

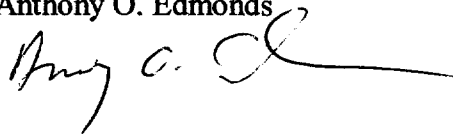
**The War at Home: How the History of the Anti-Vietnam Movement Parallels One
American Family's Experience**

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Sarah M. Fullam

Dr. Anthony O. Edmonds

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony O. Edmonds", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Abstract

This paper looks critically at the historical accounts of the effects of the Vietnam conflict on the American population. The paper addresses the anti-war movement, how it grew and matured throughout the years of the conflict, and whether it echoed the sentiment of the American population, both those that participated in organized opposition and those that opposed the war without joining an organized movement. Throughout the paper historical accounts are compared to the experiences of my father, Gary Fullam, my mother Claire Fullam and my uncle, Edward Kiffmeyer from Cincinnati, Ohio. All three were around the age of 18 at the time of the conflict.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are given to Dr. Anthony Edmonds; who sparked my interest not only in the Vietnam conflict but also my family's place in history. Thank you to my parents, Gary and Claire Fullam, and my uncle Ed Kiffmeyer for allowing me to dig into their past in order to better understand them, and myself.

Few events in 20th century America created such intense feelings within the nation as a whole as the conflict in Vietnam. Entire generations of Americans coming of age during this volatile time were forced to make difficult decisions both about their futures and their values and beliefs. War is not fought only on the battlefield but in the families and homes of those left behind. Perhaps no war polarized those stateside more than the Vietnam conflict. A militant and often angry anti-war movement captured the attention of the country and threatened the idyllic vision of America that had been so pervasive in popular opinion since the 1950's.

This thesis examines the turmoil that the Vietnam War created throughout America. It will look at the creation of the anti-war movement and its evolution throughout the years of American involvement and come to a conclusion on the overall effect of the war and the movement throughout America. It will look not only at what history remembers about the anti-war movement as a whole but also the first hand accounts of members of the Fullam and Kiffmeyer families from Cincinnati, Ohio; Gary and Claire Fullam, my mother and father, and Edward Kiffmeyer, my maternal uncle. Through these accounts this thesis will demonstrate that the Vietnam conflict divided people unlike any other event in the 20th century.

The Making of a Movement

The dissention that the Vietnam War created in America hardly appeared within a vacuum. Peace movements had been a part of American culture for decades, with many of the groups that would become major players in the anti-Vietnam movement springing up during the time of the Korean War, such as SANE, or the National Committee for a

Sane Nuclear Policy (Garfinkle, 42-3). SANE's primary goal was to make nuclear disarmament a policy priority, and also championed Liberal Left causes such as civil rights. America in the early 1960's was a nation still recovering from the this conflict and still committed to the idea of containment or trying to keep Communism from spreading further than the borders of the USSR and China, by whatever means necessary. The civil rights movement of the late 50's and early 60's also created what can best be described as a "adversarial culture," the likes of which had not been seen since pre-World War II (Garfinkle, 45). The struggle of African Americans in America was representative of the general decay in the myth of the American Dream for all, and was the forerunner of the non-violent protests that were to encompass much of the anti-Vietnam movement (Garfinkle, 48).

Within this culture a plethora of groups began to be formed, representing a myriad of segments of the population. Pacifist, religious, civil rights, disarmament, and student groups were organized in response to the growing police action in Vietnam. Groups that originally were a part of the radical left also joined the diverse mass of groups demonstrating American involvement in events in Vietnam (Zaroulis, 9-11). Initially each group was acting in concordance with its own objectives, often colored by the perspective and initial purpose of the organization when anti-war demonstrations were concerned. Many of these organizations existed at the edge of popular thought at the time, and were not readily identifiable to most of the American population (Zaroulis, 9).

At first these groups had little impact, with many efforts undertaken during the first few years of the 1960's not producing tangible results or support from politicians and the population at large (DeBenedetti, 58-59). Efforts from the mid 1950's to 1963

were focused not on the events taking place in Indochina, but instead the banning of testing of nuclear weapons (DeBenedetti, 78-79).

