Tonight, American and South Vietnamese units will attack the headquarters for the entire Communist military operation in South Vietnam. This key control center has been occupied by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong for 5 years in blatant violation of Cambodia's neutrality.

This is not an invasion of Cambodia. The areas in which these attacks will be launched are completely occupied and controlled by North Vietnamese forces. Our purpose is not to occupy the areas. Once enemy forces are driven out of these sanctuaries and once their military supplies are destroyed, we will withdraw....

We take this action not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam and winning the just peace we all desire. We have made—we will continue to make every possible effort to end this war through negotiation at the conference table rather than through more fighting on the battlefield.

Let us look again at the record. We have stopped the bombing of North Vietnam. We have cut air operations by over 20 percent. We have announced withdrawal of over 250,000 of our men. We have offered to withdraw all of our men if they will withdraw theirs. We have offered to negotiate all issues with only one condition—and that is that the future of South Vietnam be determined not by North Vietnam, and not by the United States, but by the people of South Vietnam themselves. ....

The action that I have announced tonight puts the leaders of North Vietnam on notice that we will be patient in working for peace; we will be conciliatory at the conference table, but we will not be humiliated. We will not be defeated. We will not allow American men by the thousands to be killed by an enemy from privileged sanctuaries.

The time came long ago to end this war through peaceful negotiations. We stand ready for those negotiations. ....

But if the enemy response to our most conciliatory offers for peaceful negotiation continues to be to increase its attacks and humiliate and defeat us, we shall react accordingly.

My fellow Americans, we live in an age of anarchy, both abroad and at home. We see mindless attacks on all the great institutions which have been created by... free civilizations in the last 500 years. Even here in the United States, great universities are being systematically destroyed. ....

If, when the chips are down, the world's most powerful nation, the United States of America, acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world.

It is not our power but our will and character that is being tested tonight. ....

I have rejected all political considerations in making this decision.

Whether my party gains in November is nothing compared to the lives of 400,000 brave American fighting for our country and for the cause of peace and freedom in Vietnam. Whether I may be a one-term President is insignificant compared to whether by our failure to act in this crisis the United States proves itself to be unworthy to lead the forces of freedom in this critical period in world history. I would rather be a one-term President and do what I believe is right than to be a two-term President at the cost of seeing America become a second-rate power and to see this Nation accept the first defeat in its proud 190-year history. ....

It is customary to conclude a speech from the White House by asking support for the President of the United States. Tonight, I depart from that precedent. What I ask is far more important. I ask for your support for our brave men fighting tonight halfway around the world—not for territory—not for glory—but so that their younger brothers and their sons and your sons can have a chance to grow up in a world of peace and freedom and justice.

Thank you and good night.

59. Vietnam Veterans Against the War:
Testimony to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee (April 22, 1971)*

By John Kerry

US troops were told during training that they were being sent to "save" the South Vietnamese from communists. As soon as they got involved in South Vietnam, many began to question what they were doing. A widely published report (Associated Press) on September 30, 1965, quoted a letter from a Wichita, Kansas, soldier: "There are so many Cong here that in three

*From the Congressional Record, May 3, 1971. The statement was made April 22, 1971, during the week of antiwar protests by Vietnam Veterans Against the War.
days we captured 12 VC and killed 33. Mom, I had to kill a woman and a baby... I swear to God this place is worse than hell. Why must I kill women and kids? Who knows who's right? As these soldiers became veterans, they brought the war's experience home with them. In 1967, Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) was formed.

In February 1971, about 150 veterans convened the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit to hold hearings on the violence they had committed or witnessed in Vietnam. They took the name from Thomas Paine's words of 1776: "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country." The media paid little attention. There was some attempt to discredit the hearings by suggesting that the veterans were liars. But on April 6, 1971, Republican Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon introduced the entire testimony into the Congressional Record.

VVAW carried out Operation Dewey Canyon III, "a limited incursion" into the country of Congress, during the week of April 9-13, 1971. (Dewey Canyon I was a covert invasion of Laos in 1969; Dewey Canyon II was the first week of the invasion of Laos that had just taken place in February.) Along with Gold Star Mothers (mothers whose sons were killed in Vietnam), they spoke to tourists and passersby, dramatizing their message with "guerrilla war" shits. Over a thousand veterans took part, some in wheelchairs and others on crutches. They camped on the Capitol mall, defying a Supreme Court injunction. Some of them tried to turn themselves in as war criminals at the Pentagon.

