

## Epilogue

And so a New Soldier has returned to America, to a nation torn apart by the killing we were asked to do. But, unlike veterans of other wars and some of this one, the New Soldier does not accept the old myths.

We will not quickly join those who march on Veterans' Day waving small flags, calling to memory those thousands who died for the "greater glory of the United States." We will not accept the rhetoric. We will not readily join the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars-in fact, we will find it hard to join anything at all and when we do, we will demand relevancy such as other organizations have recently been unable to provide. We will not take solace from the creation of monuments or the naming of parks after a select few of the thousands of dead Americans and Vietnamese. We will not uphold traditions which decorously memorialize that which was base and grim.

It is from these things the New Soldier is asking America to turn. We are asking America to turn from false glory, hollow victory, fabricated foreign threats, fear which threatens us as a nation, shallow pride which feeds off fear, and mostly from the promises which have proven so deceiving these past ten years.

For many of us there is little to remember but the promises and, most poignantly, the loss of the symbols of those promises -- of John and Robert Kennedy, of Martin Luther King, Jr., of Medgar Evers, of Fred Hampton and Malcolm X, of Allison Krause, Sandy Scheuer, Jeffrey Miller, and William Schroeder from Kent State and Philip Gibbs and James Green from Jackson State; the loss, too, of friends, of Richard Pershing, Peter Johnson, Johnny White, Don Droz, and the other 53,000 Americans who have lost their lives in this degrading and immoral war. The promises of peace candidates who were not peacemakers; of civil rights laws which were not enforced; of educational and medical aid which was downgraded in priority below bombs and guns; of equal opportunity while Mexican-Americans and blacks were drafted in numbers disproportionate to their representation in this country and then made up casualties in even greater disproportion.

I think that, more than anything, the New Soldier is trying to point out how there are two Americas -- the one the speeches are about and the one we really are. Rhetoric has blinded us so much that we are unable to see the realities which exist in this country.

We were sent to Vietnam to kill Communism. But we found instead that we were killing women and children. We knew the saying "War is hell" and we knew also that wars take their toll in civilian casualties. In Vietnam, though, the "greatest soldiers in the world," better armed and better equipped than the opposition, unleashed the power of the greatest technology in the world against thatch huts and mud paths. In the process we created a nation of refugees, bomb craters, amputees, orphans, widows, and prostitutes, and we gave new meaning to the words of the Roman historian Tacitus: "Where they made a desert they called it peace."

The New Soldier has come back determined to make changes without making the world more unjust in the effort to make it just. We have come back determined that human will can control technology and that there is greater dignity and power in human spirit than we have yet been willing to grant ourselves. In Vietnam we made it particularly easy to deny that spirit. We extended an indifference which has too often been part of this country's history and made it easy for men to deal in abstractions. "Oriental human beings" -- "gooks" -- "body count" -- "Nape" -- "Waste 'em" -- "free-fire zone" -- "If they're dead, they're VC" -- the abstractions took command from the commanders themselves and we realized too late that we were the prisoners of our own neglect and callowness.

By discussing crimes committed in war, the New Soldier is trying to break through the callowness and end the neglect. Regardless of whether crimes have been committed in other wars or even by the other side in this one, America must understand how our participation in Vietnam and the methods and motives used by American fighting men are part of a continuing national moral standard. As New Soldiers we are seeking to elevate that standard as well as to demonstrate where it has been part of a significant illusion. Individuals are trying, by denying themselves the luxury of forgetting about their acts, to spare others the agony of having to commit them at some time in the future.

This is not to say that all soldiers have departed Vietnam with the same feelings about their military service. Certainly not all veterans of this war are New Soldiers. Not all want to be or even understand what many of their veteran contemporaries are trying to say.

Even among the New Soldiers, in our hatred for the war and our drive for change, there is a wide divergence on approaches to change, or, for that matter, on what causes the need for change. I know that my own views do not necessarily represent the feelings of some Vietnam Veterans Against The War. But among all there is an intense and deep-rooted agreement that America has lost sight, hopefully only temporarily, of much that we knew as our greatness.

The New Soldier does not have all the answers. We do not even pretend to. Unquestionably we lack some of the depth of experience from which to provide guidelines for many policy questions. We are aware also of all the traditional arguments -- that those in power have access to information, that America can do no wrong, that America has particular interests which it must safeguard, and so on. In reality, however, there is a big difference between these arguments and what happens to the people involved. In the end, the abstractions never convey the reality of human life.

To be sure, those who make the decisions experience special interest pressures which others, not directly involved in the decisionmaking process, will not feel. Consequently, those on the outside of the power spectrum find it easier to prescribe solutions for the myriad problems we confront today. In their simplicity these solutions sometimes ignore reality. But more often they cut to the quick of the problem and those on the outside of the power structure show in the absoluteness of their criticisms and demands more wisdom, more moral strength, more compassion, and far more willingness to consider what effect the prescribed solution will have on people -- not the people whose security and social welfare is already guaranteed, but those thousands who are literally and figuratively "in the street."

