



By Jim McNamara—The Washington Post

A crowd of demonstrators estimated up to 3,000 gathered outside Justice Department yesterday to denounce Vietnam war and Chicago trial of eight men on conspiracy

charges. Dr. Benjamin Spock and others asked for meeting with the Attorney General. Huge metal doors of building were bolted and security guards stood on duty.

A Stranger Cries for Homer Ruple

By Haynes Johnson
Washington Post Staff Writer

The bell was tolling at Arlington yesterday morning when Bob Houston walked inside the yellow-and-white canvas tent pitched alongside the Potomac. On the card tables, stacks of printed signs were piled high. Bob looked for one from New Jersey, his birthplace. He couldn't find any. Then he drew out one from Michigan, his present home.

HOMER RUPLE, the heavy black stencil read.

"He was a quiet boy, not unruly," his mother says.

"...one of the wonderful ones... We called him Bill... He was blond, about 5 feet 5 or 6. Not much taller than I am—and the identical picture of his father."

Bob tied a string around his neck and walked off, bearing the name of the dead Vietnam soldier he had picked at random. Ahead of him in the line were two priests carrying the names of Clyde Cecil Collins and Jeff Milkey, both of Kentucky. Behind him, two of his friends from Purdue displayed the names Alger

White and Gary Rusbs of Michigan.

"No, there's no way to know about this name," Bob Houston was saying. "No way. I'm honored, that's all."

Bob, 18, with long blond hair, jeans, boots and Navy pea jacket, was no more than one of thousands of those faces in the crowd yesterday on his march from Arlington through the city, past the White House and on to the Capitol. Like them all, he performed the ritual of turning right, facing the White House, and calling out a name.

"Homer Ruple, Michigan," he said in a soft voice.

He brushed away his tears and walked on.

"The only thing I can say," he remarked, "is it's like the first time I ever cried. That's the general mood. I've been brought up in an environment where I've had very little opportunity to see people and to cry.

"It's just like I've done the middle-class thing, all the way through, and I've been in touch with reality, and this is the first time I've felt reality.

See RUPLE, A8, Col. 7

RUPEL, From A1

"I keep thinking, oh, God, my tears. Like I just want to feel 10 times more. People are worth crying for."

'Just a Person'

He was silent a moment, then:

"Homer Rupel. Just a person."

During his march, Bob talked about himself. He was, by own portrait, just another student: sometimes inarticulate, sometimes eloquent: born in New Jersey, father an engineer, moved to Dearborn, Mich., and on to Purdue, sophomore class, thinking of following his father's profession but now doubtful.

"That's where I started, but I have doubts now," he said. "I mean, you work so many formulas and equations. I'd rather do people."

"I mean, I was playing games like everyone else, and now there's a feeling—it's so hard to describe. As far as myself, I got into many things because everyone else was doing it, and I got placed in circumstances like that. But I've finally got the feeling of what all these people are trying to say.

Death and Beauty

"Like Washington's really nice. The surroundings. From what I've seen, the sights are really great. But then it just exemplifies—well, it's just such an extreme thing that such beautiful things deal with death and people's lives in such a matter of fact way. And the place could really be beautiful but at the moment I don't think it ever can be."

He didn't speak of politics, of the President or Agnew or the Pentagon, or even of protests.

"I just hope somebody feels a little bit of what these people feel," he said, glancing down the line of young marchers, each bearing a name. "Just look. They don't have to speak. Just look in their faces."

When he passed the old Munitions Building, paint peeling, flags flying, he noticed the lines of office workers out front silently watching the procession.

"I really want to reach these people who came to watch us," Bob said. "Just to have one of them look in my

eyes and become a part of me. I know very little of me is going to become part of them, but it's all of us together all over the country. That's the thing we've been doing."

Rain at White House

By the time he reached the White House, the heavy gray clouds had thickened. It began to rain. It was still raining when he got to the Capitol and deposited his placard with the name of Homer Rupel of Michigan.

Then he left, still uncertain about why he had become, by chance, the proxy for Homer Rupel—or who Homer Rupel was. Bob Houston had completed his personal role in the story of two Americans. Homer Rupel's was harder to determine.

At the Pentagon, Daniel Z. Henkin, the assistant secretary in charge of public affairs, said he couldn't find out about Homer Rupel

without a serial number or a more precise identification.

At the Veterans Administration here, the information man was helpful. But the task was immense. He would check and see. He said something about a computer bank with 28 million names of veterans.

On Capitol Hill, an assistant to Sen. Robert Griffin (R-Mich.) said he would look into it.

Woman At Pentagon

He had the name of a woman at the Pentagon who might be helpful. The senator's office had made contact with her before.

It was difficult, the woman said. But, she called back.

"We have a name," she said, "but of course we can't know if it's the right one. R-u-p-e, Homer Alfred Jr. Army. Sp.5. Born 27 July, 1938. Died 2 Feb., 1968. Three Rivers, Mich."

The operator put in a call to Three Rivers. No, there was no Homer Rupel Sr. in the directory, she said. There was, however, a Howard Rupel.

At Howard Rupel's home the woman was confused. Yes, indeed, there is a Homer Rupel in Three Rivers, she said. He's part of her family. She gave the

number.

John Rupel answered the call. Yes, it was his brother who died, he said quietly. "I think you'd like to talk to my mother."

Career Soldier

"I don't want his name used," Mrs. Rupel said. "Not for that purpose. He was making the Army his career. I do not want his name used in that march."

She wasn't angry, just firm about it. When she understood his name already had been used, she began talking about her son.

"He was a quiet boy, not unruly. I'd be a very poor mother if I didn't say he was one of the wonderful ones. Bill—we called him Bill—presented the Michigan flag at the Pearl Harbor. Oh, what was it? In '66 or '67 it was. Oh, dear. It was on the back of that picture we had, where it was, but we put it in a footlocker with the rest of his things and we still don't want to get some of those things out."

Bill, she said, wasn't married. He was born and raised in Three Rivers and went to school there; then he quit.

"Three Rivers? Oh, we're about 20 miles from the Indiana state line. It's just a lovely town to live in. It's not big, like Kalamazoo. Just a nice big friendly town.

Enlisted At 16

"It was when he was 16 when he joined up. The day before he was 17, I think. What did he look like. Oh, my. Well, he was blond. About 5 feet 5 or 6. Not too much taller than I am—and the identical picture of his father."

Rupel Sr., 55, is a truck driver. There are three other children in the family, John, 18, Martin, 16, and Kimble, a girl, 17.

"We were just like all families, I suppose," the mother went on. "We were close. Bill just liked life. He enjoyed it."

"Of course, as he got older, he was like everyone else, and I wrapped my life around him. And when he went from us. You just can't replace him at all.

"We had a pact between us. That whenever he'd do something wrong he'd come

and tell me. There wouldn't be any whippings, but there would be punishment. That was the pact between Bill and me.

"Just before Easter a year ago he called from Ft. Lewis (Wash.) and said he was going. I tried to talk him out of it, but, well, if he's going to fight, I think he felt he should fight the right way — instead of all the nonsense going on. In other words, he was proud of his country."

His brother, John, dropped out of school, she said, after Bill was killed. "He took it awfully hard. Now he's talking about going in. You just have to let them find themselves. John's got a little long hair, like all of them do, but he's not rebellious. He's going to be an Army man like his brother."

"As far as these demonstrations go, they're not solving anything. They're not going to end anything. It's not helping the boys over there for what they are fighting for. And if we have the love and understanding we should have — have — we'll find the right way."

"It's been a never-ending war," she said just before hanging up. "But maybe something will be accomplished out of it in the end."