

ROCHESTER HISTORY

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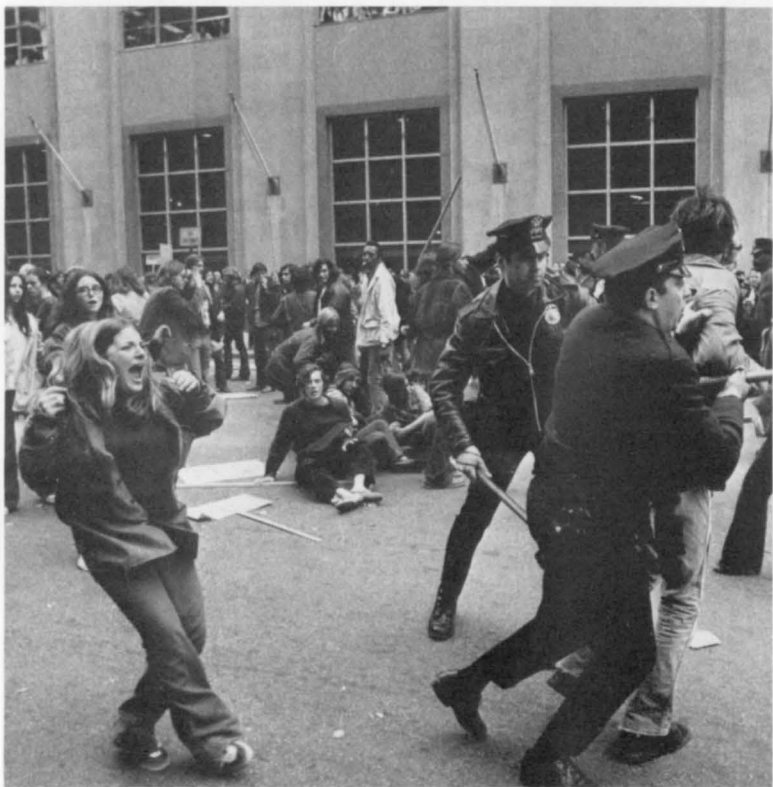
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A City in Conflict **Rochester During the Vietnam War** By Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck



SPECIAL ISSUE



Above: About 2000 demonstrators blocked traffic on Main Street in May of 1971. Cover photograph is the same protest after it moved down Broad Street. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

Cover: Police struggle to keep peace in 1971 on Broad Street outside of City Hall. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

"This welcome home is wonderful and it's long overdue. We're grateful to you people for what you did." — Mrs. Barber Conable at the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington, D.C. in 1982.

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Vietnam War supporters face anti-war demonstrators at a rally in November, 1971. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

The Early Years

Six months before American combat troops were committed to Vietnam, Eugene Richardson, a 21-year-old flight mechanic from Monroe County was killed while flying ammunition to a Special Forces camp on October 24, 1964. Rochester soon became economically involved in

the war. General Dynamics, Stromberg-Carlson, Graflex, Eastman-Kodak, Bausch and Lomb, and several other manufacturers produced foods, clothing, electronics, optics and missile and aircraft parts to support American soldiers in a war against the spread of Communism. Defense contracts totaled nearly a quarter of a million dollars in 1966.

Throughout the 1960s, young men joined the Armed Forces or were drafted. Veterans recall that they knew little about Vietnam when they were first ordered to go there for a one-year tour of duty. Many went because their fathers and brothers had been in the service and it was their duty to go where the service sent them.

Shows of support for the soldiers were common. The American Legion held a typical ceremony in 1966 at the Liberty Pole in Rochester. The rally was held on April 19, the anniversary of the Revolutionary War battles of Lexington and Concord, because some states celebrate the day as Patriots' Day and the American Legion recognized that American soldiers "are fighting in Vietnam for the preservation of the freedom and liberty of every American" and that they are "demonstrating the finest example of patriotism in keeping with the highest traditions of our military service."¹

In the early years of the war, before 1968, the newspapers were filled with features of local soldiers serving in Vietnam. The articles not only developed the soldier's personality, it told about the war from an individual soldier's perspective.

Soldiers reported that they had difficulty fighting the enemy. One said the enemy is 'the peasant guerrilla, the farmer who picks up his rifle at night. As you go through a rice paddy, he's the guy who drops his hoe, picks up his rifle and shoots you. He's the North Vietnamese regular—uniformed—who moves into a village, takes his position in a house and shoots at us and the villagers. Before you can get his position, destroy the house, he's fled. You don't know who you're fighting. . . the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) and Cong look alike. . . you can't shoot until they shoot at you."²

The Vietcong were incredibly difficult to fight and sometimes vanished, rarely leaving wounded or dead. One Rochester soldier found an escape route when he was helping to bulldoze farmland for the South Vietnamese. He discovered an abandoned underground hospital near Saigon that was the size of four football fields. It had medical supplies and beds cut from the earthen walls. The size of the tunnel-accessible hospital made it seem incredible.

Not only were the Vietcong elusive, they set up ambushes such as knee-deep holes hidden by twigs and grass with sharp sticks at the bottom. Sometimes the stick was contaminated by excrement to cause infection in the soldier's wound when he stepped on the stick. Other times, a soldier stepped on a bamboo stick resting on a 45 caliber shell that went off when the soldier stepped on it. The Vietcong were always trying to penetrate the American lines. To avoid detection at American fences, the Vietcong carried a dog that they set loose if they triggered U.S. flares, leading Americans to think that the dog set off the flares.

One medic spoke of an ambush his company encountered while they walked along a beach near Da Nang. The Vietcong attacked them with mortars and automatic weapons. He recalled, "The trap was sprung. 'They hit us with everything.' Suddenly a mortar round picked (him) up and slammed him down. 'When I came to I was behind a tombstone in the Vietnamese graveyard we were fighting in.' " He didn't remember doing it, but he had dug in and the only part of him showing behind the gravestone was his feet. A dozen yards away, a Vietcong was shooting at his boots. Then (his) head cleared and he killed the Vietcong and began making his rounds. He was a 14½-year veteran Marine who also served in Korea.³

Some soldiers became personally involved with the people of South Vietnam, especially the children. Soldiers built better living quarters for orphans and wrote letters to the editor in Rochester newspapers asking for donations.

One Rochester soldier compared himself to a country doctor in a letter to his parents. The 23-year-old medic wrote, "Your number two son to the people around here is just like a country doctor, traveling from village to village. . . when they see me coming, they all run out to meet me. If bullets don't end the war, it looks like good old Doc and his hope and miracle kit will. The people have found that the VC lied to them again when they said the Americans will not help you but will rule you as slaves. But good old Doc and his smokes, candy, food, and medical kit put a dent in the VC control of this area."⁴

Several civilians and ex-soldiers also worked in Vietnam through the Agency For International Development (AID) under the U.S. State Department. About 1300 people from the U.S. worked in Vietnam in the pacification program, which attempted to build a government and society that would remain stable after U.S. troops were withdrawn.

The City's Mood After Tet

In the spring of 1968, the North Vietnamese launched a major attack on South Vietnam that came to be known as the Tet offensive. Though it was militarily a failure, the North attacked several major cities and villages simultaneously, creating confusion and an urgent request by the American military for more troops. Americans at home were forced to reassess their commitment to Vietnam and to decide whether or not there was a threat to the security of the United States.

The Tet offensive marked a turning point in the war. Protests became more frequent and fewer people supported the war. One man whose son was wounded after the Tet offensive vowed to keep his three remaining sons out of Vietnam. He said,

*"Before, I felt it was unfair that only the poor man's son served and the rich man's son got out of it. But after hearing those GIs talk I don't think anybody should be fighting over there. . . my son told me about how troops fly peace flags instead of the American flag when they can. . . they flew the peace flag on the hill they were using for an observation post. . . . Maybe the only way to end it is for all of us to decide we won't send any more of our young people over there. With this war, we may be destroying their will to fight if we really needed them elsewhere." He complained, "A rich parent can afford to send his boys to college until they get their doctorate to avoid the draft. But I'm a machinist. I can't afford to send five boys to college. I will just have to help them resist the draft any way I can."*⁵

A year after the Tet offensive, over 1000 Rochester area residents traveled to Washington, D.C. on 27 chartered buses and many traveled by plane or car or hitchhiked.

In Rochester, those who could not go to Washington rallied at Washington Square Park. Nearly 300 people discussed the war at the First Universalist Church across Clinton Avenue from the park. People for and against the war carried signs at the park outside of the church. Angry picketers shouted abuses at one another. The participants were no longer only draft-age men.

One sixty-nine-year-old man who worked as a civilian in Vietnam on two occasions, stressed the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam. But a 76-year-old man said of the dissenters, "I favor them, yes I do. As far

as I can see, this war is useless killing for no reason.”⁶ The 69-year-old man read the names of the South Vietnamese killed by Communists while dissenters read the names of U.S. soldiers killed—each side against the killing, but each side seeking to end it in different ways.

This same day, outside of the Federal Building (currently City Hall on Church Street), other protesters held a 36-hour vigil. A list of the war dead was read . . . At the Rochester Public Library on South Avenue, Rochester Librarians For Peace, sponsored a discussion on the war. All over the area, colleges held teach-ins, poetry readings and discussions for people who could not attend the Moratorium in Washington.

The main focus of the Moratorium was the “March Against Death.” Marchers passed the White House at a rate of 1000 an hour, each protester carried a sign bearing the name of a soldier killed in Vietnam or a village that was destroyed. Except for the names called by each protester, they maintained a deathlike silence. The procession stretched from Arlington Memorial Bridge to the Capitol, and there the name cards were dropped into coffins.