The most dramatic event of Dewey Canyon III came on the final day of the protest. About 800 veterans lined up at the barricade built that week to keep demonstrators off the Capitol steps. One by one they stepped up to the microphones and made a statement. Then they tossed their Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, Purple Hearts, and campaign ribbons over the barricade. Millions of Americans watched on television as veterans voiced their feelings: "Here's my merit badges for murder... from the country I betrayed by enlisting in the US Army." "I'd like to say just one thing for the people of Vietnam. I'm sorry. I hope that someday I can return to Vietnam and help rebuild that country we tore apart." 4

A day earlier, John Kerry, representing VVAW, made the statement reprinted below before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Kerry had been awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star with oak leaf cluster, and three Purple Hearts. In 1982 he was elected lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, and in 1984 he was elected to the US Senate.

Thank you very much, Senator Fulbright, Senator Javits, Senator Symington, Senator Pell. I would like to say for the record, and also for the men behind me who are also wearing the uniform and their medals, that my sitting here is really symbolic. I am not here as John Kerry. I am here as one member of the group of 1,000 which is a small representation of a very much larger group of veterans in this country, and it would be possible for all of them to sit at this table they would be here and have the same kind of testimony.

1. President Nixon preferred the word "incursion" to "invasion."


I would simply like to speak in very general terms. I apologize if my statement is general because I received notification yesterday you would hear me and I am afraid that because of the court injunction I was up most of the night and haven't had a great deal of time to prepare for this hearing. 5

I would like to speak on behalf of all those veterans and say that many months ago in Detroit we had an investigation at which over 150 honorably discharged, and many very highly decorated, veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia. These were not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day to day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command.

It is impossible to describe to you exactly what did happen in Detroit— the emotions in the room and the feelings of the men who were reliving their experiences in Vietnam. They relived the absolute horror of what this country, in a sense, made them do.

They told stories that at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war and the normal and very particular ravages which is done by the applied bombing power of this country.

We call this investigation the Winter Soldier Investigation. The term Winter Soldier is a play on words of Thomas Paine's in 1776 when he spoke of the Sunshine Patriots and summer time soldiers who deserted at Valley Forge because the going was rough.

We who have come here to Washington have come here because we feel we have to be winter soldiers now. We could come back to this country, we could be quiet, we could hold our silence, we could not tell what went on in Vietnam, but we feel because of what threatens this country, not the reds, but the crimes which we are committing that threaten it, that we have to speak out.

I would like to talk to you a little bit about what the result is of the feelings these men carry with them after coming back from Vietnam. The country doesn't know it yet but it has created a monster, a monster in the form of millions of men who have been taught to deal and to trade in violence and who are given the chance to die for the biggest nothing in history; men who have returned with a sense of anger and a sense of betrayal which no one has yet grasped.

As a veteran and one who feels this anger I would like to talk about it. We are angry because we feel we have been used in the worst fashion by the administration of this country.

5. The Supreme Court injunction forbade sleeping on the mall. The evening before Kerry made this statement, there was a long meeting with a vote on whether or not to stay on the mall overnight. The vote was 480 to 400 to stay. See Art Goldberg, "Vietnam Vets: The Anti-War Army," Ramparts, July 1971, reprinted in Judith Carney and Marc Weiss, eds., A House Divided: Radical Perspectives on Social Problems (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973).—eds.
In 1970 at West Point Vice President Agnew said “some glamorize the criminal misfits of society while our best men die in Asian rice paddies to preserve the freedom which most of those misfits abuse,” and this was used as a rallying point for our effort in Vietnam.

