

Rival Group Criticizes Antiwar Veterans

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WASHINGTON, June 1—Representatives of a new group called Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace said today that they were angered and dismayed by the "irresponsible" protests of a "relative handful" of antiwar veterans in the capital last april.

A spokesman, Bruce N. Kesler, a former marine sergeant, said that the group had about 5,000 members and that its formation one month ago was "sort of a spontaneous reaction" to actions by the antiwar veterans.

He called demonstrations by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War an "attempt to intimidate the Government into submission by taking over the streets."

"A Viable Vietnam"

Mr. Kesler said his group supported President Nixon's policies of Vietnamization and phased withdrawal as a means of "leaving behind a viable South Vietnam with the capability for self-defense."

These are sentiments, he said, that are shared by "the overwhelming majority" of American military men who have served in Vietnam.

He said his group's aim was to "blanket the nation" with speakers and literature in the coming months as a means of countering the publicity given to the antiwar veterans' groups, headed by John F. Kerry, a former Navy lieutenant, whom Mr. Kesler accused of placing the United States role in Vietnam "in the worst light."

"We know better," Mr. Kesler said. "We've been there, too." John O'Neill, who said he was a Navy lieutenant until his discharge this morning and is a member of the new group's coordinating body, said that he had served in Coastal Division 11 in Vietnam, the unit to which Mr. Kerry was also attached.

Kerry Assailed

Mr. O'Neill charged that Mr. Kerry, who had criticized the war in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had spoken for "no one except himself and his embittered little group of 1,000 out of a total of two and a half million Vietnam veterans."

Mr. Kerry told the committee that he had seen "crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command." Mr. O'Neill disputed the statement.

Testimony Refused

"I served in Coastal Division 11 for a year. I never saw one war crime committed by allied forces," Mr. O'Neill said. "To say that war crimes are commonly committed in Vietnam as a matter of policy is a lie."

Mr. O'Neill wrote to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee requesting an opportunity to testify but was refused. A committee spokesman noted, however, that the committee recently heard from two witnesses who supported the Administration's policy, a young Navy lieutenant and Herbert Rainwater, national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Mr. Kesler, a 23-year-old former graduate student at New

York University, said the committee's refusal to hear Mr. O'Neill illustrated his group's complaint that antiwar veterans in general and Mr. Kerry in particular had "monopolized" the attention of Congress and the press.

"Kerry and a thousand of his boys walk into the committee chamber waving cap pistols, and they let them testify two days later," Mr. Kesler said, adding: "We do not believe that this is proper or in the best interests of meaningful dialogue reaching the American people."

Mr. Kesler, who also challenged Mr. Kerry to a debate, said that while in the capital the 10 members of his organization's coordinating committee would attempt to meet with members of Congress and to urge them to "act responsibly on this issue, to not sell out South Vietnam and this country."