One University of Rochester student shouted the name of his best friend, a 22-year-old helicopter pilot killed in Vietnam. The Rochester student said, “I really feel the de-escalation so far has been the result of public pressure and we need more.” Another protester said, “This many people will have to make the administration think.”⁷

The *Times-Union* reported,

“As the mass march to the Washington Monument began yesterday, a man with a bird’s-eye view could follow the surge and flow of tens of thousands of marchers by the progress of their banners. There were American flags—outnumbering Viet Cong flags 10 to 1—peace flags, black flags, yellow Yippie flags and thousands of signs: “How many Vietnamese fought in Our Civil War?”. . . “Vietnam, love it or leave it”. . . “Mathew 5:9”. . . “War is Good Business—Invest Your son.” In all the pageant the only flag that seemed to be going nowhere at all were two blue banners which said ‘Rochester.’ The Rochester resident holding one end of the banner said she was stuck in the crowd.”⁸

A Kodak scientist said he marched to oppose President Nixon’s “appeal for the ‘silent majority’ to demonstrate their support of his Viet-

nam policy." He needed to voice his opposition and not to be counted as part of that silent majority. He said, "We're just as proud of our servicemen as anyone and we support them just as much. We just don't think the Vietnam War is something they should be doing."

A Rochester Moratorium organizer said the large turn-out was partly due to a change in attitude. "It's okay to be against the war now," she said.

Some protesters slept on the floor of St. Mark's Episcopal Church while others marched around the capitol. At 6 a.m. rock music called the sleepers to breakfast to make room for those who had marched all night.

By the end of the three-day November Moratorium, they had walked through rain, hail and bitter cold, but they believed they had done what they could to help bring an end to America's involvement in the Vietnam War.



Thousands of people marched in a candlelight procession down Main Street and East Avenue on their way to the Rochester Public Library for a rally in December of 1969. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

2000 Candles For Peace

More than 2000 people walked solemnly through the streets of downtown Rochester in December of 1969 carrying candles in memory of the war dead and chanting "Give peace a chance." The parade assem-

bled at the Civic Center Plaza and followed Exchange, Broad, Clinton, Main, East, Chestnut, Broad again, and ended on South Avenue on the steps of the Rochester Public Library.

Episcopal Bishop Daniel Corrigan, acting dean of Colgate-Rochester Divinity School/Bexley Hall spoke from the steps of the library. The 85-year-old commander of the Memorial Post of the American Legion headed the parade. There was no violence and marchers struggled to remain on the sidewalks as the permit required.

In a separate protest ten men were arrested for disorderly conduct and obstructing government administration while staging anti-war *guerrilla theaters* downtown on Christmas eve. The skits were performed in front of the F.W. Woolworth Store on Main Street and B. Forman Co. on Clinton Avenue. In one performance a girl threw herself to the sidewalk while others stabbed and shot her with toy weapons. Another skit reenacted the My Lai massacre.

The My Lai Massacre

In 1971, the conviction of Lt. William Calley for the massacre of civilians at My Lai in Vietnam, caused many people to think about the morality of the war. Most of the letters to the editor reflected public attitudes about the war in general rather than the Calley case itself. It seemed to open a floodgate of public indignation against the military, but others emphasized the need to enforce laws even in time of war to prevent such crimes. Some felt the military used Calley as a scapegoat to remove the guilt of murder from itself.

One man pointed out that in 1814, Lockwood Doty's *History of Livingston County* notes, "Colonel Enos Stone of Rochester was 'suspended from command for permitting, as officer of the day, his soldiers to burn the village of St. David, opposite Lewiston, in retaliation for some animosities between them and the Canadians. He was indignantly disarmed by the commanding officer and discharged, and while on his way home from the army, died at LeRoy of a broken heart. He felt that he had been greatly wronged, and doubtless was innocent of any intentional impropriety. . . . It was the only wrong of the campaign and was promptly punished though a worthy officer suffered disgrace thereby.' "

The Silent Majority Speaks

As the war continued, protesters became more vocal. More than 500 people traveled from Rochester in 14 buses to Washington in April, 1971 and hundreds more traveled in cars. A local spokesman for organizers of this protest, the National Peace Action Coalition, said there is "a broad cross-section of the community represented, 'the names coming in are, by and large, people who've never done this sort of thing before. There seems to be a whole new kind of awakening and involvement. Where most of the support for the 1969 moratorium sprang from the campuses, many more adults are backing the current local effort.' I think adults in a sense are saying that we can't expect the kids to do what we should have been doing all along. More people have started to make their own judgement—they're not being led or remaining uninformed or turning away'. . . students have been joined by minority groups, hard-hats, and the 'silent majority' in their opposition to continued involvement in Vietnam."¹⁰

One hundred and seventeen Rochester area clergymen signed a petition pointing out this change in the nation's attitude toward the war. It was published in the *Democrat & Chronicle*. It said,

"In dramatic events in Rochester and across the land our nation is skidding into a deepening and widening moral crises over Vietnam. Symbolic of the crises was the radically new character of the Washington-San Francisco marches in April—marches for the first time led by veterans hurling back their medals won for heroic service in Vietnam. Marches for the first time joined by significant numbers from organized labor. Marches enlarged by tens of thousands participating in their first demonstrations." The petition said the American people did no longer support the war because they recognize it as a civil war and not as a danger to the U.S. The war, the petition said, was costing a million lives and \$110,000,000,000 that could be used to fight hunger and poverty at home.

Violence In The City's Streets

On May 5, 1971, about 1000 protesters staged a sit-in during rush hour traffic at Main Street East from the Liberty Pole to Clinton Avenue. About 36 of the protesters were arrested for disorderly conduct

and parading without a permit. At about 1 p.m. the chanting, singing protesters marched down the middle of Main Street to Exchange Street and on to City Hall at Fitzhugh and Broad Streets. About 300 protesters sat down in the street and after Police Commissioner John Mastrella ordered protesters to move for the third time, the 50 remaining protesters were rushed by police. Screaming protesters were carried away to police vans while City Manager Kermit Hill rushed into the streets with a bull horn to try to bring the crowd under control.

About half a dozen policemen rushed into a group of protesters on the steps of City Hall after they moved toward police following the arrest of two protesters. Shouts by police could barely be heard over the protesters' chants "One, two, three, four—we don't want your _____ war." The crowd at Main Street was so large that the Police Commissioner feared a riot if police interfered with the sit-in. He ordered police to return to the sidewalks when police tried to break up the crowd.¹²

Many city officials felt too much force was used in the demonstration. Civil authorities felt that less injury resulted when protesters were undisturbed, but the Police Commissioner said police did not overreact and that they were protecting the rights of others.

Many who were arrested felt, as one commented, that while the rights of merchants and citizens were violated by the protest, "every citizen in a democracy has a responsibility to end the war. That responsibility carries over to merchants and others. If they were inconvenienced, it was justly so." Another said, "I feel with many other concerned citizens that yesterday . . . was a culmination of frustrations. We were asking our government, in the only way we knew how, to get out of Vietnam." One added, "I submit that the United States government is guilty of disorderly conduct in Vietnam . . . all citizens have responsibility for the acts of our government. Our activity Wednesday stopped 'business as usual.' " And another said, "I think we proved something yesterday. Some 3500 people showed up because it made a difference."¹³

The protesters were hoping to show the public that not only young people participated in protests. They hoped to give courage to others to join them. One supporter said, "I have only slim hopes that the sum of many individuals' actions can end the war completely this year. But

unless I take action, however ineffective, to end the war, then I bear a moral responsibility for its continuation."

But not everyone in Rochester supported the protesters. One letter to the editor of the *Democrat & Chronicle* said, "So much of what those protesters do is revolting. They claim to be interested in peace. Yet the things they do often dishonor the Prince of Peace. Have they considered this? How they ever expect to take their places in society as they do, perplexes me."¹⁴

Another letter said, "It is small wonder that church membership and attendance are decreasing when apparently a church-sponsored organization (police identified many of the protesters as members of the Peoples' Coalition for Peace and Justice) condones the actions of those who declare that their protests are dictated by conscience rather than by adherence to law and order."¹⁵

An editorial in the *Times-Union* complained, "The Communists profit most from such demonstrations which are news in Moscow and Hanoi and Peking. They (hold up) U.S. negotiations at the Paris Peace talks; they encourage the Communists to hang in there in the false hope that America will collapse from within. Many protesters cheer Ho Chi Minh. Such law-breaking and defiance alienates most Rochesterians. That was plainly seen by the relatively small number of demonstrators the protest organizers could muster and by the angry reactions of most who looked on."¹⁶

One supporter believed most people in Rochester opposed the war, but he also opposed the demonstrations that tie up traffic. He suggested that protesters write to their representatives.

Others criticized the protesters themselves. One wrote, "It seems impossible that such demonstrations could happen here, but sad to say it really is happening. These people are not anti-war, they are anti-American. There can be no excuse for members of the 'establishment' joining the young group. The older, more mature men and women have probably lived through two world wars and a great depression and, wonder of wonders, have managed to survive. What has happened to them? The young people who feel so abused have had every advantage one could have, and it causes one to wonder what is their gripe all about. Many male demonstrators have done everything possible to avoid service in any branch of our Armed Forces. They abhor violence but have no compunction whatsoever to destroying govern-

ment property and openly declaring their intention of disrupting every government department. Those who deliberately look for trouble usually find it."¹⁷

Letters to the editor, of course, were mixed. Supporters wrote that they respected those arrested leaders who were committed to ending the war. One writer said, "Their leadership in many areas of social concern, their commitment to a better community and a better world deserves recognition. One said, "It is sad that some with limited horizons and narrow views are incapable of understanding the importance, and indeed the necessity to declare publicly, resistance to 'business as usual.' "¹⁸

But a protester wrote that the *Times-Union* continually missed the "point of anti-war sentiment in this country. For five years now, I have been reading ridiculous *T-U* editorials condemning demonstrators and 'hippies.' "¹⁹ The protester said when the war stopped, he would stop protesting.

