

19 Junior Officers Sign An Anti-War Petition

By Charles Howe

Half of the junior officers aboard the aircraft carrier Hancock berthed in Alameda have signed a petition opposing the war in Vietnam.

The action is considered unprecedented in the history of the United States Navy.

There was no immediate comment on the affair from high Navy officials in Washington.

The petition was signed by 19 non-aviation junior officers and addressed to the commanding officer, Captain

T. L. Johnson. It was delivered to the ship's executive officer late yesterday and was said to be en route to the skipper.

OLDEST

The document signed aboard the oldest attack carrier still on duty in the fleet (she returned here in April after her fifth combat mission in Vietnam) read:

"We, the undersigned, are concerned over the prolongation of the Vietnam war and its effects upon our country and the country of the Vietnamese people. We feel that a military solution is not fea-

sible, and that continued military action will result in unnecessary suffering and loss of life.

"Most of us have been concerned over the war for many months... we wish to avoid hypocrisy, and this statement is an attempt to advise the command of our feelings; to open channels of communication between us and those of differing views.

"We do not counsel libel, sedition, or mutinous action. We intend no further action as a group. We only wish to express our objection to the Vietnam war, and record our fervent hope that it may soon end."

COMPLEMENT

The ship has some 3000 officers and men aboard. None of the pilots signed the document, nor did any enlisted men. Moreover, no senior officers—men with the rank of lieutenant commander or above—endorsed it.

Two of the officers who signed the document and stressed that it was not an attack upon the Navy talked about their action.

Both are lieutenants junior grade and both hold top-secret clearance.

The ship's public affairs officer, Allen P. Cox, a Yale graduate who earlier attended the Nuclear Weapons School, said he became disenchanted with the war during the 265 days he spent at sea.

Scheduled for another assignment in Vietnam in September as an intelligence officer—an assignment he is protesting—the 23-year-old

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officer said he has been handing out peace literature in civilian clothing just outside the Alameda Naval Air Station.

Cox said the "dehumanization" that has resulted as a result of the war is rampant among pilots.

"They (the pilots) are mainly anaesthetized," Cox said. "They would go out on a mission and come back to white linen and tablecloths. There was the attitude that those (Vietnamese) people were less than people."

In protesting his extraordinarily swift reassignment to Vietnam — normally only done when an officer volunteers — Cox wrote to the Chief of Naval Personnel on June 11, outlining some of the reasons why he could no longer totally support the war.

LETTER

The letter read in part:

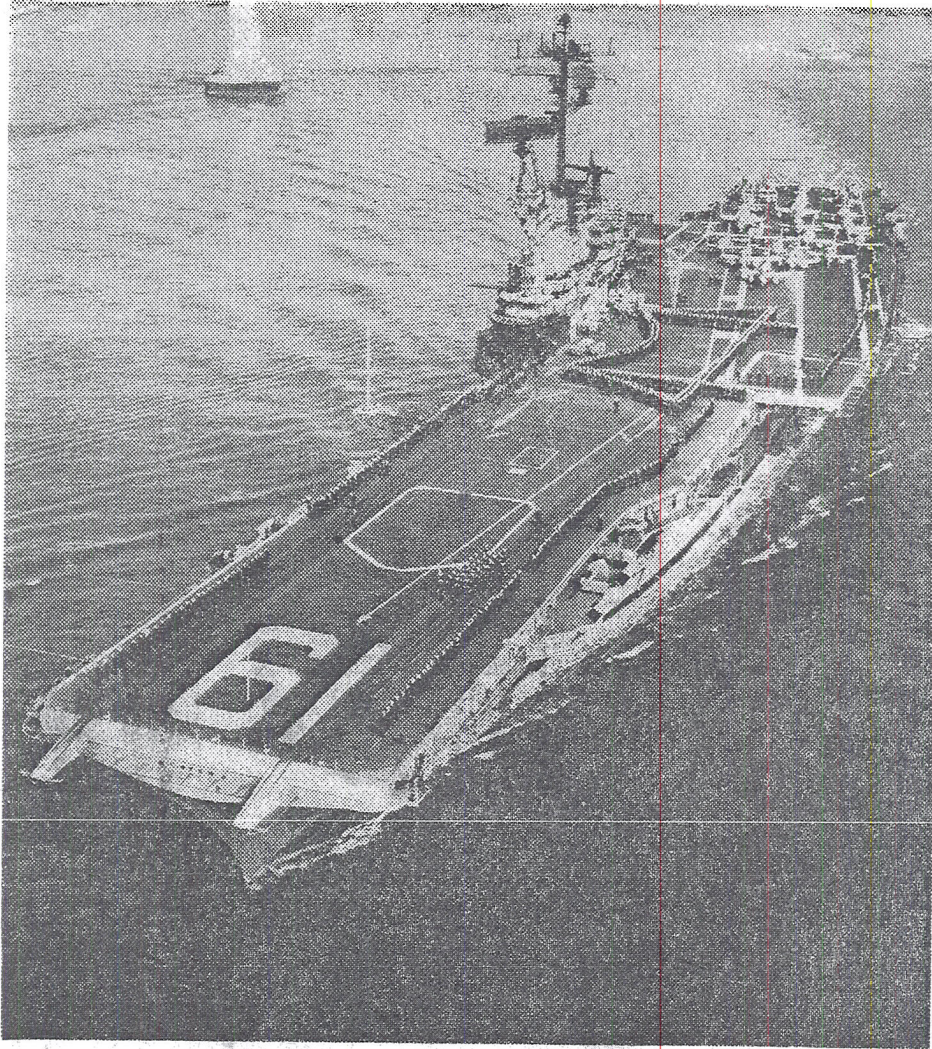
"The comments of some senior officers and pilots further alienated me. Each meal was punctuated with war stories from the pilots, whose bombing victims were referred to as 'crispy critters.' I particularly remember the account of a boy on a bicycle who was strafed and reported as a 'mechanized vehicle.'

The Air Wing commander once remarked to two Army enlisted reporters, in my presence, that the Air Wing does not get full credit in body counts because some of the victims are disintegrated by bombs."

Another junior officer joining Cox was Lieutenant (j.g.) William D. West, an Annapolis graduate and a former pilot until he "turned in his wings" or resigned as a combat pilot. He is now the ship's aviation fuels officer.

West, who said he may file as a conscientious objector, said one unnamed junior officer aboard the Hancock refused a promotion "because he did not want to be rewarded" for killing.

Dissent on a Carrier



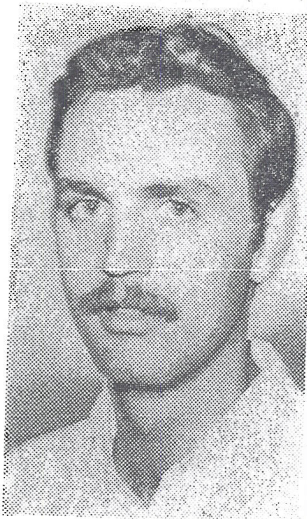
The carrier Hancock — the action aboard her is unprecedented

More junior officers would have signed what is essentially a call for a round-table discussion of the war, West said, if they had not been afraid of possible reprisals.

Both young officers stressed they were not rebelling against the Navy nor their commanding officer,



ALLEN P. COX
Pilots are 'anaesthetized'



WILLIAM D. WEST
He turned in his wings

who they described as "a good guy ... an extremely fair man."

Senior officers did not sign the petition, the two said, because they did not wish, generally, to jeopardize their careers.

Enlisted men were in no way prosylited because of the fear of violating military law; thus, there were no signatures from the ranks.

"But from what we have heard," the two said, "there is much feeling against the war among the enlisted men."

The two said they signed the document because, as they understand Department of Defense regulations, the expression of opinion is freely encouraged; dissent within the boundaries of the law is not repressed.

West, who said he is a Republican, agreed that junior officers all over the world are "gradually being turned off about war."

"You know there was recently something like a protest in the Soviet Union in the military," West said. "They shot one of the officers involved in that action. In the United States we still have the freedom of dissent."