But for us, as boys in Asia whom the country was supposed to support, his statement is a terrible distortion from which we can only draw a very deep sense of revulsion, and hence the anger of some of the men who are here in Washington today. It is a distortion because we in no way consider ourselves the best men of this country; because those he calls misfits were standing up for us in a way that nobody else in this country dared to; because so many who have died would have returned to this country to join the misfits in their efforts to ask for an immediate withdrawal from South Vietnam; because so many of those best men have returned as quadriplegics and amputees—and they lie forgotten in Veterans Administration Hospitals in this country which fly the flag which so many have chosen as their own personal symbol—and we cannot consider ourselves America’s best men when we are ashamed of and hated for what we were called on to do in Southeast Asia.

In our opinion, and from our experience, there is nothing in South Vietnam which could happen that realistically threatens the United States of America. And to attempt to justify the loss of one American life in Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos by linking such loss to the preservation of freedom, which those misfits supposedly abuse, is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it is that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart.

We are probably much more angry than that, but I don’t want to go into the foreign policy aspects because I am outclassed here. I know that all of you talk about every possible alternative for getting out of Vietnam. We understand that. We know you have considered the seriousness of the aspects to the utmost level and I am not going to try to dwell on that. But I want to relate to you the feeling that many of the men who have returned to this country express because we are probably angrier about all that we were told about Vietnam and about the mystical war against communism.

We found that not only was it a civil war, an effort by a people who had for years been seeking their liberation from any colonial influence whatsoever, but also we found that the Vietnamese whom we had enthusiastically molded after our own image were hard put to take up the fight against the threat we were supposedly saving them from.

We found most people didn’t even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. They wanted everything to do with the war, particularly with this foreign presence of the United States of America, to leave them alone in peace, and they practiced the art of survival by siding with whichever military force was present at a particular time, be it Viet Cong, North Vietnamese or American.

We found also that all too often American men were dying in those rice paddies for want of support from their allies. We saw first hand how monies from American taxes were used for a corrupt dictatorial regime. We saw that many people in this country had a one-sided idea of who was kept free by our flag, and blacks provided the highest percentage of casualties. We saw Vietnam ravaged equally by American bombs and search and destroy missions, as well as by Viet Cong terrorism, and yet we listened while this country tried to blame all of the havoc on the Viet Cong.

We rationalized destroying villages in order to save them. We saw America lose her sense of morality as she accepted very cooly a My Lai and refused to give up the image of American soldiers who hand out chocolate bars and chewing gum.

We learned the meaning of free fire zones, shooting anything that moves, and we watched while America placed a cheapness on the lives of orientals.

We watched the United States falsification of body counts, in fact the glorification of body counts. We listened while month after month we were told the back of the enemy was about to break. We fought using weapons against “oriental human beings.” We fought using weapons against those people which I do not believe this country would dream of using were we fighting in the European theater. We watched while men charged up hills because a general said that hill has to be taken, and after losing one platoon or two platoons they marched away to leave the hill for reoccupation by the North Vietnamese. We watched pride allow the most unimportant battles to be blown into extravaganzas, because we couldn’t lose, and we couldn’t retreat, and because it didn’t matter how many American bodies were lost to prove that point, and so there were Hamburger Hills and Khe Sanh and Hill 81s and Fire Base 6s, and so many others.

Now we are told that the men who fought there must watch quietly while American lives are lost so that we can exercise the incredible arrogance of Vietnamizing the Vietnamese.

Each day to facilitate the process by which the United States washes her hands of Vietnam someone has to give up his life so that the United States doesn’t have to do something that the entire world already knows, so that we can’t say that we have made a mistake. Someone has to die so that President Nixon won’t be, and these are his words, “the first President to lose a war.”

We are asking Americans to think about that because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake? But we are trying to do that, and we are doing it with thousands of rationalizations, and if you read carefully the President’s last speech to the people of this country, you can see that he says, and says clearly, “but the issue, gentlemen, is communism, and the question is whether or not we will leave this country to the communists or whether or not we will try to give it hope to be a free people.” But the point is they are not a free people now under us. They are not a free people, and we cannot fight communism all over the world. I think we should have learned that lesson by now.