This lack of focus on the conflict in Indochina itself spilled over into the general population's lack of knowledge about the events in the region and America's increasing presence in the area. Gary Fullam, my father, noted that his first exposure in any way to the conflict was in 1961-2, as increasing news coverage was devoted to Vietnam. Gary noted that in the early 1960's, much of his feelings about the war were "molded by what my father and his peers were discussing about the situation" (Gary Fullam interview, March 8, 2001). Gary noted the strong sense of nationalism that his father's generation felt, and the patriotism and the fear of the spread of Communism that were the underlying reasons for war, and so initially Gary was supportive of the war. That was to change in the years to come.

1963 was the year that what had been for years been strictly committed to peace and nuclear disarmament started to shift toward a predominantly anti-war focus. In August of 1963, groups in New York City and Philadelphia as well as other American cities, staged their first formal anti-Vietnam protests, denouncing America's policy regarding America's support of the Diem government in place in South Vietnam (Zaroulis, 12). Still, these protests failed to garner widespread public and political support, with much of the attention still focused on the civil rights movement in the South.

The period of 1963-1964 was a time of haziness for the anti-war movement, where many voices were speaking, with little being heard outside of the small confines of the liberal sector. Some described this period as the "period of lonely dissent" where

groups worked outside of the consciousness of the American population for a cause that few understood or even knew existed (Zaroulis, 9).

A Nation is Awakened

The Gulf of Tonkin incident, which took place in August of 1964, increased awareness of the conflict in Vietnam. Despite the obvious escalation of fighting and the decision of Lyndon Johnson to send more troops to the area, Vietnam was not a major issue in the presidential election of that year. As November of 1964 began; however, national news began to broadcast scenes from action in Vietnam, and the first American casualties were shipped home (Garfinkle, 58). Despite this increased coverage and media attention, little public outcry appeared in 1964 and anti-war groups undertook little action. Even dissention within Johnson's top-level advisors such as General William Westmoreland, the commander of US forces in Vietnam, and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, William Bundy, regarding possible public outcry to an overt war in Vietnam failed to raise eyebrows either in the Johnson administration, or the American public (Wells, 10-13). Both of these men urged Johnson to reconsider major troop commitment to the area.

This ambivalence within the American public and the liberal left was not to continue into 1965; however. That year saw a marked increase in anti-war activity, spearheaded by student groups such as the Students for a Democratic Society, or SDS, as it came to be known. SDS was a purely student organization, originally organized on behalf of the civil rights movement, but quickly became one of the anti-war movements most radical organizations (Garfinkle, 61-64). Johnson's implementation of Rolling

Thunder, an aggressive bombing campaign of targets within North Vietnam set off the initial firestorms of protest. Protests such as the “teach-in” organized by professors at the University of Michigan and later at other schools, as well as the other smaller demonstrations planned by members of SDS helped to create more press for the anti war movement, but caused little initial change in the opinion of the American public or the Johnson administration (DeBenedetti, 108-9).

The first exposure that my mother, Claire Fullam, had to Vietnam came around the mid 1960’s, as more and more airtime was devoted on the nightly news to coverage of the war. Gary also mentions that the first exposure that he remembers to the conflict was through national news broadcasts. Claire remembers that “at that time I didn’t know anyone who was over there, but I knew that it was not where I would want one of my loved ones to be. I remember thinking ‘I hope this is over soon’. Little did I know that it had already been going on for about ten years and it would continue for many more,” (Claire Fullam interview, March 9, 2001). Claire notes her initial formation of her feelings on Vietnam as she grew older and began to understand more of what was taking place.

At first I was just horrified. Then I realized how wrong it was for us to be butting into another country’s civil war. When I realized that the Vietnamese people didn’t particularly want our involvement, I thought ‘Why don’t we just leave?’ But the powers that be felt committed to seeing it through (Claire Fullam interview).

Edward Kiffmeyer, Claire’s older brother, also came of age during the Vietnam War, starting high school in 1964, but his view of the war differed greatly from Claire’s.

Kiffmeyer said, "I felt that what the US was doing was the right thing to do, helping another country from being taken over by a communist-backed country" (Edward Kiffmeyer interview, March 9, 2001).

