

Militancy of Antiwar Veterans Is Rising

By STEVEN R. WEISMAN

With a flare for "guerilla theater" that has won them publicity again and again, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War have emerged as one of the most outspoken peace groups in the country.

The group received widespread attention again on Friday when six of its national leaders were indicted in Tallahassee, Fla., for conspiring to disrupt the Republican National Convention with fire bombs and shootings.

One of their best-known "actions" took place one week last December when protesters occupied the Statue of Liberty, the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia, the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, a military hospital ward in California and a South Vietnamese consulate in San Francisco in a well-coordinated effort to "put the issue of the war back on the front page."

Those demonstrations, like many before and after them, resulted in arrests that served to dramatize the antiwar cause.

The demonstrators often wear their military clothes and engage in actions that parody military maneuvers.

1,000 to 25,000

Founded by six young veterans from New York City in 1967, the group says its membership has grown to more than 25,000 today. Officials say that the active members number about 8,000, but one former officer said recently that the number was closer to 1,000.

Although the Vietnam Veterans Against the War have

been fielding demonstrations for five years, they did not win national attention until April, 1971, during a week of protests in Washington highlighted as 700 veterans threw away the medals they had won in Vietnam over a wire fence in front of the Capitol.

The veterans' chief spokesman then was John F. Kerry, a 27-year-old former Navy lieutenant who had won a Silver Star, a Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts in Vietnam. Later in the year, Mr. Kerry resigned as a national coordinator and now is running for a seat in the House of Representatives from the Fifth District in Boston.

Since last year, the veterans have moved to a more militant posture, officials of the group say. Many more than before have been willing to get arrested in acts of civil disobedience. Although there was no personal violence in the demonstrations last December, a national coordinator, Al Hubbard, said then that the veterans would be prepared "to take more risks" in the future.

A second shift by the veterans, in organization, has involved a far greater degree of decentralization than was evident in December, when Mr. Hubbard oversaw the nationwide demonstrations from the veterans national headquarters here, at 25 West 26th Street.

The veterans organization today comprises 26 regions, each with a coordinator. Six national coordinators, each with a special function, make up the group's executive leadership.

Among the officers indicted Friday in Tallahassee were one national coordinator, two re-

gional coordinators and three local coordinators, according to Del Rosario, another national coordinator who works out of the headquarters here.

Another activity sponsored by the group has been its "war crimes" hearings, which have involved testimony from veterans about American "atrocities" in Vietnam. The hearings, or "Winter Soldier Investigations"—after Thomas Paine's remark about "summer soldiers and sunshine patriots"—are continuing and were made into a motion picture.

The Vietnam Veterans Against the War adhere to nine objectives, including demands for an immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam, liberalization of legal rights for servicemen, amnesty for deserters and draft evaders, and changing "the domestic social, political and economic institutions that have caused and permitted the continuance of war."

With its more recent decentralized emphasis on local matters, Mr. Rosario said yesterday, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War has involved itself in community work and a drive for jobs and hospital care for veterans.

Mr. Rosario reported that the group was heavily infiltrated by informers for Government agencies, especially the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He said that one regional coordinator, William Lemmer, had admitted that he was an F.B.I. informer. Mr. Lemmer, who testified before the grand jury in Tallahassee, has been unavailable for comment.

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