

Angry War Veteran

John Forbes Kerry

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WASHINGTON, April 22—Early in 1968, not long after his graduation from the Navy's officer candidate school, Lieut. j.g. John Forbes Kerry visited Vietnam for the first time when his ship stopped over in Danang after a brief tour in the Gulf of Tonkin. "I went ashore and

Man saw the barbed wire, the machine guns and a 'woodpile' of dead Vietcong bodies,"

News Mr. Kerry recalls, "and it hit me all at once. This was my first contact with the land war, and at first it looked like something out of the movies. Then I reacted—I said 'my God, what is going on here—this is really a war.'"

Mr. Kerry is here this week to protest that war as leader of 1,000 or so veterans encamped on the grassy mall near the Capitol.

Last night, he stretched out his lean, 6-foot frame and recounted some of the experiences that turned him against American policy in Southeast Asia.

Mr. Kerry was born in Denver Dec. 11, 1943. He later lived in Washington and in France and Germany.

War Doubts at Yale

While still an undergraduate at Yale, Mr. Kerry developed some reservations about American foreign policy. This was reflected in the senior oration he delivered at his graduation in 1966 criticizing aspects of the draft and the war.

At Yale, Mr. Kerry won letters in soccer and lacrosse and belonged to the Skull and Bones Society. His plans to study abroad were quashed by a notice from his draft board that he would probably be called for service.

Neither jail nor self-exile appealed to him, he said, and "although I did have some doubts about the war in terms of policy, at that time I believed very strongly in the code of service to one's country. So" he added, "I enlisted in the Navy."

That first trip to Vietnam piqued his curiosity — "I wanted to go back and see for myself what was going on, but I didn't really want to get involved in the war." So, late in 1968 he volunteered for an assignment on "swift boats"—the short, fast aluminum craft that were then used for patrol duty off the Vietnam coast.

Two weeks before he arrived in Vietnam as a swift boat commander, he said, "they changed the policy on the use of the boats—decided to send them up the rivers to prove to the Vietcong that they didn't own the waters."

The river missions involved shooting at sampans and at huts along the banks and suddenly, Mr. Kerry recalls, "We said, 'hey, wait a minute—we don't know who

these people are.' So we started to beach our boats to go ashore and find out what we had been shooting at."

Mr. Kerry, 27 years old, paused a moment, then remembered a time earlier in his life when his father, now a Massachusetts lawyer, was a Foreign Service officer stationed in Paris.

"My mother was born in France," he said, "and when we lived there, I used to play in the old German bunkers outside my grandmother's house. From listening to her stories, I got a vivid impression of what it was like to live in an occupied country, and when I went ashore in those villages, I realized that's exactly what I was in—an occupied country."

Because he had been wounded three times (in addition to the three Purple Hearts, he holds the Bronze and Silver Stars), he took advantage of a navy regulation that allowed him to return to duty in the United States.

Mr. Kerry left Vietnam in March, 1969, and took a job as an admiral's aide in New York City. Shortly afterward he married. His wife, Julia, is 26.

During this time, he says, "my opposition to the war was haunting me. The October moratorium came along and I did some work for it. It was just incredible, seeing all those people, and I said to myself, 'that's it.'"

He asked for, and was given, an early release from the Navy so he could run for Congress on an antiwar platform from his home district of Waltham, Mass. His campaign lasted a month, ending when he withdrew in favor of the Rev. Robert F. Drinan, the Jesuit who was elected to Congress last November.

