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ANTI-WAR VETERAN RON KOVIC
'It's raining bombs in Vietnam'

Viet Vets' Last 'Peace Patrol'

By Mary McGrory
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Miami Beach

The Vietnam Veterans Against the war call it their "last patrol."

Wearing their rag - tag uniforms, carrying their tattered banners, several hundred had straggled to the convention city from all over the country to gather at the gates of the Fontainebleau Hotel.

They faced three solid lines of state troopers in riot gear there Tuesday. Occasionally and half - heartedly they begged them to "join us."

The troopers think slightly better of the veterans than of the other demonstrators they are holding at bay here. The vets do not "trash" or burn flags. They police themselves and pick up their litter. Some of them are in wheelchairs.

Jams

The delegates make no distinction among those who cause traffic jams or shout obscenities at them as they make their rounds. To them they are all "these people" who will be permanently put in their place come November.

The principal speaker outside the gates was Ron Kovic of Los Angeles, a paralyzed ex-Marine sergeant who talked from a wheelchair. He spoke with a passion and fire that has not been heard here in the cliché - ridden convention hall.

"The delegates up there," he shouted into his hand - held microphone, looking up at the huge white pleasure dome. "You lining up there behind the silk curtains in your Brooks Brothers suits and your shiny shoes. You behind that wall of men with guns and bullets and helmets, listen to us.

"We will not be silent. Too many of our brothers have died. Too many Vietnamese have been murdered. You have taken our bodies, but you have not taken our minds."

It began to rain.

"It's raining. We'll stay in the rain. It's raining bombs in Vietnam," Kovic said.

No one even mentions the bombing at the Convention Hall, where Richard Nixon is limned by the hour in word and film as the peacemaker of the ages.

"You can take all the people in the U.S. prisons and all the rapists and extortionists and murderers and they couldn't even compare to that bum up there who is going to be nominated tonight," Kovic cried.

Arrival

Mr. Nixon was at that moment arriving at Miami International Airport amid the organized raptures of the Young Voters for the President.

The veterans negotiated with the troopers to send three of their number in wheelchairs through the lines and into the lobby, where they read "A letter to the President" to nobody in particular. The delegates glared at them.

One Republican wearing a pink terry cloth shirt and rose - color pants growled: "They ought to smash them. I bet 99 per cent of them never served in the army. They probably blew themselves up."

Bottles

Outside the veterans gathered up their empty Coke bottles, picked up the bottle caps, reformed their lines, hoisted their banners and marched off down Collins avenue. Traffic resumed.

It is the last patrol for the veterans. They touched the country briefly a year ago in the spring when they marched in Washington and unnerved the Congress. The President tried to evict them from the mall. Their impact was swallowed up in the Mayday tribes. Just as here they are confused with the Yippies and Zippies. They have come on hard times. Their star, John Kerry, is running for Congress in Massachusetts and their numbers have dwindled.

The country, like the delegates here, prefers to think the war is over, now that their sons are no longer dying in it.