Letter writers, however, expressed the same sentiments as the editors sometimes. One writer said, "Those young people who are supposed to be so intelligent march on Washington, leave filth and dirt exceeding any dump in the city, and they call themselves smart. Russia is surely having a good laugh. They said they would take us without firing a shot, and they are doing a good job turning our young people against their own country and government. These young people seem to think destroying our capitalistic system—our democratic society—will bring happiness and no more wars."²⁰



As the names of Vietnam War dead were read, protestors dropped to the ground before a coffin to emphasize death in an October 1971 anti-war demonstration. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

Protest Violence Builds

In October 1971, about 200 protesters met at Washington Square Park and marched to City Hall where about 15 coalition leaders met with city officials to urge them to take a stand against the war. The following day about 250 protesters held an anti-war rally on East Main Street near the Liberty Pole. Traffic had to be detoured for an hour and a half. A member of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War read the names of 295 Rochester area men killed in Vietnam. Eight Vietnam veterans dressed in fatigues lay on Main Street near a flag-draped coffin.

Nearly 600 protesters moved through the streets of downtown Rochester for a noontime rally at Washington Square Park on May 5, 1972. Rain fell continuously on the crowd as they listened to talk after talk. Twenty-two groups joined the rally, among them: Voters For Peace, Metro Act of Rochester, Rochester Action For Welfare Rights, The Ecumenical Concern For Peace and Justice, Youth Against War and Fascism, Rochester Association of Catholic Laymen and the Rochester Lutheran Action Committee. Later, about 100 people split off and pro-

tested in front of the Federal Building. In the evening, while evangelist Leighton Ford preached under a spotlight in the War Memorial, a dozen protesters walked up the center aisle wearing signs saying "Vietnamese War Dead." They laid on the floor by the stage while Ford told the story of the good Samaritan.²¹

The *Democrat & Chronicle* reported a clash between police and demonstrators on May 11, 1972 after they marched downtown following a peaceful demonstration at the Federal Building (now City Hall on Church Street) to protest the mining of North Vietnamese harbors and intensified bombing of the North. Twenty-three protesters were arrested. The paper reported:

*"As marchers approached South Avenue and Broad Streets, . . . (a) scuffle erupted. Four were arrested. The tense crowd moved east on East Main Street. The enthusiasm died. 'I can't believe it happened. . . I can't believe this is Rochester.' As the crowd pressed east on East Main Street, a reporter saw an officer poking marchers with a four-foot-long club. Many of the marchers hit were on the sidewalk. . . at East Main and Elm Streets, police again tangled. There were more arrests. As the demonstrators moved onto East Avenue, American Civil Liberties Union observers began shouting, 'Go home, go back home. You're only going to get burned more.' The marchers ignored them. Only about forty were left as they moved onto Chestnut Street. A police car moved along the street taking motion pictures. It was a quiet group of demonstrators that went down Court Street. They no longer chanted."*²²

Three days later a group of about 200 protesters, mostly members of Youth Against War and Fascism, marched on the Internal Revenue office downtown, then gathered at Washington Square Park. They moved around the Monument to Soldiers and Sailors carrying picket signs that said, "Free the People" and "Jail the Cops." A spokesman for the group complained about police brutality and said, "We will continue to fight until the peoples' power reigns in this country."²³

Later a grand jury would probe the May 11, 1972 clash between police and demonstrators. One hundred and twenty-five people protesting the war on Main Street had been forced from the street onto the

sidewalk by police and a scuffle began. The grand jury recommended that two police officers be reprimanded and that charges be filed against 39 protesters. It also recommended procedural changes to the police department.

A month later five anti-war protesters including a priest, a nun, and two students were tried for disorderly conduct after they staged a *die in* in front of the Internal Revenue Service Building on State Street on April 17, 1972. The five lay in a semi-circle and were arrested when they did not respond to police orders to move. The defense claimed the five could not move because they were dead. Films from Television Channels 10 and 13 showed there was no disruption of pedestrian traffic until police arrived and a crowd gathered. The five were found innocent. Presiding Judge Andrew G. Celli said, "The mere inconvenience that was caused . . . would not be sufficient to find them guilty of the offense of disorderly conduct, judged in the context of the fundamental rights guaranteed to the defendants."²⁴ Their *die-in* was thus seen as symbolic speech. A police detective protested the decision saying that police were witnessing a "serious breakdown in law and order which is being fostered by recent decisions of the city court." A year earlier, following the arrest of 36 protesters for parading without a permit during the May 5, 1971 protest, the same judge declared the parade ordinance unconstitutional because it allowed too much discretion by the person granting it and because there were no guidelines indicating who may parade.

Pushing For A Cease-Fire

Nine religious leaders left Rochester for Washington, D.C. in May of 1972 to meet with Senators Jacob Javits (R) and James Buckley (C) and Representatives Frank Horton (R) and Barber Conable (R). The nine were refused a meeting with Senator Buckley and found Representatives Horton and Conable in support of President Nixon's policies. Only Senator Javits was slightly sympathetic. The clergymen were frustrated and found that Congress could do little to end the war given the supporters among its members. The clergymen carried a statement that read, "We are deeply upset over our country's escalation of the war in Vietnam. . . . We also object to the secrecy in which the war is waged, keeping its grim realities from the American people . . . and

we especially deplore the fact that our nation and Soviet Russia are using the poor people of North and South Vietnam as pawns in a tragic game of war."²⁵

When the cease-fire was called in October of 1972, several students were asked if the protests had any effect on the cease-fire. One student said, "No, they don't care what the kids think anyway." Another said, "I think everyone is sort of tired of the whole subject of the war." Another said, "We just can't get over it. It's something we've been living with, and its like a bad part of your life disappearing." Several agreed the cease-fire was timed to help elect Richard Nixon and that the war could have been ended earlier. One student said she didn't trust Nixon to maintain the peace after the election. Another student who believed that protest could bring change, said, "It's a way of influencing public opinion. I don't think students can influence politics directly, but they can influence public opinion."²⁶

Following the cease-fire, march organizers and anti-war protesters had to keep the public aware of the war. One organizer said, "The peace movement has fragmented because people have given in to the hope that the war will be over soon, but if we cannot say to the Vietnamese that your agony will be over soon then we have no right to say it to ourselves."²⁷

So about thirty peace organizations joined together for a candlelight walk in December of 1972. About 1000 people marched through the snowy streets of Rochester from Washington Square Park to the First Universalist Church at South Clinton Avenue. Half of the marchers were able to hear speakers inside the church. They hoped the demonstration would show that the peace movement was not dead.

The End of "Religion As Usual"

The Ecumenical Concern For Peace and Justice began a campaign to interrupt 'religion as usual' in January of 1972. The members walked up church aisles during services, one member every five minutes, to emphasize that one person was killed every five minutes in Vietnam. A four-foot papier-mâché bomb was then laid on the altar.

About twenty protesters came to Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Brighton during the mass in 1972. Every five minutes a member walked up the aisle. A reporter was making notes when a female congregant tried to grab the notebook from the reporter's hand because the mass

in progress was for her father. After about six protesters walked up the aisle bearing signs about one death every five minutes, parishioners left their seats and ripped the signs from the protesters' hands. One parishioner said, "We don't want your garbage here." Angry parishioners grabbed the four-foot bomb from the hands of the executive director of Metro Act, an ordained Lutheran minister. The monsignor officiating over the mass said he did not know how to apologize for the behavior of the church's 'guests.' The group, however, stated that their purpose was to disrupt 'religion as usual.' "Perhaps our coming will have disturbed your worship but we are here to ask you what connection you make between celebrating the presence of the Lord of Peace and the horrible destruction of life and the environment in Indochina."²⁸

The group sent a statement to fifty Protestant and Catholic churches defending its interruption of services. The statement said, "It is precisely because of the counterproductive actions of most Christians in this nation and because of the paradox of the church's complicity in supporting the things that make for war and injustice that we found it necessary to disrupt 'religion as usual' . . . the religious community must be on notice that religion as usual can't be tolerated."²⁹

Some churches received them gladly but others protested loudly. One couple whose church service was interrupted said, "We felt they gave dramatic witness to the charge that churches have virtually ignored the moral issue of involvement in this war." Some opposers were insulted by the assumption that they as individuals needed "a rude awakening to moral concerns."³⁰

At least eight churches were revisited as a follow-up on what had been done since the last visit. The group's spokesman said, "Some churches need the jolt . . . they're very complacent and I think that kind of complacency has to be dealt with." The group suggested that churches "take part in anti-war activities such as supporting those who resist induction, refusing to invest in war-related industries, contributing to the defense of the Harrisburg 7 and refusing to pay the telephone tax" (which was raised to support the war).³¹

Many times during the Vietnam War period, vandals tore American flags from their poles in area cemeteries. Hundreds of small flags placed at individual graves of veterans were burned.

One mother, whose son was killed in Vietnam, was afraid to put a marker on his grave because of the destruction of veterans' graves. The family couldn't afford an elaborate memorial so another son made a wooden base in school shop class and the father's co-workers engraved the name on pieces of scrap metal they fashioned into a cross. The mother said she thought she should keep it in her home to protect it.

