

ernment that responds, not ...

## John Kerry's Testimony 80x 4/25/76

# ... And the Anguish of a Veteran

*From testimony by John Kerry, Vietnam Veterans for Peace, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee April 22, 1971.*

The country doesn't know it yet, but it's 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'd like to talk about it. We're angry because we feel we've been used in the worst fashion by the administration of this country. 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 freedoms which those misfits abuse." And this was used as the rallying point for our effort in Vietnam.

But for us, his "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 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's that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart.

Someone has to die so that President Nixon won't be—and these are his words—"the first President to lose a war." And 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?

We're here to ask where are McNamara,

Rostow, Bundy, Kilpatrick and so many others. Where are they now that we, the men whom they sent off to war, have returned? These are commanders who have deserted their troops. And there is no more serious crime in the law 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've left the real stuff of their reputations bleaching behind them in the sun in this country.

And 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 for ourselves. We wish that a Merciful God could wipe away our memories of that service as easily as this administration has wiped away their memories of us.

But all that they have done and all 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 fear that have driven this country these last 10 years and more. And more. And 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 in the turning.

Thank you.