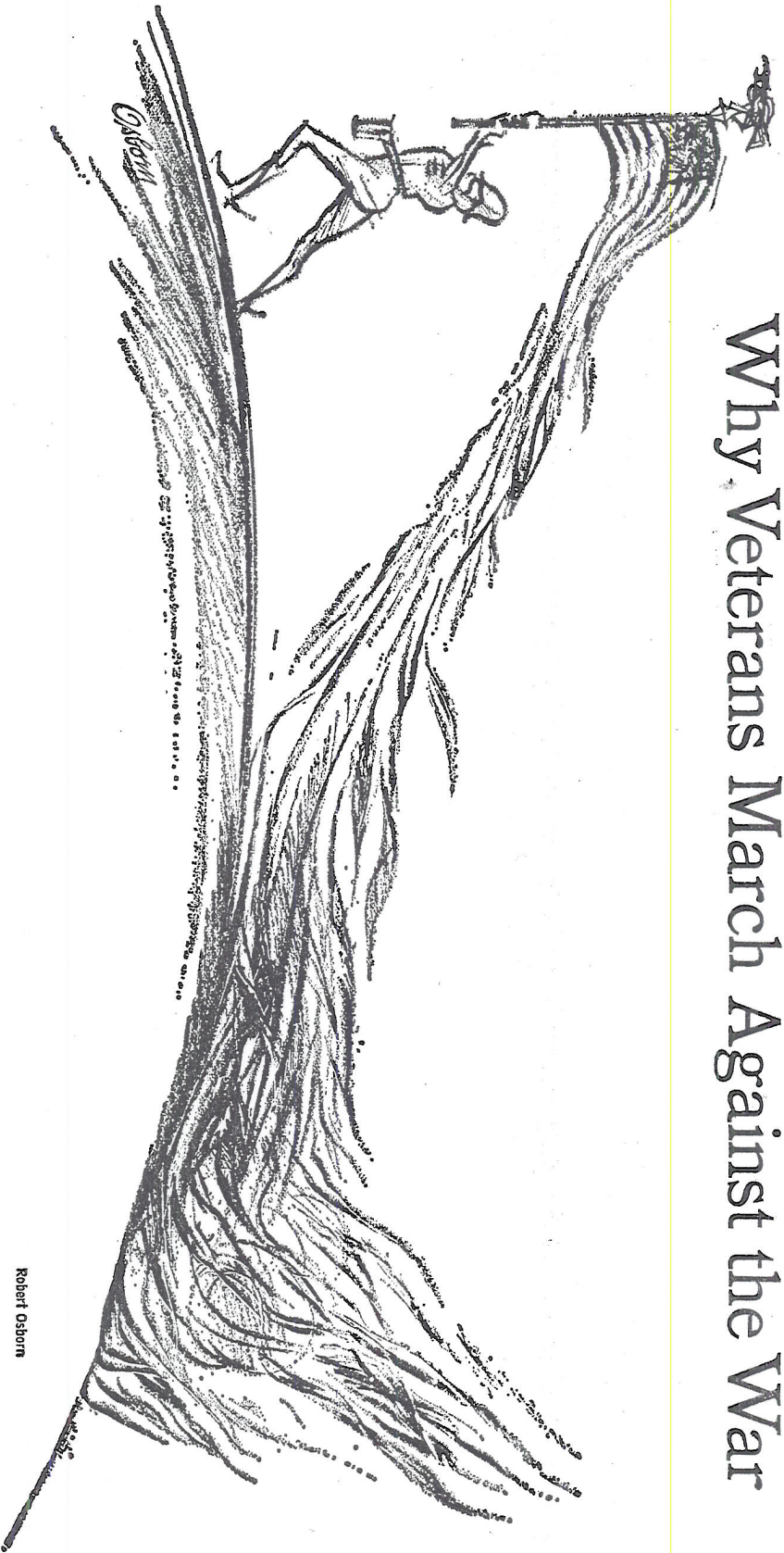


# Why Veterans March Against the War



Robert Osborn

By JAN BARRY

WASHINGTON—All this week American veterans who served in Vietnam are protesting against the continuation of the war and for immediate withdrawal. Tomorrow they will join the ranks of other Americans in a mass demonstration against the Nixon Administration's continued false promises and in support of Congressional bills to stop the bloodshed on both sides and end the war now.

With the conviction of Lieut. William L. Calley the real dilemma of my generation has finally been brought unmistakably home. To kill on military orders and be a criminal, or to refuse to kill and be a criminal is the moral agony of America's Vietnam war generation. It is what has forced upward of sixty thousand young Americans,

draft resisters and deserters to Canada, and created one hundred thousand military deserters a year in this country and abroad. It is what has created S.I.D.S. and draft-card burning, the Weathermen and Kent State, the 1967 "siege" of the Pentagon four years ago and much of the impetus for the marches taking place this spring. It is what has caused nearly two and a half million honorably discharged veterans of Vietnam to drop out, to disappear.

Mine was the generation that brought up on the lessons of Nuremberg, the evils of dictatorships, and the horrors and terrors of the police state. Thus, we were not prepared to go to Vietnam to uphold a tragicomic (but nonetheless sickening) series of war-lord dictatorships, to honor "commitments" to a Francophile Vietnamese traitor (Nguyen Cao Ky) whose "only

hero is Hitler," to help place the ruling Saigon regime's "enemies"—dissident citizens—in concentration camps, to supervise and help administer "laws" outlawing all meaningful political opposition.

We were not prepared to go to Vietnam to help institute and supervise perhaps the world's most deadly efficient police state—to slaughter and lay waste to, intimidate and kill "Communist" bushes and trees and pigs and rice and thatched huts and women and children and old men and babies by the hundreds of thousands, all in the name of "Democracy."

Nevertheless, many of us did. Now every last one of us is guilty, along with Calley, of committing war crimes. Because a "free fire zone"—where anything that moves can be shot—is by definition a violation of the Geneva

Convention of 1949 with respect to the treatment of civilians; because a "search-and-destroy mission"—where anything living is destroyed or removed—is also a violation of the Geneva Conventions; because massive defoliation, "recon by fire," saturation bombing, "mad minutes," and forcibly relocating villagers are all violations of international law, and therefore, war crimes.

One cannot participate in the Vietnam war without being at least in complicity in committing war crimes. And so tens of thousands of young men of my generation have refused to participate in the war in Vietnam. Yet they are all criminals, too. Some are draft dodgers, some are deserters, and some two hundred thousand are annually AWOL. Our dilemma is that no matter what we do—go to Vietnam or refuse—either action is criminal, against some law, and, therefore, "wrong."

America's Vietnam generation isn't up against the wall: it's bricked in. Going to Vietnam is a war crime, refusing to go is a domestic crime and just sitting still, somewhere or somehow in exile or limbo, is a moral crime. It is a terrible time today to be American and young. In fact, it apparently is a crime.

*Jan Barry, who received an appointment from Vietnam to West Point—from which he dropped out—is a founder of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.*