But the problem of veterans goes beyond this personal problem, because you think about a poster in this country with a picture of Uncle Sam and the picture
saying "I want you." And a young man comes out of high school and says, "That is
fine, I am going to serve my country," and he goes to Vietnam and he shoots and
he kills and he does his job. Or maybe he doesn't kill. Maybe he just goes and he
comes back, and when he gets back to this country he finds that he isn't really
wanted, because the largest corps of unemployed in the country—it varies
depending on who you get it from, the Veterans Administration says 15 percent
and various other sources 22 percent—but the largest corps of unemployed in this
country are veterans of this war, and of those veterans 33 percent of the unem-
ployed are black. That means one out of every ten of the nation's unemployed is
a veteran of Vietnam.

The hospitals across the country won't, or can't meet their demands. It is not a
question of not trying; they haven't got the appropriations. A man recently died
after he had a tracheotomy in California, not because of the operation but be-
cause there weren't enough personnel to clean the mucus out of his tube and he
suffocated to death.

Another young man just died in a New York VA hospital the other day. A
friend of mine was lying in a bed two beds away and tried to help him but he
couldn't. He rang a bell and there was nobody there to service that man and so he
died of convulsions.

I understand 57 percent of all those entering the VA hospitals talk about sui-
cide. Some 27 percent have tried, and they try because they come back to this
country and they have to face what they did in Vietnam, and then they come back
and find the indifference of a country that doesn't really care.

Suddenly we are faced with a very sickening situation in this country, because
there is no moral indignation and, if there is, it comes from people who are al-
most exhausted by their past indignations, and I know that many of them are
sitting in front of me. The country seems to have lain down and shrugged off
something as serious as Laos, just as we calmly shrugged off the loss of 700,000
lives in Pakistan, the so-called greatest disaster of all times [the November 13,
1970, cyclone in what is now Bangladesh—eds.].

But we are here as veterans to say we think we are in the midst of the greatest
disaster of all times now because they are still dying over there—not just Amer-
icans, but Vietnamese—and we are rationalizing leaving that country so that those
people can go on killing each other for years to come.

Americans seem to have accepted the idea that the war is winding down, at
least for Americans, and they have also allowed the bodies which were once used
by a President for statistics to prove that we were winning that war, to be used as
evidence against a man who followed orders and who interpreted those orders
differently than hundreds of other men in Vietnam.

We veterans can only look with amazement on the fact that this country has
been unable to see there is absolutely no difference between ground troops and a
helicopter crew, and yet people have accepted a differentiation fed them by the
administration.

No ground troops are in Laos so it is all right to kill Laotians by remote con-
trol. But believe me the helicopter crews fill the same body bags and they wreak
the same kind of damage on the Vietnamese and Laotian countryside as anybody
else, and the President is talking about allowing that to go on for many years to
come. One can only ask if we will really be satisfied only when the troops march
into Hanoi.

We are asking here in Washington for some action; action from the Congress
of the United States of America which has the power to raise and maintain ar-
 mies, and which by the Constitution also has the power to declare war.

We have come here, not to the President, because we believe that this body can
be responsive to the will of the people, and we believe that the will of the people
says that we should be out of Vietnam now.

We are here in Washington also to say that the problem of this war is not just a
question of war and diplomacy. It is part and parcel of everything that we are
trying as human beings to communicate to people in this country—the question
of racism which is rampant in the military, and so many other questions such as
the use of weapons; the hypocrisy in our taking umbrage at the Geneva Conven-
tions and using that as justification for a continuation of this war when we are
more guilty than any other body of violations of those Geneva Conventions; in
the use of free fire zones, harassment interdiction fire, search and destroy mis-
sions, the bombings, the torture of prisoners, the killing of prisoners, all accepted
policy by many units in South Vietnam. That is what we are trying to say. It is part
and parcel of everything.

An American Indian friend of mine who lives in the Indian Nation of Acatraz
put it to me very succinctly. He told me how as a boy on an Indian reservation he
had watched television and he used to cheer the cowboys when they came in and
shot the Indians, and then suddenly one day he stopped in Vietnam and he said
"my God, I am doing to these people the very same thing that was done to my
people," and he stopped. And that is what we are trying to say, that we think this
thing has to end.