The rash of protests that erupted October 15-16 in cities throughout America began to create attention. These protests included the burning of draft cards in New York City, a teach-in of over fifteen thousand people in Berkley. Several major news outlets, such as CBS and NBC, reported on activities surrounding several students sitting on a draft board meeting in Ann Arbor and the Selective Service's immediate revoking of deferment status for some of the students involved (Wells, 57). The attention gained during this round of protests were some of the first nationwide coverage any American had of the anti-war movement, but it did little to ensure stability in the movement or its support.

The year 1965 saw little real progress in the anti-war movement's agenda, but it did serve as an organizational year for the movement. A tenuous alliance was created, with groups representing the liberal left of disarmament groups such as SANE, the radical left of groups such as SDS, and the "new pacifists," comprised of groups like Women Strike for Peace (WSP), a group of liberal women who had organized on a nuclear weapon ban platform. This alignment created a triangular approach to demonstrations, each organization progressing according to their own agendas, but ultimately focusing on many of the same issues. Alliances between these three groups were formed, with each of the three main players taking turns as the "leader," demonstrating the relative flexibility of the movement's leadership (Garfinkle, 67-68).

Both Gary and Claire took note of some of the actions of anti-war groups, and both came to similar conclusions on whether organized protesting was a viable option for them. "I was surprised at first when I first started hearing people talking out against the war," Gary said, who was making the transition from middle school to high school in 1965. "But one thing did become clear, that at this time, one had to start forming solid opinions" (Gary Fullam interview). Gary opted not to become a part of any organized group, mostly due to the lack of unity that the groups that constituted the movement displayed. "There were other objectives attached to their individual groups, like blacks against the war- blacks at that time were dealing with many issues besides the war. There was not much purism" (Gary Fullam interview). Claire also shied away from joining an organized movement. "I was not a fan of the violent anti-war groups like SDS. I never thought about joining any organized groups because the majority of them were violent, and I never thought that was the answer to the problem" (Claire Fullam interview). Claire did participate in small ways while in high school and college, by marching in peaceful demonstrations, and speaking her discontent with her friends. Claire did participate in some rallies in the early 70's while in college as a peaceful demonstrator (Claire Fullam interview).

Kiffmeyer had a different and much more forceful opinion of the anti-war movement and their tactics. Kiffmeyer also did not participate in any anti-war activities, because he believed that the war was "something that needed doing" (Edward Kiffmeyer interview). He went on to say:

People have the right to protest, so that was fine. What was not okay was the way they went about it- there was too much active, not

passive protesting, damaging property, defying law enforcement, etc.

That's why I did not approve of the anti-war movement then (Edward Kiffmeyer interview).

Winds of Change

As the conflict entered 1966 there were several changes in the mood of the country and the Johnson administration regarding Vietnam. Some senators, who had noted a marked nervousness among their constituents regarding Johnson's policy for bombing North Vietnam, urged and convinced Johnson to halt the proposed resuming of bombing at the beginning of 1966 (Wells, 67). Senator J. William Fullbright went so far as to conduct public hearings regarding the war, hearings that were televised nationally, exposing more Americans to anti-war sentiment than ever before (Wells, 68). Upon the conclusion of these hearings, a public opinion poll found that Americans on the whole were more "concerned" with the war in Vietnam than other issues such as crime and cost of living (Wells, 70). This rise in public unease over the war was a change over previous year and marked a significant shift in public opinion, one that was to continue for years to come. Even with the rise in public discomfort with the war, many Americans still failed to side with the anti-war movement. Religious Americans, though often seeing the war in Vietnam as unjust, were a demonstration of this concern, but unwillingness to protest that much of the American public displayed. "Although anxious about the war, most religious Americans were not ready to protest it in 1966" (Wells, 75).

This year also saw changes from within the movement, as well as from without. First, there was a major shift in the civil rights movement, orienting it more towards an anti-war stance (Garfinkle, 91). Second was the rise of what came to be known as the

“counterculture” movement. This movement was attractive to younger Americans, and those involved later became known as “hippies” (Garfinkle, 91-2). The counterculture attracted many of the same demographics as did SDS, but its tactics were less radical and more focused on civil disobedience than that of SDS. The counterculture angered many within the established anti-war movement because of the movement’s overt apolitical nature and embracing of illicit drug use and promiscuity (Small, 10-11). There is argument regarding the counterculture’s place within the movement, whether it was help or a hindrance, but it did attract many followers, and became a media mainstay into the 1990’s as representative of the movement and those involved in it.

