s were represented by the news reports.

Roberta Garner and John Tenuto (1997, 1) define social movement theory as “the project of creating a unified and coherent definition and explanation of social movements and related phenomena. Social movements are usually defined as collectivities engaged in noninstitutionalized discourses and practices aimed at changing existing conditions of society.” These scholars compiled a guide to much of the research, and concluded that the theory has changed based on intellectual currents, changes in the phenomena themselves, and the volatile nature of such movements (Garner and Tenuto 1997, 1-6).

From 1945 to the early 1960s, social movements were analyzed as irrational psychological aberrations and were approached via psychoanalytic paradigms. From the mid-1960s until the late-1970s, researchers tended to be kinder to persons engaged in social movements, viewing them as rational actors within social structures. Here, the paradigm shifts to organizational structures and resource mobilization. From the late 1970s until now, however, analysis largely has taken a deconstructionist approach. “According to these new intellectual currents,” writes Garner (1997, 6) in her introduction to *Social Movement Theory and Research*, “all human phenomena are

socially constructed in ongoing processes of cultural discourse and interaction; hence there is no bedrock for human society, either in the individual or in social structures.”

If social movements are perceived as socially constructed, it becomes crucial to understand which societal actors are taking part in the construction of their realities and in what manner. Several scholars (e.g., McLeod and Hertog 1999; Putnam 2002) have asserted that, over the past few decades, the mass media, especially the news media, have played prominent roles in the contouring of images associated with social movement organizations.

This approach to social movements through their social construction will be less than satisfying to those in the field who prefer materialist approaches, especially examinations of resource mobilization. These past approaches contributed greatly to our understanding of social movements, especially in their recognition of the importance of elites. However, as Tarrow has detailed, many researchers and theorists recently have expanded the study of social movements to look at culture as an important “meta-narrative” in formation, operation, goals, symbols, and success of movements. He proposed the following valuable synthesis:

People engage in contentious politics when patterns of political opportunities and constraints change and then, by strategically employing a repertoire of collective action, create new opportunities, which are used by others in widening cycles of contention. When their struggles revolve around broad cleavages in society, when they bring people together around inherited cultural symbols, and when they can build upon dense social networks and connective structures, then these episodes of contention result in sustained interactions with opponents—specifically in social movements. (1998, 19)

This theoretical synthesis seems particularly descriptive of VVAW. The inherited cultural symbols were themselves—a country's noble warriors. The dense social network was the powerful bond of those who have shared combat. The broad cleavage in society was the Vietnam War. The VVAW learned how to use and to gain attention strategically for collective action. It became loosely affiliated with other war opponent groups, but maintained a separate identity, as part of a widening cycle of contention. The sustained interaction with opponents included a long-term struggle against the Nixon Administration. The changing patterns of political opportunities and constraints included a vast and idealistic youth population dissatisfied with the “establishment” and a relatively new and powerful news medium—television. At times the political patterns worked for VVAW, at times against.

Social Movements and the News Media

Research on social movements suggests that the type of coverage these movements receive from the news media often reflects the needs of political and economic elites. Viewed as a part of the power elites in society, mainstream media are said to grant legitimacy only to those movements that are believed to pose no threat to the status quo. Those movements that are seen as undermining the stability of the established political and societal consensus are portrayed as deviant and lacking legitimacy.

In attempting to explain why journalists might assign deviant status to certain individuals or groups, Daniel Hallin (1986, 117, 162) created a model of the modes of journalistic coverage. Hallin contends that journalists operate within three spheres of journalistic coverage. The first is the sphere of legitimate controversy. Within this sphere, journalists attempt to be balanced and neutral in their coverage, mirroring the journalistic ideal of the watchdog model of

the press. The second is the sphere of consensus, in which journalists do not remain objective, but rather serve as advocates of what are viewed as consensus values. The third sphere of journalistic coverage is the sphere of deviance. Within this sphere, journalists act to silence or condemn those individuals or groups that are viewed as challenging political consensus. Through these models, Hallin argues that those individuals or groups, such as social movement organizations, that are striving to bring about change to the widely-agreed-upon political or societal stances encounter much difficulty in having their voices heard by the mainstream press.

Hallin's assertions are sustained by a number of studies regarding news coverage of social protest. In one of the earliest works, Breed (1955), in his analysis of newsroom practices, found that members of the press tend to establish informal organizational policies that are mainly aimed at promoting social conformity. He writes that by avoiding coverage of social actions deemed to be nonconformist, or by assigning these stories to staffers who will provide a certain slant to the actions, newspaper editors are able to maintain the deception of societal equilibrium and tranquility. Gitlin's (1980) study of anti-Vietnam war demonstrations showed that while the news media may at times concede to the need for certain reforms within the political system, it will disparage any movements that attempt to go against the system itself. He found that anti-Vietnam war demonstrators were often negatively presented, not in a manner reflective of the actual demonstrators.