I myself went into the service with very little awareness of the people in the streets. I accepted then and still accept the idea of service to one's country. But because of all that I saw in Vietnam, the treatment of civilians, the ravaging of their countryside, the needless, useless deaths, the deception and duplicity of our policy, I changed. Traditional assumptions and expectations simply were not enough. I still want to serve my country. I am still willing to pick up arms and defend it -- die for it, if necessary. Now, however, I will not go blindly because my government says that I must go. I will not go unless we can make real our promises of self-determination and justice at home. I will not go unless the threat is a real one and we all know it to be so. I will not go unless the people of this country decide for themselves that we must all of us go.

J.K.

## Appendix

Vietnam Veterans Against The War:  
A Profile Study of the Dissenters

by Hamid Mowlana and Paul H. Geffert/June, 1971

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This survey was conducted by the authors independently of any organization or institution and had no sponsors or support financially or otherwise from any source.

The arrival of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Washington prompted many comments from politicians, political observers, and the American people in general. The men who had experienced the war focused the attention of the nation on themselves and their cause through a week of demonstrations, lobbying, and guerilla theatre. Much was said, and will be said, about their impact on politics and society at large. Their actions and their speeches were carefully recorded. What was missing from these observations, however, was an examination of the nature of the anti-war Vietnam veteran himself, his background, and his opinions and attitudes.

We intended to throw light upon the anti-war veteran as a person, and as a group, examining his socioeconomic background, his sources of information about the world in general and specifically the Asian war.

This survey was undertaken on April 23, 1971, among the veterans encamped on the Mall in Washington. The encampment had about 1,000 veterans. The total number of veterans who came to Washington was estimated at about 2,300. The other veterans stayed in homes, congressional offices, and in truck and trailer campers. Some 200 survey questionnaires were distributed randomly, but only 172 forms were returned and tallied. All of the survey forms were filled in by veterans who had served in Vietnam.

If we could create a composite demonstrator, one characterized by those qualities which the majority of Vietnam veterans at the demonstration possessed, our survey shows that he was a Northeastern United States urban dweller, between the ages of 21 and 25. He had finished high school and had some college education, and was at present either unemployed or a college student. The average anti-war veteran, according to our survey, was a many-sided individual who did not easily fit into preconceived categories which many find associated with the peace movement. His world outlook and political opinion changed drastically from a moderately conservative to a liberal one during his tenure in the service. He cited his personal contact with the Vietnamese people and with his fellow GIs as the two major sources of information which led to his change of opinion and attitude about the war.

While a majority of the demonstrators made their homes in the Northeast before their entrance into the service, a substantial minority were from the Midwest. Together, these two groups accounted for nearly 80 percent of the anti-war veterans in Washington. Few came from the Western states and fewer from the South.

The religious affiliation of the demonstrators provides an interesting dichotomy. The two largest groups responding were Catholics and agnostics. Here, on the one hand, we find a large percentage of demonstrators with rather strictly traditional church-oriented beliefs. On the other hand, a great many veterans were doubters and challengers of faith. Few, however, fully rejected religious beliefs through atheism. Especially notable for their lack of representation were the Jewish veterans. Only 2.9 percent of our sample were Jewish, a group often associated with liberal movements in the United States in recent years.

Approximately one half of the demonstrators came from families with occupations in industrial labor. Professional fields accounted for about one third of the demonstrators' family backgrounds. Only 2.2 percent of the men came from agricultural families.

When we examined what the veteran himself was doing prior to entering the service we discovered over 43 percent of them had just completed high school or college. Some 22 percent of the respondents were drafted while in school. The remainder were working -- the overwhelming majority in industrial labor positions.

About one in five veterans (21.8 percent) said that they were actively employed at the present time in such professions as sales, teaching, labor, and agricultural. Over 41 percent identified themselves as students enrolled in colleges, while 36.8 percent said they were unemployed.

The survey showed that two out of three men had enlisted for the military service, rather than being drafted. The political views of the veterans prior to entrance into the service may in part account for this. We found that only slightly less than one fourth of the men had, at the time of their entry in the service, already determined that there was no justification for the United States' presence in Vietnam. It is also interesting to note that almost one half of our respondents stated that they had no strong feeling about the United States' intervention or non-intervention in Vietnam when they entered the service. And over one fourth felt that the United States was justified in being in Vietnam. It is thus recognizable that enlistments would be high among this group.

We asked the veterans to identify the direction of their political persuasion prior to entering the service. More than 90 percent of them were evenly divided among "conservative," "moderate," and "liberal," with less than ten percent identifying themselves as "radical." But when we asked them how they would identify themselves with social, economic, and political thinking in the United States at the present, we found a drastic shift in their political outlook. Forty-eight percent identified themselves as "radical," 18.5 percent as "extremely radical," with 27 percent classifying themselves as either "liberal" or "moderately liberal," and only five percent being either "moderate" or "conservative." Thus, while 64 percent of the veterans saw themselves as moderates and liberals at the time of their entry into the service, now only about 30 percent put themselves in these categories, while almost all the rest of the respondents (close to 70 percent) place themselves in the "radical" or "extreme radical" categories.