A major shift in public opinion to date occurred in 1967, as did the escalation of hostility in Vietnam and anti-war movement protest activity in America. Television covered the war in 1967 nightly, and brought both the horrors of war and the protests of those against it into American homes (Garfinkle, 101-2). Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out openly against the war in Vietnam in 1967, despite his misgivings that doing so might draw attention from his main focus on the civil rights movement (Wells, 116-7). After viewing a graphic picture in an article about Vietnam, King said, “Nothing will ever taste any good for me until I do everything that I can to end that war” (Wells, 117). In addition college students began a letter writing campaign to members of Congress, students who had not necessarily yet formed an opinion of the war (Wells, 118).

Public opinion polls were the most telling change of 1967. “Irreversibly, the war was coming home” (DeBenedetti, 179). Approval polls for Johnson were dropping, down to 47 percent from a high 67 at the outset of the war (Wells, 124). Americans also were placing less faith in Johnson’s handling of the conflict, with only 33 percent of

American's agreeing with the current tactics in the region (DeBenedetti, 179). In May 1967, nearly a quarter of the American population did not feel that America's participation in Vietnam was "morally justified," and by July a poll found that 61 percent of America felt personally affected by the war (DeBenedetti, 179). The unrest was beginning and was only to increase as the war continued.

April of 1967 began what was to become one of the most easily identifiable means of anti-Vietnam protest, the burning of draft cards. April 15 saw a protest of nearly 300,000 individuals in Central Park, the largest in US history (Wells, 133). In all, around 170 draft cards were burned, and eventually the crowd was dispersed, but the immensity of the demonstration was not to die down as quickly (Wells, 133-4). "No longer could peace activists be discarded as a tiny minority of crazies" (Wells, 134).

October found another round of draft cards being either returned or burned in over eighteen cities, over 1,500 in total (Wells, 192). This time the protests drew national media attention, with the protests being broadcast on NBC. John Chancellor, a commentator for NBC noted, "If men like this are beginning to say things like this, I guess we had all better start paying attention" (Wells, 192).

By the end of 1967, with draft cards being turned in and burned in ever increasing numbers, public opinion continued to shift. In a poll of San Francisco and Cambridge, 40 percent of those surveyed supported a complete and immediate withdrawal from Vietnam (Wells, 219). The only flaw with the San Francisco and Cambridge poll was the overly liberal culture of both cities, making the findings there not truly representative of the nation as a whole. Another poll showed that for the first time since America's

involvement in the region, more Americans felt that being in Vietnam was a mistake that those that did not (Wells, 219).

During 1968, changes set into motion by protests in years past began to show their first amount of fruition, but also started to draw more and more negative media attention. The biggest change was Lyndon Johnson's decision not to seek re-election, opening up the presidency to a new successor. "There is division in the American house tonight. I would ask all Americans to guard against divisiveness and all its ugly consequences," Johnson stated during his address to the nation stating his intention to withdraw from the presidential race (Wells, 253).

This withdrawal created an interesting scenario for the party conventions that took place in the summer of 1968. With Johnson out of the picture, Hubert Humphrey accepted the nomination of the Democratic Party, while violent and bloody demonstrations outside of the amphitheater were being broadcast to the nation (Wells, 276-8).

Not only did this conflict at the convention hurt Humphrey's chances at the presidency, and nail shut the coffin of Chicago's machine politics under mayor Richard Dailey, but it also served to erase some of the public opinion gains that the anti-war movement had seen. A public opinion poll in the wake of the convention found that 40 percent of America felt that the police in Chicago actually used *insufficient* force when dealing with the protesters (Wells, 283). Protesters were, in 1968, "the most despised political group in the country" (Wells, 284).

Kiffmeyer during the late 1960's and early 1970's took a position with the Ohio Selective Service on a "youth advisory committee," one of eight student representatives

on this panel. The position, which he held for four years, allowed him a unique view of the workings of the war, and allowed him access to knowledge about the inner workings of the military and the opportunity to converse with eight other students in the state of Ohio, much like the other committees that the Selective Service created in all US states. However, he feels that the experience of serving on the committee did not help to change or color his already formed opinions on the war (Edward Kiffmeyer interview). At the same time that Kiffmeyer was a part of the Selective Service, both Gary and Claire did not participate in any overt anti-war activities, due to the fact that both were still in high school at the time.