"There's a generation coming of age that doesn't know about Vietnam. They see A-team and they see people who are shot and don't bleed. They don't hear people scream when they're shot. It's tragic. It makes you want to scream.

"I screamed when I was in Vietnam: 'Why... am I here? It's wrong.' But nobody listened. Why should they listen now? They've forgotten about war. Why should they listen now?

"I know one thing. I'll never sing the glories of war, because I didn't see it.

"There's no glory in shelling a village, and then going in and finding a woman holding a child, and the woman's dead, or the child's dead, and you don't know if it was your bullet.

"You know, the only question you'll ever get out of Vietnam is 'Why?' "32

The Flower City Conspiracy

In the early morning hours of Sunday, September 6, 1970, eight young people entered the Federal Building on Fitzhugh Street and ransacked the offices of the Selective Service, the F.B.I. and the U.S. Attorney. The police noticed one of the eight in the dimly lit doorway and when police entered the building, they found files and drawers opened and papers torn and strewn all over the floor. Ink was spilled on draft records and drawer locks were broken.

The eight called themselves the "Flower City Conspiracy." The break-in was one of at least five break-ins planned around the country. The conspirators said that because three of the conspirators were from Rochester, this city was chosen.

The F.B.I. knew of the break-in before it occurred because of a wire tap on a telephone conversation between one of the Flower City Con-



Women against the war protested outside of the local draft board in 1970. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

spirators and the Rev. Philip Berrigan who was on trial as one of the Harrisburg 7 who also destroyed draft records. The Harrisburg 7 were not only charged with conspiracy to raid draft boards but conspiracy to blow up underground heating tunnels and to kidnap presidential adviser Henry Kissinger. The 7 were convicted of conspiracy to raid draft boards only. Since Rev. Berrigan was a friend and fellow member of the "East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives" along with one of the Flower City Conspirators, the link between the two conspiracies was made and a Flower City Conspirator was charged in the Harrisburg case. The charge was eventually dropped.

All eight of the Flower City Conspirators were convicted of ransacking the Federal Building and they were given sentences ranging from 12 to 18 months. One conspirator serving 18 months was free on bail while awaiting an appeal that overturned all the convictions, but not before the others had served their time.

In October 1970, three nights after dynamite was stolen from a truck in Brockport, blasts damaged the Federal Building, the County Office Building, two black churches, a union official's home and a synagogue.

The bombings were not proven to be connected to the anti-war movement, but it added to the tensions in the city and a reward was offered for the bombers. A California man, living with a Rochester man was arrested and charged with possession of 144 sticks of dynamite.

Rochester's Returning Soldiers Protest

Many parents turned from hawk to dove as their children came home from the war or their sons reached draft age. One returning soldier, injured early in the war, said "authorities don't like you to say too much, particularly about situations involving casualties." He said he and other returning soldiers were "warned not to speak too freely of their war experiences once they got back in the United States."³³

But returning soldiers, some of them members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, did recount their stories and held rallies to make public what they believed was a senseless and immoral war. Stories from POWs became public. A *Democrat & Chronicle* editorial pointed out that "It was the stories and pictures of the suffering of individual Vietnamese, North and South, that helped create the first great revolution here against a war that had gone on too long."³⁴

The Vietnam Veterans Against the War held a noontime rally in July of 1971 at the Civic Center Mall to tell the public firsthand of their experiences in and attitudes about the war. The veterans were concerned that the postponing of a withdrawal date was delaying release of Americans held prisoner and allowing more American soldiers to die. They urged city officials to support them and pointed out that urgently needed federal funds for urban development were being used to support the war. They said, "We are Rochesterians who have served in Vietnam, seen and participated in the war in Indochina. We have been driven by the continued moral laxity and political expediency of our nation's leaders to demand an immediate, fixed withdrawal date from a conflict in which America does not belong."³⁵

Coverage of the war in newspapers and attitudes in letters to the editor changed noticeably after the Tet offensive in 1968. People were more outspoken against the war. Although only one year before 59% of the people polled by the *Democrat & Chronicle* supported increased bombing of North Vietnam as a way to end the war.³⁶ One letter to the editor said, "Thoughtful, patriotic Americans now realize that our mili-

tary action in Vietnam was a mistake. I suspect we still don't know the full magnitude of that mistake. Dribblets of information I get from returning soldiers and others all confirm this conclusion. Any reversal of our announced de-escalation and withdrawal is unthinkable."³⁷

As the death toll mounted, the method of informing next of kin came under criticism by the newspapers. Rep Barber Conable, Jr. and Representative Frank Horton complained about the insensitivity of the military. Conable wrote to Army Secretary Stanley Resor, that there has been "considerable dissatisfaction in the Rochester area about telegrams delivered without warning sometimes in the middle of the night."

The Marines notified the next of kin in person, but one family, whose son was in the Army, received an anonymous telephone call at 12:50 a.m. asking them to leave their porch light on because a taxi was coming to deliver a telegram. The contents or purpose of the telegram were not mentioned. When they received it they read that their son was killed in action.³⁸

A *Times-Union* editorial warned immediately after the Tet offensive, "Now the grim-faced military messengers of death in Vietnam are knocking more frequently on Rochester doors. At current count, 56 servicemen from Monroe County and 58 more from Rochester area counties have died in Vietnam since 1960. Relatively, the number is not great—1,400 Monroe County residents were killed in WWII. But it is great enough in homes where sons and husbands and brothers have been lost. And the tempo of death is quickening. For more grief lies ahead. Draft calls are increasing, and more U.S. troops may soon be sent to Vietnam. Nationally, America has lost more than 18,000 battle dead in Vietnam; at the current casualty rate, there will be that many more before the year is out."³⁹

The City Moves Against The War

On January 9, 1973 Rochester's City Council passed a resolution introduced by Democrats Thomas P. Ryan, Jr. and Christopher Lindley. The tie vote was broken by Republican Robert Wood who said he voted out of conscience and not out of party allegiance. He said, "I feel deeply about ending the war, probably deeper than most people think. People define a patriot in many different ways, but I think a patriot is one who does what he feels is in the best interests of his country."⁴⁰ Republican Stephen May was concerned about the reaction to the vote from

the White House. The Republican councilman had voted not to support Richard Nixon's Vietnam policy. Rochester was one of only three cities at the time to take an official anti-war position.

The Resolution read:

Resolution No. 73-1.

WHEREAS, the United States Government is still spending billions of dollars annually to pursue the war in Vietnam while critical needs of our own citizens continue to be neglected, and

WHEREAS, the bright hopes of last autumn that "peace is at hand" have not been satisfied, and

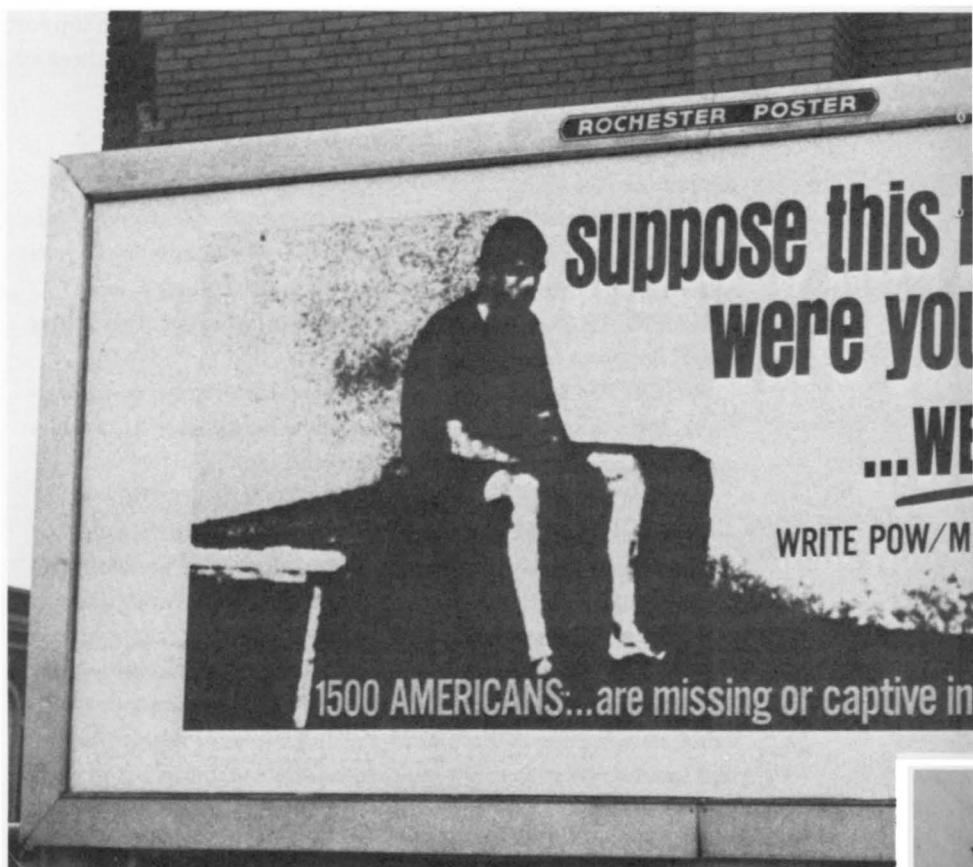
WHEREAS, in addition to the fundamental moral considerations, the Vietnam War continues to be a major obstacle to adequate federal funding for critical domestic needs;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Council of the City of Rochester deplores the failure of the October negotiations to conclude an effective Peace Agreement; condemns the resumption and expansion of hostilities including the intensive bombing of North Vietnam; and urges our Congressional representatives—Congressmen Conable and Horton and Senators Javits and Buckley—to support congressional termination of the funding of the Vietnam War if the current peace negotiations are not successfully concluded by January 20, 1973, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution be sent by the City Clerk to the President of the United States, the President Pro Tempore of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, to Senators Javits and Buckley and to Representatives Conable and Horton.⁴¹

When the war officially ended at 7 p.m. EST, January 27, 1973, church bells rang all over the city. Students threw firecrackers and danced. Church members prayed in small groups while car horns beeped on the street outside. The war was over after a dozen years. But the rejoicing was quieted by many who carried a deep grief within themselves. Like the mother, who two years after her son was killed by



Hundreds of people closed Main Street to traffic in this 1972 demonstration. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).