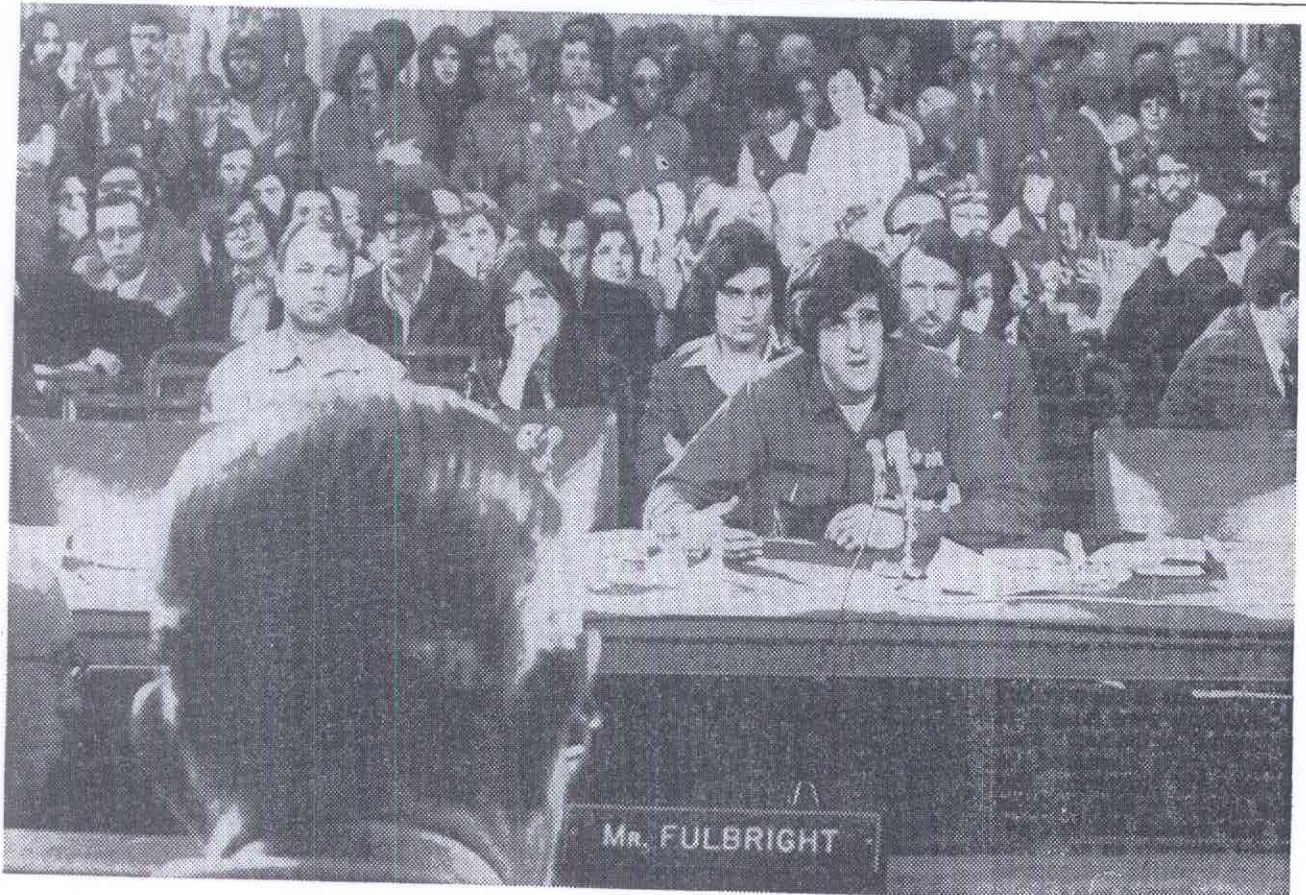
While campaigning for Father Drinan, Mr. Kerry appeared on the Dick Cavett television program and was seen by members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, who asked him if he would work for their group. He has been a full-time organizer for them ever since.

During a veteran's meeting in Detroit last winter, Mr. Kerry said he became aware of increasing antiwar sentiment among returning veterans. "I saw guys there who couldn't talk about what they'd done in Vietnam without crying," he said. "That's when I realized that we had to take this thing to the Government."

Operation Dewey Canyon Three, the week-long veterans' protest now underway in the capital, is the result.

Mr. Kerry describes himself as "still a moderate—I'm not a radical in any sense of the word. I guess I'm just an angry young man."

He is not a pacifist—"if I have to pick up arms to defend something that is very real. If the shores of this country were threatened, I'd be the first to defend it."



VETERANS' LEADER BEFORE SENATE PANEL: John F. Kerry testifying before Foreign Relations Committee and Chairman J. W. Fulbright, foreground, yesterday. The former Navy lieutenant, who was wounded three times

in South Vietnam, asked, "How do you ask a man to be the last to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last to die for a mistake?" He said war's search and destroy missions had been "search and avoid" missions.

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