Recognizing that these terms connote different things to different people, we make no attempt to examine these claims or the possible actions which might result from these self-categorized radicals. The important thing for this study is the shift of opinion and attitude. In the men, previously characterized as moderates, has developed an attitude by which nearly half of the veterans now accept their position vis-a-vis the political, economic, and social status of the United States as radical. In fact, nearly one fifth classified themselves as extremely radical.

There is no doubt that among the veterans there was a decided shift in opinion and attitude. Examining this change, we find that 80 percent of the veterans experienced a change in view of our involvement in Vietnam after they left the United States. A small number of men (16.5 percent) experienced their attitude change following their return to the United States. But a great majority, 41.1 percent of the veterans interviewed, said that they changed their view drastically during their first three months of service in Vietnam.

We asked our respondents to rank the sources of information which in their opinion determined their new attitude about the war in Vietnam. We found personal contact with Vietnam and Vietnamese peoples as the primary source of information for the change.

The second source of information was, again, personal contact, this time with other Americans and GIs serving in Vietnam. We found ranking immediately below personal involvement was the print media: magazines, newspapers, books. At the bottom of the list of information sources were: contact with non-Americans other than Vietnamese, and films and movies. Thus, physical contact with the war, according to our survey, was the primary source of information in determining the veterans attitude about the war.

We also asked the veterans to rank the media they used most while they were stationed in Vietnam. The two primary sources of information were the Army's newspapers and broadcasts, followed closely by U.S. magazines and the veterans' hometown newspapers. Other information sources in order of importance as listed by the veterans included: foreign newspapers and magazines, films and movies, North Vietnamese broadcasts, South Vietnamese newspapers and broadcasts, and other international broadcasts.

It is interesting to note that the respondents listed the North Vietnamese and other international broadcasts as one of their least used sources of information. This may indicate that the respondents were not as exposed to enemy mass propaganda as one would have expected.

Age of the veterans	
20 and under	4.4%
21 to 25	74.7
25 to 29	19.7
30 and above	1.2
	100.0%

Education	
Did not finish high school	6.6%
High school graduate	19.9
Some college	55.8
College student	17.7
	100.0%

Spent most of his time before the service	
Northeast	54.1 %
Midwest	23.2
Southwest	3.9
West	5.5
Deep South	5.0
Border states	2.8
Outside US	5.5
	100.0%

Marital Status	
Single	83.0%
Married	9.5
Divorced	7.5
	100.0%

Veteran's family occupation	
Professional	29.4%
Managerial & Sales	15.6
Agricultural	2.2
Education	3.9
Labor	48.9
	100.0%

Type of work before entering service	
Just completed school or college	43.1%
Drafted while in education	22.1
Professional work	4.4
Agricultural work	.6
Managerial and sales	5.5
Teaching	1.1
Labor	23.2
	100.0%

Entered the service	
Drafted	34.3%
Enlisted	65.7
	100.0%

Present occupation	
Student	41.1%
Managerial and sales	2.3
Labor	5.7%
Teaching	4.0
Professional	8.0%
Not working	36.8
Agricultural	1.8
	100.0%

Religion	
Catholic	24.7%
Protestant	11.4
Jewish	2.9%
Agnostic	23.0
Atheist	11.0%
Other	27.0
	100.0%

Opinion about US involvement in Vietnam when entering the service	
US was justified in being there	28.5%
No strong feeling about our intervention or non-intervention	47.5
US was not justified in being there	24.0
	100.0%

Political identity before the service	
Conservative	29.5%
Moderate	29.5
Liberal	34.0%
Radical	7.0
	100.0%

When did you begin to see a drastic change in your views about US involvement in Vietnam?	
First entered service, still in US	21.7%
During first 3 months in Vietnam	41.1
Toward end of service in Vietnam	20.6%
Upon returning to the US	16.6
	100.0%

Ranking by importance the sources of information used in determining attitudes about the War in Vietnam

- 1-Personal contact with Vietnam and the Vietnamese
- 2-Personal contact with GIs and Americans in Vietnam
- 3-Magazines
- 4-Newspapers
- 5-Books
- 6-Television
- 7-Radio
- 8-Contact with their political and religious leaders
- 9-Contact with non-American people (other than Vietnamese)
- 10-Films and movies

Ranking by importance the sources of information used while in Vietnam

- 1-Army newspaper
- 2-Armed Forces broadcasting
- 3-US magazines
- 4-Hometown newspapers
- 5-Other than hometown and Army newspapers
- 6-Foreign newspapers and magazines
- 7-Films and movies
- 8-North Vietnam broadcasts
- 9-South Vietnam broadcasts
- 10-Other international broadcasts

Political Identity in relation to the current social, economic, and political thinking in the US

Strongly conservative	.6%
Moderately conservative	1.8
Just moderate	3.0
Liberal	18.7
Moderately liberal	8.6
Radical	48.8
Extremely radical	18.5
	100.0%