There were nine Rochester area POWs when the Rochester Jaycees billboard campaign was launched in 1971. This first one at Hayward and North Goodman was one of 25 such billboards around Rochester. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).



the grenade he threw himself on to protect his fellow soldiers, published a memorial in the *Times-Union* saying: "We rejoice for the families who have sons coming home but for us there can be no rejoicing, only emptiness. Why did it take so long? The war you hated is almost over but for you and us two years too late."⁴²

The Fall of Saigon

In early 1975, North Vietnamese forces began to move on South Vietnam. Relatives of Vietnamese families living in Rochester became fearful that when the Communists took Saigon, their relatives would be murdered for their relationship to Americans. The U.S. Immigration Office in Buffalo was swamped with letters and telephone calls from Vietnamese relatives trying to arrange safe passage out of Vietnam. More than fifty families in Rochester listed their relatives with public officials, U.S. Immigration offices, and the Red Cross. About twenty families met in April at Red Cross headquarters in Rochester to try to speed up red tape. Exit permits and airplane ticket prices skyrocketed.

Friends For All Children (FFAC) tried to raise \$60,000 for a commercial flight to airlift 250 orphans out of Saigon. The director of FFAC was a Webster woman who narrowly missed death when she stayed with orphans in Vietnam rather than take a planeload of orphans on an Air Force plane out of Saigon. The plane crashed killing half of the orphans, 105. Forty families in Rochester were waiting to take the orphans into their homes.

Remember Our POWs—MIAs

Families struggled to keep the issue of MIAs and POWs in the public eye, particularly during the Paris Peace talks. Letter writing campaigns were organized. Petitions were circulated. The Rochester Jaycees sponsored a billboard campaign to publicize the petition drive. Letters and petitions from greater Rochester were forwarded to Hanoi, but they were often returned unopened. Five Rochesterians traveled to Paris to deliver letters and petitions that they piled against the closed gates of the North Vietnamese Embassy in Paris. Bracelets bearing the names of POWs and MIAs were sold. The funds raised from the sale helped to finance the trip of the five Rochesterians to Paris where they met with two secretaries of the Hanoi delegation to the Paris Peace talks. The

North Vietnamese refused to accept the 117,000 petitions from the Rochester area or a camera and film to record the POWs. The North Vietnamese were uncomfortable about the attention given to the group by the French press, but the group pressed the North Vietnamese for the meeting. Nine days later, however, they left without any new information on their families. Two French interpreters who assisted the Rochester group were awarded the keys to the city and the county medallion for their assistance.

To publicize the plight of the POWs and MIAs, a group called 'Remember Our POWs-MIAs, displayed a tiger cage, a small bamboo cage used to confine POWs, and put a mannequin in it in 1971. The cages are usually sunken into the ground and the dimensions do not allow a captive to stand. The organizer of the display, whose brother-in-law was a POW, believed it was important to display the cage and she arranged to place it at South Town Plaza. An ex-Marine, a veteran of two tours of duty in Vietnam, left Sears where he worked and when he saw the cage, he began to shake uncontrollably and ran from the plaza.

The organizer said she sympathized with the veteran but added, "His reaction should give you some idea as to how the families feel when our loved ones may be living in those cages five or six years." She was upset with the malls who refused to display the cage after the incident, partly because the malls did not want to disturb the shopper who wanted to think "pleasant thoughts." The organizer said, "This is a completely humanitarian effort, the aspects of the war are not in debate. If you are an American, you cannot and must not turn your back on our men."

Parade officials refused to allow the group to display the cage in the city's 1971 Memorial Day parade fearing that the cage might upset the families of seven Rochester men who were POWs or MIAs. Officials suggested instead that a car carry wives of men lost in Vietnam.

When the war ended, there were 311 Monroe County soldiers dead in Vietnam. Families awaited news of their loved ones. Names of POWs held by the North Vietnamese were forwarded to the families, each hoping their relatives would appear on the list. There were rumors of more lists. There were tensions across the country.

Locally two MIAs were reclassified as POWs before the war ended. Cmdr. Robert Doremus and Marine Captain Bruce Archer. Archer's family held a memorial service for him seven months before they

learned that he was captured. Both returned safely. But others never returned and many were reclassified from MIA to KIA (killed in Action). Families of MIAs were embittered by a government they felt was turning their backs on their families. Some people in government suggested that families of MIAs resisted reclassification to maintain benefits. This deepened already hard feelings.

Returning POWs Bruce Archer and Robert Doremus received the keys to the city and the county medallion.

Families of soldiers killed in action had mixed feelings after the war. One parent said, "At the time our son was killed, I figured maybe I could see the reasons for our involvement. I think that way less and less."

Another said, "I never did believe in the war really. I often wonder if it's done any good."

One mother said, "It makes you feel funny to think he might have gone just before peace came. You wonder why, but I'll be glad if at least some of our boys come home alive."

A father said, "My boy died very honorably. I never figured the loss of any of our soldiers was in vain. They've said this in every war—that the men did not die in vain. History will show this is true."

Others said: "Most of the boys there died for nothing."

"For my part there is only hurt, to think it was all for nothing."

"How can I be bitter, as far as I'm concerned, my son was only obeying the laws of society. The country said our boys had to go."

Another resident said with resignation, "Whatever He (God) says is going to be. What can I say?"⁴³

At least one local family traveled to Southeast Asia to lay to rest the haunting feeling that their son was alive somewhere. The mother of one local soldier missing in action traveled to Paris to get information on her son and later traveled with her husband to Laos in 1977 and flew over the area where her son's plane crashed in the dense jungle. She felt more at peace after seeing the improbability of her son's survival, but her husband remained hopeful.

Veterans and travelers to Vietnam spoke about POWs. One soldier was angered by those who said there were POWs living in Vietnam because it kept alive false hopes in POW families. Others spoke with authority—"yes, there were POWs alive—yes, there are unrecovered American bodies in Vietnam." One ex-Vietnamese mortician testified

that he knew of 400 American POW bodies at a closed camp. In January 1980, a group of congressmen toured the camp but were denied access to that building that reportedly housed the remains.

Many veterans have returned to Vietnam to recapture their thoughts and to lay to rest many memories. Several Rochester area veterans have returned for visits.

A national monument to Vietnam veterans was dedicated in 1982. About 10,000 veterans and onlookers stood in the cold for two hours to dedicate the Vietnam War Memorial, a long black granite wall on which the names of more than 56,000 war dead are carved. About 85 veterans from Rochester attended. Speaking for thousands of area residents, Mrs. Barber Conable, wife of Representative Barber Conable (R) said, "This welcome home is wonderful and its long overdue. We're grateful to you people for what you did."

The veterans found the visits to the wall a very moving experience. The wall was the idea of a Vietnam veteran and it was built with funds raised by veterans. No money for the construction came from the government.

A Day To Remember

Since 1866, Rochester veterans have marched in Memorial Day Parades to remember their fallen comrades. One hundred and eighteen years later, in 1984, the 20 some veterans organizations that compose the Veterans Memorial and Executive Council, voted not to march in the Memorial Day parade because peace marchers also planned to march in the parade. A year earlier, peace marchers were permitted to march at the end of the parade but were not to carry signs. Many did and the anger it stirred led the organization to vote against marching with the peace marchers again.⁴⁴

But this Memorial Day was especially meaningful to the Vietnam Veterans because it was the day the Unknown Soldier would be laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. It was the day these veterans felt the absence of their fallen comrades keenly.

So the Genesee Valley Chapter of the Vietnam Veterans of America called a three-hour emergency meeting in which it was decided that they would march without supporting or opposing the Veterans Memorial and Executive Council or the Peace marchers, the Rochester Women's Action for Peace. The veterans stated, "The discussion to march was based on the strong conviction that we must honor our fallen brothers and sisters on Memorial Day in the traditional manner of marching. For their courage and will in making the ultimate sacrifice to defend the principles of this country, we choose to display the courage to honor them: especially since the Unknown Soldier from Vietnam will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery this Memorial Day."⁴⁵

Vietnam veteran Gary Kenyon observed, "At the staging area rain was falling. The gray and windy sky we marched under seemed almost fitting. When informed that a 30-foot interval was to be maintained between groups, we replied that our purpose was to honor our fallen comrades and that we would march at a distance we felt appropriate. At the conclusion of the parade the peace groups held their own ceremonies. We had turned off their line of march several blocks earlier and proceeded to the local War Memorial.

"As we approached it several policemen blocked the intersection and, coming to attention, presented arms as we passed. It was a moving moment for us as we returned the salute. At the Memorial we held a short prayer service followed by a reading of the names of the area dead. Following a salute to the Colors we disbanded."⁴⁶

For Some—An Everlasting War

Many soldiers were deeply affected by their experiences in Vietnam. One Rochester soldier said a soldier in his outfit stepped on a Viet Cong Bouncing Betty which is a land mine that bounces up chest high before exploding. Five of his friends were killed by it. Not from the explosion, he said, but from the concussion that set off their own grenades.