The Movement Stalls

In the wake of the public relations disasters of 1968, the movement had much “saving face” to do in 1969. Unfortunately, that was not to be. In January 1969, Richard Nixon ascended to the presidency, elected mainly on his promise to end the war in Vietnam, bolstered by the talks that had begun with North Vietnam and increasing public support of Nixon’s plans (Zaroulis, 209). Nixon supported an eventual end to the war because he realized that the public’s support had a time limit, and without delivering on his promises, his political life would be short.

This year found the movement stalling in the wake of an overall embarrassing year in 1968, and as a result one of the most identifiable protest groups found itself in a state of disarray. SDS, which had been the instigator in many of the more publicized protests early in the war, at its 1969 national convention became a victim of internal

division, and started to fade to the background of the movement and the nation's consciousness (Garfinkle, 167-8).

This year also saw the first national draft lottery, where each birthday was assigned a number by random. All men eligible for service that turned 18 in 1969 were potential draftees, with low numbers being the first to be sent. Kiffmeyer participated in this first draft lottery as a part of the Selective Service, traveling to Washington to help physically draw nine of the 366 numbers (Edward Kiffmeyer interview). Gary turned 18 the year of the 1969 lottery, and was therefore eligible. If drafted, Gary's fully intended to dodge the draft, possibly fleeing to Canada (Gary Fullam interview). The number drawn for Gary's birthday in the 1969 lottery was a high number, keeping him from being drafted.

Not every 18 year old was automatically eligible for the draft. Some did not pass the physical exam for the army, while still others were granted deferment by the government as a result of being in college at the time of the draft. Kiffmeyer was granted such a deferment, though he states that if he had been drafted, he would have served (Edward Kiffmeyer interview). He related a lot of frustration with the deferment process however, and those students that chose to use it to their own advantage.

There was a lot of 'bullshit' stuff that went on then, to stay out of the draft people fled the country, enroll in college in the easiest classes, enroll in 'divinity studies' but party like a fool all the other times, declare themselves 'conscientious objectors' to the Selective Service, make up their own religions and if they could, cheat their way into flunking the draft physical (Edward Kiffmeyer interview).

In April, both student and religious groups met with Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security advisor, only to discover that Nixon's promise to end the war was not going to be fulfilled any time soon. One protester said after meeting with Kissinger, "They're completely committed to continuing the war... the 'secret plan' is to escalate the war" (Wells, 294-5). The "secret plan" was the plan that much of America felt that Nixon had for extracting America from the conflict in Vietnam, a plan that was not to be.

Quakers began reading the rolls of war dead in prominent public places, continuing to publicize the war's human toll to the population, while other activists began to reach out to a new group of possible protesters- GI's (Wells, 296-7). GI's United Against the War in Vietnam was created in February of 1969, and immediately began drawing supporters (Wells, 297). Although always considered a minority movement, the GI movement allowed for another voice against the war, one that had been there. The GI movement also began to speak out against other discrimination, such as the treatment of black and female soldiers (Small, 94-5). The movement not only remained here in America, but also spread to the front lines of Vietnam, partly due to the dissidents who had been drafted into service (Small, 102). Another GI group, called Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), was organized in 1967, but gained more prominence in the years following the 1968 Tet Offensive. VVAW was less radical than most of its civilian group counterparts, preferring to peacefully demonstrate and participate in events planned by other groups, such as student strikes (Small, 142-3).

The creation of these groups signaled a change in the opinion of the country, because more veterans were beginning to return home. Kiffmeyer was affected by the return of veterans, noting that it was then that "the war really hit home to me" (Edward

Kiffmeyer interview). Many veterans came home to chilly receptions, with some groups going so far as to spit on returning veterans. Gary found that as veterans came home, his opinions changed as well.

