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Opinion

# As An Epic, War Protest Missed Goal

By Don Branning

There were so many of them, marching in a blaze of banners like a new world appearing along the edges of the park, that it seemed all the throng would never make its way into the Polo Field before the day was finished.

The crowd seemed immense late in the afternoon, spread across the shallow bowl of the playing field. I estimated there were 125,000 persons. It was meant to seem epic, and at times it caught the illusion of it, that it was something epic, a new world.

In the end, the anti-war demonstration fell apart somehow. As an epic. To youth belongs the future, but that is like saying Tuesday follows Monday. It is a mere fact, no epic at all.

There is something trite about it, a kind of Cecil B. DeMille syndrome: The young must be epic, because there are so many of them.

The crowd was mostly young, white and hip. There were not many Negroes. Of the middle aged and older, there were only a small number.

There were Chicanos, a fair number, and some Indians, and these too monopolized the speakers' platform near the last with incoherent cries of rage and frustration. "You take our land and now you want to take our culture!" a young Indian from Washington screamed in a breaking voice.

## 'Majority Not Silent'

One of the most common placards that appeared in the crowd said, "The majority is not silent. The government is deaf!" But, really, this was not the majority. The revulsion that followed the conviction of Lt. Calley was a gut reaction that rolled across the continent, and you could feel it.

And despite the massed, defiant showing of V.C. flags and red banners, they knew they were not the groundswell of America in the Polo Field, whatever it would be, if it ever came, and rolled across the continent.

"This here today is addressed to the white, hip crowd," said Carol Jessen, a 21 year old student at San Francisco State College. "It's not going to have any effect on the government, but it will let a lot of people know that there's a whole lot of people against the war."

"I don't think it'll affect Nixon. I don't think anything can affect Nixon," said another San Francisco State student, Nick Blonder, 21. "But I think senators and congressmen are affected."

## The Serious Vets

Did he think he would be able to communicate with Nixon, if he had the chance?

"I think I could communicate. I'd love to talk with him for a couple of hours," said Blonder. "But I don't think it's going to have any effect," said Ed Lanzinger, a 23 year old veteran of the war. He was standing with a buddy. They were wearing their ribbons and medals of the Vietnamese campaign on Army jackets over civilian garb, and they seemed much more quiet and serious than most of the young people around them.

"It's gone on as long as it has," Lanzinger said. "Everybody is up on the platform telling us the different ways that things are bad. I think they are all missing. It's too emotional, and they have no solutions. The only way we'll end it is by due process of law, when enough people in Congress are listening."

Both seemed quiet and depressed. A man on the speaker's platform was shouting for the veterans to come forward and strip themselves of their medals.

Serious faced, Lanzinger and his friend went forward, their hands moving to their breast pockets. There was a thin spray of glinting light in the air. The veterans were throwing their medals away.

## Confusion of Voices

It dissolved into a confusion of voices at the end. The whole day had been windy and cool, the dust blowing across the field. It clouded over and got colder after 3 o'clock.

A young man's voice came over the loudspeaker, forlorn in the dissolving afternoon. "I love you," he called out. "All I can say is love, man."

All he could say was not enough. There were not many who even heard him.

It had been something ebullient to watch. They came with their legion of dogs, the girls in a jingle of bells, the boys with their expensive cameras around their necks. It is a nation of would-be photojournalists.

It was fun to take in the signs and devices. One sign, carried by a girl, quoted God: "Killing is a no no." A group of young men carried a huge banner. "MBAF." It meant, the banner explained, "Master of Business Administration Freaks" opposed to the war. There were some, funny, that cannot be re-printed, and others that can: "Petaluma Jewish Cultural Club Demonstration for Peace."

### 'Under Pressure'

The young hips from Berkeley were there, fresh from their triumph in its municipal election, and a girl shouted over the loudspeaker, "We'll do what we did in Berkeley in every city in California, in the country!"

Hers was a splendid claim, a high point of the hyperbole. When the thing ended rather incoherently at 4 o'clock, thousands of them streamed out of the stadium and onto buses that took them through the Richmond and the Fillmore.

On the sidewalks in the Richmond and the Sunset were the middle class folks of the town, their faces closed to all the semaphores of revolution that have so excited the young hips at the Polo Field. And in the Fillmore, the black men lounged in front of the stores. That rally in the park had not been their party, either.

No, it was not the sharp clap of the American groundswell that will sometimes cross the continent, because that is something very tough and unmistakable.

But Bob Higley, who came up with a Unitarian church group from the San Fernando Valley, said: "The young are under more pressure than we are -- after all, they have the most to lose in a war -- and they are not tied to the system like we are. The youth are really going to make a new world, and nobody's going to talk them out of it."