Many veterans complained of nightmares caused by the war, but years later, soldiers who thought they left Vietnam with no psychological scars, began experiencing unexplained skin rashes, lesions, nervous conditions, malignancies and deformed children. Thirty-five percent



The Vietnam War was protested not only by draft-age young men, but by whole families who held general anti-war sentiments. This family is demonstrating at a rally on Church Street in 1970. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

of the children born to Vietnam veterans in the Rochester area have birth defects compared to a national average of one to three percent.

Veterans believe the cause is a defoliant called Agent Orange which contains Dioxin. Eleven million gallons of the herbicide were sprayed

on Vietnam between 1962 and 1971. The intent was to defoliate the jungles, thus depriving the enemy of cover. Agent Orange remains toxic for years. The U.S. government acknowledges that dioxin is the most toxic chemical known—that it is 150,000 times more deadly than organic arsenic.

Even though Air Force supervisors were instructed in careful handling of the herbicide, including the caution that gloves and face masks should be worn, the U.S. Army manual states that Agent Orange is not hazardous. Soldiers handling the chemical were not warned of its hazards and not until years later, when symptoms peculiar to Vietnam veterans began to surface, did they realize its dangers. A 1986 study concluded that there were insufficient records kept by the military so that it could not be determined who was affected and therefore, whether there is a relationship between Agent Orange and the symptoms Vietnam veterans attribute to it.

One Spencerport man was a member of a ground crew of a C123 defoliation team called Project Ranch Hand that flew spraying missions out of Tan San Nhut Airfield. Flying in 1965, the soldiers were still unaware of its dangers. He said, "Flying at tree-top height, they lay down a heavy chemical spray that strips leaves from trees or destroys VC harvest." Crew members said, "The spray doesn't harm people. You can dunk your hand in it all day." "47

A city man said that he and his gunner used to fly a helicopter with 200-gallon tanks of the herbicide attached by eight-foot poles to the sides of the helicopter. He said that he and his gunner sat behind the sprayers and the wind sucked the defoliant into the helicopter and left them covered with a thin oily coating. It was difficult to remove the substance because of the oily base and there was no urgency about showering to remove it.

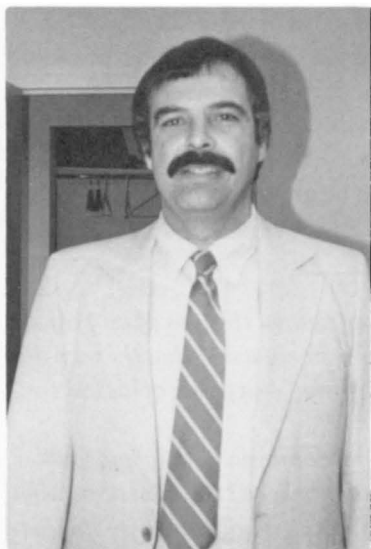
The government has refused to acknowledge any relationship between use of the herbicide and the symptoms that are developing in Vietnam veterans and their children. Claims by veterans for benefits from the Veterans Administration for exposure to Agent Orange have been routinely denied as non-service related. So in 1979, Vietnam veterans across the nation joined in a class-action suit against manufacturers of the chemical, who, in turn, sued the United States government claiming that they did not properly administer the defoliant or instruct their personnel in its safe handling. They further charged that the

government violated the constitutional rights of the soldiers and “killed its own troops.”⁴⁸ The Director of Veterans Outreach, Tom Cray, said, “We decided we would have to take care of it ourselves. We were together then. We will be together on this.”⁴⁹

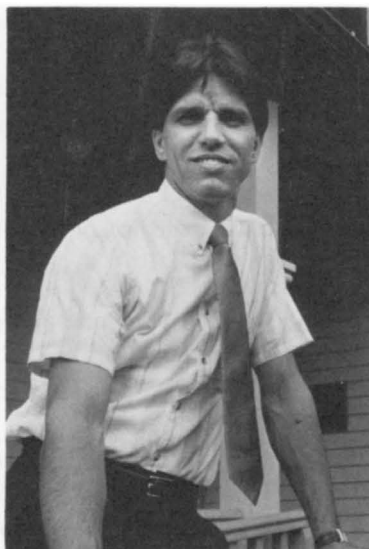
In 1985, the veterans settled for about 180 million dollars. Most veterans interviewed believed the sum to be grossly inadequate to cover the costs of their medical problems, many of which are still unknown.

“My boy died very honorably. I never figured the loss of any of our soldiers was in vain. They’ve said this in every war—that the men did not die in vain. History will show this is true” — a father of his lost son.

“By the end of the three day November Moratorium, they had walked through rain, hail and bitter cold, but they believed they had done what they could to help bring an end to America’s involvement in the Vietnam War” — on 1969 Washington protestors.

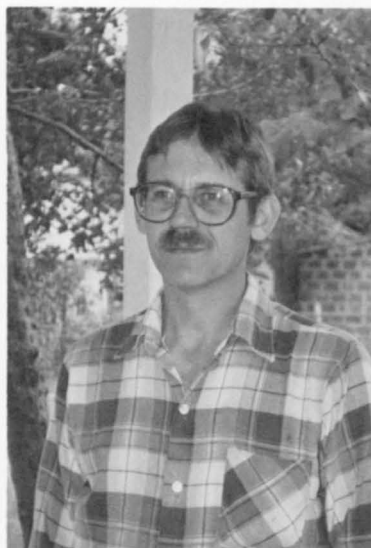


James Myers

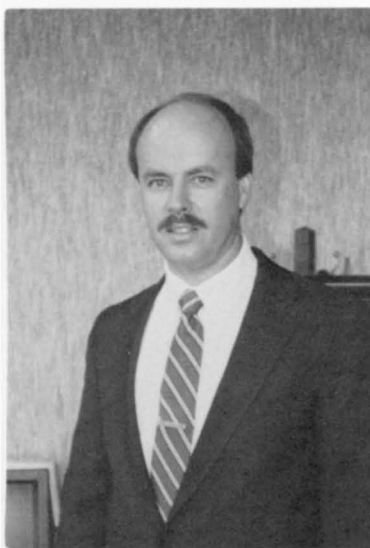


Tom Cray

Vietnam Veterans Remember



Gary Kenyon



William Reddy

Local Veterans Recall The War Years⁵⁰

James Myers

Protests—I was kind of insulated from all that. The real protests didn't start until 1968—the election. The Tet offensive was in the Spring of that year and you didn't get the big build-up until then. I think it was mostly kids on college campuses that didn't want to get drafted. Later older people started to think—maybe these kids are right.

I changed from when I first went in. I wanted to do something for my country. I think it was my second tour that I realized we weren't getting anywhere after I was there two years. Our strategy wasn't right for that war. We were in their land, we didn't understand their culture, their Russian-made rifle was better than our M-16. The M-16 jammed, it had twenty instead of the VC's thirty shells. It fired too lightly and it could be deflected from target too easily. The M-16 was not made for jungle warfare. It has to be kept clean.

The VC carried their guns, sometimes mortars, and sometimes used their helmets to pick it up if it was too hot from firing. they are used to just hitting and running. Do the most damage and get out of there. They fire at us from a hill and disappear.

Survival—If you want to survive in Vietnam you don't trust anybody. You don't know who the enemy is. I was hit by shrapnel in both shoulders in one fight. It was removed in the field. The other time, I was burned by gasoline trying to light it to keep the area around the concertina (barbed wire) clear and I was burned over the face and arms. I was lucky my eyes were saved when I put my arms up. I had to run through the flames. I was 'medivaced' out. I was given a beer and a Darvon. I was starting to go into shock. I got to the hospital and I can still hear the whoosh of the helicopter. A nurse came in and shoved a big pill down my throat and said I'd have to wait because four wounded were coming in and two had sucking chest wounds. They save them now. The helicopters get them out of the field and into a hospital in ten minutes.

I have the most respect for the medivac guys. They get fired on—they just keep coming. Some of those guys make twenty runs a day. They drop off their wounded and go out on another run. Sometimes they come in at night shining a light to find our location. The VC can spot them. Sometimes they shoot. They'll shoot at anything. They

have to hover and wait while they lift wounded. If one gets shot down they keep sending 'em.

Going to 'Nam—It was the thing to do. I had friends who were there. I wanted to be a paratrooper and I wanted to go to 'Nam. The Army was willing to give me both. We went into the mountains on missions sometimes for weeks. Once we had to come down for water—we couldn't find any. We usually drank the water there or called supply for some. We also got a supply drop every five days—so every five days the VC knew where we were. We never knew where they were. We were fighting an army that could live on a bowl of rice—we had to have C-rations.

Return—I didn't talk about Vietnam when I came back. Most of my friends were against the war and they didn't ask me about it. If they sometimes did I said I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't start doing that (talking about it) until a couple of years ago. It felt good when I started going to Veteran's Outreach. I got involved with them through our banker. We found we were in the 101st Airborne and started talking about it. . . . Now I talk about it more. . . . You just put Vietnam behind you. You know you went to Vietnam. . . . some of those guys had a lot of responsibility. I was 21 years old when I got out. You know on the outside, you're just a 21-year-old kid.