McLeod and Hertog (1992; 1999), in several of their studies on social protests, found that demonstrators are often defined by the news media as being violent and criminal. The authors claim that journalists often use a violent crime narrative to set up a conflict scenario between protesters and law enforcement officers. Journalists' use of a conflict scenario in their coverage of social movements

has been found in other studies (e.g., Manoff and Schudson 1986; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000) as well. Conflict is said to boost the spectacle value of the coverage. By discussing the size of the protests, the presence of police, and clashes between police and protesters, newsworthiness of the protests is heightened. Newsworthiness is also heightened if protests are associated with issues already attracting news attention. With the increase in social movement coverage due to perceptions of newsworthiness, however, resistance to those changes being called for by the social movements also tend to rise (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Altschull 1984; Parenti 1986; Loewen 1996).

Justin Gustainis and Dan Hahn (1988) looked specifically at the social movements aimed at ending the Vietnam War, and asserted that those movements failed and that negative public reaction actually prolonged the U.S. role in the war. They argued that the protesters and protest groups made rhetorical errors, such as identifying with the counter culture and using immoderate protest tactics: violence, obscenity, and flag desecration. They argued that pro-war forces were very effective, with responses that tapped into the audience's fear of communism and opposition to protests in general and protest violence in particular. These authors make an important contribution, but one should note that only massive, noisy, and impolite protest garners mediated attention—and protesters must operate in that reality, and the smarter ones recognize and use that reality. Antiwar veterans, as this book demonstrates, wisely recognized the need to maintain an identity separate from the general antiwar movement, a separate identity that takes advantage of their hard-earned credibility.

It is impossible to determine precisely whether antiwar protest lengthened, shortened, or had no effect on the Vietnam War. There is no “control group” contemporaneous war done without protest for comparison. It seems likely that the war protests did some good by

breaking the “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann 1984). People who had doubts about the war (or any war sub-point such as cost, fatalities, congressional authorization, performance of South Vietnamese allies) had validation that they could express those doubts, even if at the same time they could express revulsion at the protesters bringing the message.

The Gustainis and Hahn article makes a stronger contribution when it points out that U.S. news media got to the antiwar protest story late, generally gave such protests negative coverage, and curtailed coverage when faced with criticism. CBS News, for example, never had antiwar protests comprise more than 20 percent of its overall Vietnam coverage (Hallin 1986, 192). Hodgson (1976) documented a decline in antiwar protest coverage following Vice President Spiro Agnew’s diatribes against television, press, and protest. Network executives, by nearly all accounts, certainly were quite concerned and even fearful about what the comments threatened, ranging from license challenges to FCC regulation (Schieffer 2003). NBC anchor and reporter John Chancellor admitted that, after the Agnew attacks, networks found themselves thinking “thrice not just twice” reaction pieces to presidential pro-war statements (Deane 1983).

The major findings from research on press coverage of social movements may be summarized as follows: the news media have been found to often: deny the existence of the movement, ignore the movement as meaningless or irrelevant, dismiss the cause as hopeless, stereotype the adherents as extreme or odd, create alternate and less threatening spokesmen, fragment the movement into competing groups, co-opt leadership, co-opt the least threatening ideas, prematurely declare the movement dead, recall the movement as an aberration no longer needed, and finally forget the movement ever happened.



By the 1980s, VVAW protests continued, but coverage waned.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

As a social movement, VVAW presents an intriguing case study because it is essentially made up of two often counter-opposing communities. As a veterans group, VVAW is part of a larger group that serves as a tribute to the nation and those who fought for the nation. At the same time, however, it is a group dedicated to the promotion of peace and social justice. Adam Garfinkle explained well how the VVAW were perfectly positioned to break through the implicit dilemma of coverage described by Gustainis and Hahn. Garfinkle wrote, “The reason is simple: veterans were by definition patriotic. They were not draft-dodgers. They did not and never had rooted for the enemy. They were not spoiled students on elite college campuses. They did not have long hair, wear beads, or openly smoke pot. In short the very fact that they appeared respectable helped earn their views respect” (1995 197).

Bob Ostertag noted, “By the early 1970s GIs opposed the war in proportionally greater numbers than students ever did, and at far greater risk to themselves” (2006, 118). Active duty antiwar veterans

could face dishonorable discharges, transfers to more dangerous duty, or even jail, often on trumped-up charges.