I think that it was this part that started creating some personal confusion. It is also, in retrospect the one part today that I am most ashamed of. Being stateside afforded me the comfort of being insulated. But, eventually, people from my small community in Cincinnati started coming home from their tours. It was then that you got some first hand information on what the war was really like- the confusion and indifference among the fighting forces, the perception that they did not know what they were fighting for. This was a strong influence in the forming of how I felt and how I was going to react in the future in regards to the war. I felt like 'If they would all refuse to go, then the situation would be over'; and I feel extremely bad to this date for taking the approach of it being their fault (Gary Fullam interview).

Claire had more mixed emotions to the Vietnam War than did Gary and Kiffmeyer, as well as those that were fighting.

I never thought they were wrong for going. Most of them didn't have a choice. But even those who chose to go made their decision based on honor and patriotism, both of which I respected. And those that came home, I was proud of. They were heroes to me because they survived and lived to tell of the horrors. Some of course never spoke of what they had seen or what they had done. All of them were changed

people when they returned, some mentally disturbed, some angry at the world, some totally unable to show emotion after all they had experienced. It was a very confusing time and my feelings were confused as well. My heart breaks when I think of what they went through. Many of the vets were upset that they didn't get a big parade or fancy welcome home, but I could never imagine that happening since the war never ended, it just went on and on and on. I guess that fact made the vets feel like what they did was insignificant. But none of us stateside could see any reason to celebrate a homecoming, because as soon as one soldier came home, five more went over. It must sound crazy to you to think that I was against our participation in the war, but at the same time I held no ill will toward the boys who were fighting in it. That is just the way things were back then (Claire Fullam interview).

Gary, in May 1970, participated in a demonstration at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. This was the first, and only demonstration that he participated in, and was nothing more than a peaceful observer as others took over an ROTC building on the campus. He noted that this demonstration at one time became slightly violent, with police and protestors occasionally exchanging blows (Gary Fullam interview).

After the discovery that Nixon had no intention of following through with the end of the war, the movement made perhaps its biggest statement yet in mid October 1970 with a day of protest that was called the Moratorium. In all, in numerous cities across the nation, over two million Americans protested the war by not attending school, reading the names of war dead, and holding candlelight vigils (Wells, 371). Still others protested the

protests themselves, backed by the Nixon administration (Wells, 374). It was the first time that the nation had united in such a show of solidarity against the war, and was one of the movement's finest hours.

The Beginning of the End

In the wake of the Moratorium, members of the anti-war movement should have been in fine spirits and able to capitalize on the gains made in late 1969. As the war continued into 1970, the movement found itself once again in the middle of a slowdown that lasted the entire winter and most of the spring, mostly due to increased public support for Nixon's Vietnamization plan (Wells, 403).

The beginning of the decade also brought one of the most well-known campus demonstrations of the war, not for its size or effectiveness, but the tragedy that ensued on May afternoon in Ohio. During a protest at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, National Guard officers opened fire on a peaceful protest, killing four of the students. As a result of the shooting, protests were held on more than 1,300 campuses across the nation (Wells, 242-5). Public opinion also shifted dramatically in the wake of Kent State. Nixon's Vietnam approval rating dropped to an abysmal 38 percent, and support for immediate withdrawal of troops from the region had risen to 46 percent (Garfinkle, 189). It was the highest point that the movement would see, and was a hard act to follow.

The year 1971 was a hard year for the movement as a whole, with many organizations simply disintegrating, for reasons not completely understood (Garfinkle, 196-7). April saw more promising activity; however, with favorable public opinion polls being released, indicating that 60 percent of Americans favored immediate troop

withdrawal, regardless if to do so would cause the collapse of the South Vietnamese government, and the fact that most Americans now held the belief that the war in Vietnam was “morally wrong,” (Wells, 491). April also saw Nixon promising massive troop withdrawals by the end of 1971 (Wells, 491). Protests that included emotional pleas from Vietnam veterans enhanced sagging morale within the movement, and continued to sway public opinion (Wells, 496).

The movement’s spring offensive, while actively drawing opposition from police and other law enforcement during the May Day protests in Washington D.C., notched a considerable victory for the movement. The protest served to bring home the movement’s point that stopping the war in Vietnam was an urgent matter and also served as a further morale boost and political victory (Wells, 512). Unfortunately, the fall and winter failed to carry the excitement of the spring, with many within the movement feeling that since more and more troops were being sent home, the war was slowly coming to an end (Wells, 528).