The fall of Saigon—The ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) were lazy, undisciplined. They didn't care about fighting. Most of them were farmers who just wanted to be let alone. They didn't care who was running the government. They didn't want to learn how to use a gun or equipment. We gave them every opportunity to resist Communism. They didn't resist—they just collapsed. The fall started at the DMZ and two days later they were in Saigon. They had good equipment, our bases, our training, if they didn't want independence more than that, we did all we could do. Now the Russians use our bases. . . . We didn't win the war, we didn't lose the war. We were in a holding action and we did that. The ARVN held out for two years. They deserved what they got. They were lazy and undisciplined.

U.S. government—I think we trust our government less now. It has hurt the government. I'm mad about the way they treated us. They turned their backs on us. They didn't even have a parade for us until ten years later. Now it's too late.

Amnesty—I'm coming more to their (draft evader's) way of thinking. But I think they were just chicken not to go. They were right that we shouldn't have been in the war—I think that way more every year—but they didn't go about it right. It makes me mad—I mean, I gave two years of my life to that war.

Agent Orange—I didn't sign up for the suit because I didn't have any symptoms. I was lucky though, I have two healthy girls, ten and seven. I remember when I was on a TAC (an observation hill) one morning I saw a big transport flying low over a hilltop spraying something. That might have been Agent Orange. It might have been a place I went the next day. I know we've gone through areas that were defoliated.

Memorial Day parade—I don't blame the other groups for not marching with them (the peace groups in 1984). That's not what the day's for. They should march on the 4th of July—we want to maintain our independence peacefully, but on Memorial Day—I'm not feeling very peaceful. I lost a lot of friends there. I want to think about them.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington—I haven't been there. I'm still mad at the government. I'm going to have to deal with that someday. I think it's nice that it was built with money from Vietnam veterans—no government money. I'd like to take the kids down there someday to learn how government works. I don't think enough people get involved in government personally. Besides, I don't think I'm ready for it.

Tom Cray

Protests—didn't get to me. I knew little or nothing about the Vietnam War at the time, little or nothing, simply because it was a matter of little interest to me—even with the idea of going into the military. I had decided to enlist in the Navy to avoid going to Vietnam. It never occurred to me the Navy was participating in the war.

I was on a ship both tours. I was in San Diego about three weeks waiting for my destroyer. . . I made my first tour on that destroyer. . . the assignment was to provide Naval gunfire support.

We had a home port at Subic Bay in the Philippines. We would go to Subic to do what was called a stand down and do a ship replenishment and then go back to the gun line. When we got back off my first tour in Vietnam I asked for a transfer because I didn't want to go back to Vietnam. It turned out, the ship was going to Vietnam.

I was a boatswain—a person who works on board ship, rehabbing the ship. I also did some personnel work . . . I also worked on the gun line. I also worked on rigging to replenish the ship for refueling. There are only about 100 some odd men on board a destroyer so you're assigned a number of different tasks. My primary task on the gun line was gun mount training. I was the one that trained the gun on the target based on the coordinates the gunnery line officer called. There were nine of us on that crew—pointer, trainer, gun mount captain, and what were called the handling crew, people that handled powder casings, projectiles, and got rid of hot powder casings.

There were no incidents of injury on my ship. One of the ships that pulled into harbor had lost all of its upper handling crew because of a cook-off in the gun mount . . . the projectile had exploded in the bore because of a malfunction and had killed all the members of the upper handling crew . . . Of course I was new to all this. I can't tell you the thought process I went through, but when we had a malfunction I thought it was good-bye . . . because we had the same problems.

I knew I never wanted to go back to Vietnam. I had convinced myself I was going to jump ship when I heard we were gonna go again . . . I just knew I didn't want to go and I don't know whether that was a moral conviction that I had or whether it was a part of the popular belief that participation wasn't just at the time . . . It had reached me (anti-war sentiment) during my first tour . . . because of a couple of incidents . . . We had a real gung ho gunnery line officer that was really into what was happening . . . on one occasion he informed me that we had just blown the hell out of an orphanage—I remember the wrenching feeling in my gut. It wasn't like I was . . . I lost the sense that I was keeping other soldiers from attacking our soldiers. The thought just crossed my path and it just stayed there—'why did we have to . . . Why in God's name did we have to go and blow up an orphanage. It didn't make sense to me. My understanding was that we were killing women and children and I said to myself— 'There's no point in doing that . . . it was intentional (the destruction of the orphanage).

We had shifts—twelve hours on—eight off . . . We were on a boat midnight to eight in the morning shift. Normally they did what was called an H and I firing which was to harass the enemy. In the morning they called for a D and E, a direct effect . . . that means that there was a lot of activity and you have to disrupt the activity . . . When you're

inside a gun mount the mechanism is working and the gun is firing, the recoil gets hot and it lets off gases. I was tucked away in this little space receiving coordinates from the gunnery line officer. While I was waiting for the coordinates, I'd always look up at this part of the gun that was very heavily greased and it was starting to drip and I knew that the intensity of heat was starting to build up in the mount even more so. And you get very, very tired and you get very sweaty. . . There was a thin copper tubing inside and the percussion had a tendency to crack the tubing. I can remember the tubing had sprung a leak and there was this transmission fluid getting into my eyes and I couldn't see the dials to train the coordinates. I said to my gun mount captain that I couldn't see and I didn't know if we were on target. He called for a break and the bridge refused. . . to allow a change. . . It was the last time the captain accepted a refusal. . . . Four hours later at ten o'clock he told the gun crew to stop firing and we opened our hatches to our mounts and we had stopped firing in the middle of a firing line and had walked out. We had protested the run, so to speak. Those two things had to do with my difference of opinion on the war.

I let my father talk me out of (jumping ship before the second tour). I had called home and told my folks that I was leaving and I'd be in touch with them. He (my father) had dashed off a quick letter to me and I started to make some sense out of the whole thing. He told me if I had some moral reason for leaving the whole thing to come home and he would help me.

(His father wrote): Dear Tom, Your telephone call was quite disturbing to me and the family. Not because of your attitude toward a possible Pacific tour, nor the method you might employ to avoid such a tour, but your total inability to verbally express any justification for considering such bold action. . . . (His father presented Tom's alternatives as he saw them and attempted to help him formulate his thoughts.) If you decide your moral fabric is being torn apart and you can define to me the basic structure upon which your principles are founded I will completely support any dignified action you must implement to safeguard those moral commitments. A man must first establish the ethical standards by which he must live before he can initiate any action that would insure a lifestyle or commitment. . . If you decide to go AWOL just because you don't like the Navy. . . you can never be able to enjoy the benefits of man nor will you be able to join in the

community of man. An individual with strong moral commitments need never run. Only those with unsure weak moments seek the shadows in which to hide. What you do will justify your future existence and if the wrong decision is made you may never be able to turn the world around and begin all over. . .

Gary Kenyon

Vietnam Veterans Against the War—We weren't just another group, we were like the group. . . Where other people were talking from their ideological or political convictions, we were talking from experience. . . . If you didn't serve in Vietnam, you couldn't be a member. . . In Rochester, a guy came into a meeting and he said, "I loaded bombs on Okinawa. I loaded B-52s. Are you telling me I wasn't part of the war? . . . I saw crews get shot down. We sent planes out that didn't come back. Are you telling me we weren't just as involved as you guys?"

As a result of that happening in other places too. . . if you served you could be a member. . . . Another time a woman came in and said, "My old man is involved in that stuff and he's a Vietnam vet and you're telling me I don't have just as much right to be ticked off as you people?" So then anyone who wanted to be a member could. . .

We (the Vietnam Veterans Against the War) felt like we were the Americans. We felt like all the ideals we were raised to believe in were being betrayed by the leadership. . . We were not summer soldiers or summer patriots. . . we were the real patriots. . . it was in March of '68 or '69 that Vietnam Veterans Against the War started. Down in New York City a few veterans marched under a banner of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and it caught on.

It was experience, I think, that was the biggest catalyst for guys to get involved with it. We came home. Nobody really wanted to hear what we had to say or anything about what we knew was happening and people really just didn't care. . .

Guys that were out on patrol. Guys that really carried the work of the war. . . you develop. . . bonds that are stronger than you think. . . you're taking care of each other. . . and you see people making sacrifices that you've never conceived of before. And now all of a sudden people are saying, "You sucker. It doesn't mean anything." It stirred up a frustration and it creates an anger and bitterness. . . That thing with Agent Orange, they say, "You're all a bunch of whiners."

Amnesty—Vietnam has affected the entire population in one way or another. . . a lot of detrimental things were going on in peoples' lives as a result of whether they had served or whether they had resisted serving. . . that was one reason that we wanted to see. . . (amnesty for all). It was this idealist, Utopian kind of. . . 'Why can't everyone just be together,' . . . but that was a pretty prevalent mood in our culture. I suppose it's understandable.

Returning From War—When I walked in (to the neighborhood tavern) . . . everybody in the place would buy you a beer. . . I didn't want to go in sometimes because I knew I couldn't possibly drink all the beer that was going to wind up in front of me.

Parades—Whenever we stopped we could hear calls, 'Thanks guys' . . . Whenever the marching unit goes by, you can trace our progress just by the crowd's reaction. . . it's kind of disconcerting sometimes. The crowd noise for us is so loud, we can't even hear our own cadence call. . . it's really remarkable. (Peoples' attitudes have changed.) I think people are finally able to separate the war from the warrior. They're starting to realize that we didn't lose the war. There were bad decisions made. . . .

Fall of Saigon—There were a lot of peoples' names left in those files. . . I think it was unforgivable. . . there was time to destroy them, but they didn't want to tip their hand.

Vietnamese people—It was a civil war, but there was also an invasion from the outside. The North Vietnamese were different. The further south you go, the more populated it got. The more people depended on our money. (When we left) it really messed up their economy.