Adding to the credibility of antiwar veterans is their role as witness/convert. One survey of 172 of two thousand veterans who went to a VVAW protest in April 1971, Dewey Canyon III, found that most of those vets had either supported or had no opinion about the war before going to Vietnam; but solid majorities reported undergoing a drastic change in viewpoint while serving in Vietnam. Before the war, the respondents were evenly divided among self-described liberals, moderates, and conservatives. After Vietnam, 48.8 percent called themselves radical, 18.5 percent extreme radical, and fewer than 6 percent self-identified in the moderate to conservative range. Unsurprisingly, the vets listed personal experience in Vietnam with the Vietnamese, other GIs, and other Americans as the leading sources in forming their new attitudes (Mowlana and Geffert 1971).



An unidentified veteran, laden with medals, listens to speakers at the VVAW war protest event, Dewey Canyon III. Photo courtesy of VVAW.

Despite the unwillingness of many people to accept the fact, a majority of Vietnam era veterans opposed the war. In 1977 and 1979, Ellen Frey-Wouters and Robert S. Laufer surveyed 326 Vietnam veterans, 341 Vietnam-era veterans, and 592 non-veterans. The researchers reported that few American GIs went to war with antiwar attitudes, but while they served in Vietnam “a plurality of veterans were participating in a war they clearly opposed or to which they had a variety of confused responses that amounted to less than full support for the American involvement. Upon return home, opposition to the American role in the war often intensified. At the time of our interviews, a majority of Vietnam veterans agreed that we should have stayed out of the conflict” (1986, 87).

Time of service mattered. Most pre-Tet veterans supported the war; most post-Tet U.S. veterans did not. Branch of service also mattered. Only 23 percent of Marines opposed the war, but pluralities of army and navy veterans did. Combat itself was not a significant



Active Duty GIs and Ex-POWs supporting VVAW.
Photo courtesy of VVAW.

factor in war opposition, but those directly exposed to “abusive violence” report that this violence affected their view of the war, almost always in the direction of opposition (Frey-Wouters and Laufer 1986, 79-87, 387-408).

Hipsher (2007) argues that VVAW can be regarded as a “heretical social movement organization.” She includes it with such groups as Veterans for Peace, Iraqi Veterans Against the War, Catholics for Free Choice, and the Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians. These groups form a special class of collective struggle because they articulate positions and pursue goals contrary to what the larger community might presume is their identity group position. In the case of VVAW, the group was specifically created to contest the Vietnam War efforts of the U.S. and contradicted the position taken by the larger veteran community, similar to World War II vets in the American Legion, sympathetic to the U.S. cause.

Based on past studies on social protest, one can assume that VVAW would have encountered scant news coverage of its early and vibrant demonstrations. The group would not have been covered extensively except when official reactions, such as arrests and trials, led reporters to the story. Because the demonstrators themselves were war veterans, the coverage might have been slightly different from the type of coverage provided to most social demonstrations. The very existence of large numbers of antiwar veterans might have led to a form of cognitive dissonance for much of the public and a good many reporters and editors.

By examining the major U.S. network television coverage of VVAW in its early years, this book attempts to provide insight into how the VVAW as a heretical social movement might have been covered and whether the coverage can be considered distinct from standard social movement coverage.

Highlights

Social movement theory suggests that as organizations grow more threatening to the status quo, mediated resistance also rises. This generally happened with VVAW.

The VVAW may be viewed as a heretical social movement, one whose views may run counter to public assumption of its position. In the case of VVAW, this led to enhanced credibility through personal experience with the Vietnam War.

News coverage of VVAW followed a pattern common to most social movements. News media miss the story, then downplay its significance, then distort its message, then co-opt certain messages or messengers, then dismiss it as no longer needed, and finally forget it happened.

VVAW did not fall into the news trap experienced by other social movements, using violence to gain attention, only to have the violence swallow the message. VVAW stayed non-violent.

Unlike some other social movements VVAW success did not flow from a breakdown of elite consensus. It largely was a working-class phenomenon, gaining attention well after elite consensus about the Vietnam War had fallen apart.

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Sound: Yes, Time in: 01:40:00:00 Time out: 01:43:19:00.
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68/024 Tape: *PM2053*.
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Sunday brings more protests for peace in Vietnam) 1968.
Issue Date: 28/03/1968 Sound: Yes. Time in: 01:44:05:00
Time out: 01:45:23:00. Canister: 68/26 Film ID: 2053.29.
Sort number: 68/026 Tape: *PM2053*.
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Sound: Yes. Time in: 01:19:54:00 Time out: 01:21:42:00.

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01:21:53:00 Time out: 01:28:59:00. Canister: 68/60 D
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