As the conflict drew into 1972, there was a light at the end of what years before had been a dark tunnel. Only 13 days into 1972, Nixon announced the further withdrawal of troops, cutting the number from over 100,000 to only 69,000 (Wells, 533). The movement managed to spurn a smattering of protests in the spring of 1972 but was almost completely silenced by the fall, partly as a result of waning public interest in the war, and frustration of those within the movement itself. Spring demonstrations for 1973 were canceled, due to lack of interest, the first such move since the mid 1960’s (Wells, 557).

The Paris Accords were signed in January 1973, beginning the complete withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam. Anti-war activists displayed mixed emotions, some “too numb from years of mass killing to feel much of anything,” (Wells, 564-5). By April of 1975, the war had come to a close with the final evacuations from Saigon, and the takeover of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese Army. As one anti-war newspaper noted “It was a moment that many thought would never come,” (Wells, 577).

The war’s end brought many emotions out in both Gary and Claire, emotions that spill over to today, over 25 years later. Gary feels that the war not only changed him, but the country as a whole as well.

To this day, I still believe that the war was very, very wrong. With time and more information I have come to understand, in depth, why I was right for feeling the way I did.

In some respects, I think the war was the end of innocence of this country. It started the changing of the guard and opened the door to a more moderate form of government. It has created a media in this country that is somewhat relentless in their objective of making sure that we have all the news, but has also created a situation where we do not let our government do the jobs that they were elected to do. It has also created a new breed of military and political leaders that generally do not get this country involved in a military conflict without a clear purpose and objective, a clear purpose and objective that did not exist in the Vietnam War.

The part I played was, by itself, insignificant. But being a part of the whole, being willing to commit to a viewpoint will always be a source of pride (Gary Fullam interview).

Claire also had mixed emotions about the war as a whole since it's conclusion, and about the way that Vietnam veterans have been treated not only by the country, but the government.

I think that I might have found a reason for us being there had I actually been in Vietnam, but I am certain that it would have been only to help the US soldiers. I don't think that my loyalties would have been with the Vietnamese people. But, being stateside, I just thought that it was a wrong and misguided war.

I feel proud of my stand for peace, and I don't think that my feelings have changed that much. Except that it angers me that so many Vietnam veterans are homeless, mentally disturbed, lost people. The government owes them big time. The government brought this condition on them and they have pretty much turned their back on the vets (Claire Fullam interview).

Kiffmeyer, in contrast, had little mixed emotion on the war, or his place in it looking back. Kiffmeyer spent the entire duration of the war in school, protected by a deferment from being drafted.

As for myself, I don't feel any remorse in going to college instead of getting drafted, or enlisting in the service during that time. You will have to believe me, but I had wanted to someday be an architect or engineer since I was in the fourth grade, and I achieved that (Edward Kiffmeyer interview).

The Movement's Legacy

So what effect, if any, did the anti-war movement have on the war in Vietnam? This question has been answered many ways, with some blaming the movement for what could be considered a "loss" in Vietnam, while others feeling that the movement was a powerful force in the eventual withdrawal of troops from the region. According to most of the research done on the movement, a conclusion that the movement had little to do with any "loss" can be made, but also that the movement cannot take much of the credit for forcing the withdrawal of troops from the region (Garfinkle, 266-8). The only time that the movement ever saw any kind of policy impact was during the Kennedy and Nixon administrations (Garfinkle, 266). Johnson's small concessions came not because of the movement's activities, but the sways in public opinion polls. Public opinion, which could have been in some small way affected by protests, was in more likelihood changed as a result of media coverage of events in Vietnam and first-hand accounts of loved ones that had returned home.

What cannot be disputed however, is the Vietnam War's effect on Americans. No other movement before, or possibly since, has included and embraced more diverse sections of the American population under a single objective (Garfinkle, 291). Also, the movement's effects have reached far beyond 1975, changing government, culture, and the media even today. The war changed an entire generation of Americans, people just like Edward Kiffmeyer and Gary and Claire Fullam, across the nation. Regardless of the scope of the movement, individual lives were forever changed by it, and the war lives on in their memory and the stories they tell others.

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