William Reddy

On Returning—They have to give you debriefing time. . . . You go over as individuals. You come home as individuals. You come home as individuals into a society torn apart. You can go from a combat situation, hot combat and 24 hours later be on the streets in America. You just trained this guy for two or three years how to kill with instincts to react so he survives and does what you want him to do, and that's kill the other person. . . . Now you put him on the street and somebody gives him a hard time. . . and you say, 'well, no. No. We know we trained you to kill for three years but we want you this instant to stop.' That's very difficult to do. A soldier maybe isn't going to hurt anybody

else, but he's dying inside because he's trained to react. . . . I got asked a question when I got back 'Did you kill anybody?' Well, you think about it. I didn't answer the question. . . . It puts me in the context of trying to justify an action that I took in a different culture, in a different set of circumstances, while I'm sitting here eating an ice cream cone. People say, 'Well, how could you do that?' You can't judge it by this. You don't operate in a combat zone by the same values and standards that you operate here. . . . There is no script writer that's going to make it better when things go wrong. That tears people up. They found not only other people asking those questions. They found themselves asking those questions. . . . You may try to even justify some of the mundane things. . . and you can't do it. That's why a lot of it just got buried and shoved aside and said 'That's gotta stay over there.' . . . other soldiers have that base of reference, they make a judgement in the context of the same culture. These guys knew what it was like, exactly. . . salt stains on your clothes and white stains. . . salt.

Town—You can't picture anything like an intersection. . . a grocery store. They got a couple of huts thrown together. That was it. . . we went to this one village. . . and there was a school in this grass hut with a bunch of kids in it and the kids came out. . . and they all smoke. . . one and two year old kids smoke and they came out and see the smoke and this Papasan had this little baby. He sat next to me and I was talking to him. I was running a little short on cigarettes and I was hesitant to give him some, but I handed him some candy and cigarettes. I had my ruck sack and I was leaning against it like a back rest. After I had given him the cigarettes and candy, he said, 'Don't sit there.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'VC on the hill up there.' I just kept thinking, 'What if I didn't give him that cigarette? I could have been a dead man for the sake of a cigarette?' He was right because we set up camp and that night we took fire from that hill.

(Why didn't the villagers warn the Americans?) I don't know. For all I know he could have been VC. . . all I know is I gave him the cigarettes and candy and he told me.

When I arrived—I didn't do anything over here for about five months. I didn't drink anything. I didn't smoke anything. I didn't do anything that would interfere with my senses. I wanted to hear everything. See everything. I wanted to come back alive. . .



Leaning on the rifle of a Civil War soldier, this young man looks on an October 1971 anti-war rally at Washington Square. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).

Going to Vietnam—My acquaintances were not of my generation. If the government says do it. Do it. My father was clearly like that. Did he understand the war? No. Did I understand the war? No. Did I think about the war? No. Not until I got my draft notice (at age 22). I'm not an anti-war demonstrator. I didn't sit around the bars debating the Vietnam war. It didn't exist for me except on the nightly news. I was filled up with myself. I was in college. That (Vietnam) was a long ways away. Did I think the war was wrong? No. Did I think the war was right? No. I didn't understand it. When I got my draft notice, I thought maybe I'd develop a better understanding. . . .

A clerk reassigned—There was this clerk sent out to a fire base. I didn't see this kid for thirty days. They sent him to a fire base. He went out in the jungle, and it was like reading a GI Joe comic book. Last time I saw him he was a 19-year-old kid with blonde hair, brush cut, the all-American boy. Thirty days later, it's raining, this picture is framed in my mind. The door opens and here stands this battered veteran, GI Joe type, with a week's growth of beard on him—looks like he was thirty years old. He had been to the mountain. He wasn't a month older. He was five years older.

On Doing His Duty—I'm certainly not a proponent of the war. I ended up there because I got drafted. I've had a good life. I couldn't ask for a better life. Good friends. Good family. I couldn't ask for anything more. I always wondered if somebody was gonna tap me on the shoulder and say 'All right. We've given you all this. Now it's time to give it back again.' Well, they tapped me on the shoulder, and said, 'It's time to serve your country' and I said, 'Well, fair enough. I've had a good life. . . . I was confused about the war. Is it good? Is it bad? I don't know. . . . (You were willing to risk your life to find out?) Yeah. . . but when you're young. . . the only war I'd known was John Wayne. . . War is so glorified on TV. . . When you're young, you're sort of immortal.

I wasn't strong enough against the war to say, 'I'm not gonna go.' I've never condemned the guys who went to Canada. . . . They had very strong convictions. . . . If they had those convictions and they didn't do what they did, then I'd think less of them. They did what they thought they should do. . . . I went to Canada. . . . Initially it was just to go see this girl for a couple of days before I had to leave. A couple of days turned into a few more days and I thought, 'Hey, why should I go to

Vietnam? This is not a bad life here.' Of course, I called home and my mother said, 'Good. I'd rather have you there and alive. That's fine with me.' And my father said, 'Get . . . back here. Do what you're supposed to do.' So there were conflicts at home too. And they (Canadians) introduced me . . . to the underground. . . . We had a meeting and I've never met a bigger bunch of losers in my life. I did not classify all the people like this. . . I just couldn't see myself as one of them. . . . So I took off my civilian clothes, put on my uniform and flew back to Seattle to Fort Lewis to get shipped off to Vietnam. . .

We were in formation. . . there were about 2000 guys and this officer said, 'If anybody's got to go to Courts and Boards,' which is like trial, 'Step over here'. . . If there were 2000 people in that formation, about 1900 had to go to courts and boards. Only a hundred were clear and free. . . . You get a two-week leave from Advanced Infantry Training, but when you're supposed to go to Vietnam. . . Well we're all kind of scared. If I take an extra day, what can they do to me? If I take an extra month, what are they going to do to me? Send me to Vietnam? They fined me. They took away my rank. I was in Vietnam two days later. They gave me back my rank. . . But I thoroughly enjoyed those two weeks and I did some serious thinking.

Copy edited by Hans Munsch

"I didn't do anything over here for about five months. I didn't drink anything. I didn't smoke anything. I didn't do anything that would interfere with my senses. I wanted to hear everything. See everything. I wanted to come back alive" — William Reddy.

Footnotes For *A City In Conflict*

1. *Democrat & Chronicle*, April 9, 1966.
2. *Democrat & Chronicle*, November 6, 1967.
3. *Times-Union*, February 22, 1966.
4. *Times-Union*, April 4, 1966.
5. *Democrat & Chronicle*, March 23, 1971.
6. *Democrat & Chronicle*, November 15, 1969.
7. *Times-Union*, November 15, 1969.
8. *IBID*.
9. *IBID*.
10. *Times-Union*, April 22, 1971.
11. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 21, 1971.
12. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 6, 1971.
13. *Times-Union*, May 19, 1971.
14. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 11, 1971, includes previous quote.
15. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 15, 1971.
16. *Times-Union*, May 6, 1971.
17. *Times-Union*, May 12, 1971.
18. *Times-Union*, May 19, 1971.
19. *IBID*.
20. *IBID*.
21. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 5, 1972.
22. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 12, 1972.
23. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 14, 1972.
24. *Democrat & Chronicle*, June 24, 1972, Judge Celli's comments and detective's protest.
25. *Democrat & Chronicle*, May 16, 1972.
26. *Democrat & Chronicle*, December 24; December 31, 1972.
27. *IBID*.
28. *Times-Union*, January 17, 1972.
29. *Democrat & Chronicle*, January 23, 1972.
30. *Democrat & Chronicle*, February 6, 1972.
31. *Times-Union*, March 21, 1972.
32. *Times-Union*, February 15, 1971.
33. *Democrat & Chronicle*, April 9, 1966.
34. *Democrat & Chronicle*, October 9, 1972.

35. *Democrat & Chronicle*, July 27, 1971.
36. *Democrat & Chronicle*, September 3, 1967.
37. *Democrat & Chronicle*, February 25, 1970.
38. *Democrat & Chronicle*, February 26, 1966, includes Rep. Conable's letter above.
39. *Times-Union*, February 26, 1968.
40. *Times-Union*, January 10, 1973.
41. *Proceedings of the Common Council*, 1973, Resolution #73-1.
42. *Times-Union*, February 5, 1973.
43. *Democrat & Chronicle*, March 23, 1975; *Times-Union*, April 29, 1975, preceding quotes on sons lost.
44. Gary Kenyon, "Rochester, NY Memorial Day Parade Blocked by 20 Other Vet's Groups in Dispute," in *VVA Veteran*, August, 1984, publication of Vietnam Veterans of America.
45. *IBID*.
46. *IBID*.
47. *Times-Union*, January 29, 1966.
48. *Democrat & Chronicle*, November 2, 1980, *Upstate Magazine* cover story.
49. *IBID*.
50. Excerpts from about eight hours of taped interviews with Vietnam veterans James Myers, Tom Cray, Gary Kenyon and William Reddy.

Identification of Veterans Interviewed

James Myers served two tours of duty in Vietnam and now works for Stress Technology, Inc. in Henrietta.

William Reddy served in Vietnam for one tour and is now a budget forecaster for RG&E.

Tom Cray served two tours of duty in Vietnam on shipboard. He is the director of Veterans' Outreach Center, Inc. on South Avenue.

Gary Kenyon served in Vietnam for one tour and is a published writer with an extensive personal library on Vietnam.



The grim reaper stood vigil outside of the Hall of Justice and City Hall in March of 1972 in protest of the Vietnam War. (Courtesy of Gannett Newspapers).