We are also here to ask, and we are here to ask vehemently, where are the
leaders of our country? Where is the leadership? We are here to ask where are
McNamara, Rostow, Bundy, Gilpatric and so many others? Where are they now
that we, the men whom they sent off to war, have returned? These are command-
ers who have deserted their troops, and there is no more serious crime in the laws
of war. The Army says they never leave their wounded. The Marines say they never
leave even their dead. These men have left all the casualties and retreated behind
a pious shield of public rectitude. They have left the real stuff of their reputations
bleaching behind them in the sun in this country.

Finally, this administration has done us the ultimate dishonor. They have at-
ttempted to disown us and the sacrifices we made for this country. In their blind-
ness 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 for 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 last ten years and more, so when 30 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.

Thank you.

60. The Ecological Impact of the Air War*

By Paul Feeny with Jim Allaway

During all of World War II, the United States dropped about 2 million tons of bombs in all theaters, including the strategic bombing of Europe and Japan and the tactical bombing in all campaigns throughout the Pacific and European theaters. By the end of 1971, the United States had dropped 6.3 million tons of bombs in Indochina.1 In just two years, 1968–1969, the United States dropped over one a half times more tonnage on South Vietnam alone than all the Allies dropped on Germany throughout World War II.2 By 1969, North Vietnam was being hit each month with the explosive force of two atomic bombs. The 1972 Christmas bombing alone ravaged Hanoi and Haiphong with more tonnage than Germany dropped on Great Britain from 1940 through 1945. The total firepower used by the United States on Vietnam probably exceeded the amount used in all previous wars combined. Bombs dropped on Vietnam between 1965 and 1969 equaled “500 pounds... for every man, woman, and child in Vietnam.”3 Even these statistics do not convey the vast ecological disaster caused by just the immediate after-effects of the high explosives, such as the 21 million bomb craters created in South Vietnam alone, not to mention the prolonged effects of chemical warfare.

The US air war in Indochina employed unprecedented technological sophistication. The incendiary bombs of World War II and Korea were refined into new napalm and phosphorous bombs with the capacity for creating far greater areas of burning, more intense heat, and improved ability to stick to human skin. The gargantuan “Daisy Cutter,” weighing 7.5 tons, was dropped by parachute and detonated above the ground, flattening all trees and structures in an area with a diameter equal to ten football fields. “Smart bombs” were guided by laser. The major university laboratories worked to perfect a whole arsenal of fragmentation bombs, including cluster bombs carried in a “mother bomb” and “flechette bombs” designed to maximize internal body wounds. When Vietnamese surgeons became adept at removing the metal flechettes imbedded deeply in the victims’ bodies, US scientists redesigned the bombs to use plastic flechettes that could not be detected by X-rays.

The essence of air war is terror: Planes appear suddenly, and nobody in their path knows their intended target. In the South, this terror was aimed at the rural population, seeking to drive them into government-controlled areas, punishing them for supporting the guerrillas and trying to isolate the guerrilla army from its base among the people. This strategic theory tends to ignore the possibility that the terror may translate into anger and hatred. Indeed, many analysts have concluded that the terror bombing of the countryside in Vietnam probably created more opponents than it destroyed.

Against the North, the terror was first called “retaliatory” and a means to “punish” those supporting the insurgency in the South. But even before the admitted bombing began, another possible aim of the air war had been suggested by CIA analyst William Kaye: “Unless major military operations sap a substantial proportion of North Viet Nam’s national effort, a degree of industrial progress is likely to be achieved that may well become a more effective means of political penetration in neighboring countries than direct military intervention.”4 When the “retaliatory” raids commenced, their very first targets—announced as military bases—were North Vietnam’s most advanced industrial centers. For example, the air raid on “retaliation” for the Gulf of Tonkin incidents (Reading 34) were officially described as PT bases. But, as journalist Bernard Fall pointed out in the Washington Post, “none of the targets attacked was previously known as a regular port or base area. Hon-gay, for example, was one of the largest open-pit mining operations in Asia, if not the world.”5 By 1967, the secret study conducted by the Jason Division of the Institute for Defense Analysis reached this conclusion:


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1. Littauer and Uphoff, p. 9. This volume, prepared by the Air War Study Group of Cornell University, is the essential text on the air war through mid-1971, giving rich bibliographic material and statistics.
2. Littauer and Uphoff, pp. 10 and 203.