

The Rag 50th Reunion 1966-2016

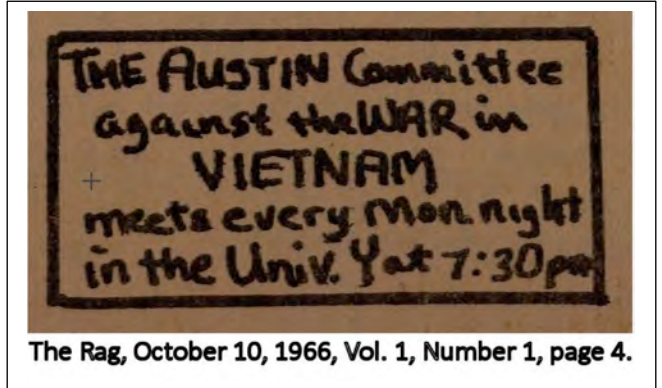
The Rag, the American War in Vietnam, and the VVAW

Terry J. DuBose, Viet Nam, 1967-1968, Vietnam Veterans Against The War
VVAW, National Steering Committee and Texas State Coordinator, 1970-1972

From the very beginning of *The Rag* in October, 1966, the American war in Vietnam was an issue in the publication. On The Rag page 1, Volume 1, Number one, an editorial by the former Editor of *The Daily Texan* (1965), Kaye Northcott, describes the opinions of the new *Daily Texan* Editor (1966, John Economidy) as, "Economidy has made decisions on the following issues: Vietnam – 'The enemy is the Viet Cong,. The enemy is the cold, thin smile of a Viet Cong as he shoots to death a village official. The enemy is the laughter of the Viet Cong (VC) while making an old man dig his own grave before he is buried alive.' " ¹ In reality Economidy's accusations against the VC sound like the subsequent testimonies given by VVAW members about war crimes against the Vietnamese people. VVAW testified to witnessing and/or participating in war crimes at the Winter Soldier testimonies in Detroit, 1971.^{2,3}

There is little question for this writer why Kaye Northcott was working with *The Rag* in 1966 and no longer with *The Daily Texan*. In that same initial issue of *The Rag*, page 4 was this notice:→

In 1966, when *The Rag* was starting, I was a senior at Hardin-Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, and knew nothing of *The Rag*, and little of the American war in Vietnam. After graduation in 1966, I could find no job that seemed appropriate for a graduate with a Bachelor of Business Administration and a minor in Economics. I had good credentials, fair grades, and four years in the student government ending as Student Body President.



In August, 1966, I enlisted in the Army, and was brain-washed into volunteering for combat in Vietnam. After Vietnam and being discharged from the Army I moved to Austin, Texas because if I still could not find a job, I could at least enroll at UT Austin under the GI Bill. However, I did get a job as a Tax Examiner in the Motor Fuels Division of the Texas Comptroller's office, in 1969. After the Kent State Massacre, I left my desk and joined the protest march from the UT campus to downtown.⁴ Later I quit my job and hitchhiked to the West Coast, but by September 1970 I returned to UT and the GI Bill in "self-directed" graduate studies. There was no "spitting" at me, only concerned students wanting to understand my experience and the war.

It was then that I met Bill Meacham, a PhD candidate, Steve Russell and Guy Herman, both law students and UT shuttle bus drivers, others on *The Rag* staff and folks in the Vietnam protest movement; many names are lost in the fog of the 1970s. I also met Alan Pogue, an award winning Rag Photographer, Vietnam vet, and VVAW member. Alan documented many protests and social injustices in Texas and around the world.⁵

It was then I connected with people from "*Direct Action*."⁶ At one of the *Direct Action's* Sunday afternoons' pot-luck dinners that the subject of a veterans' protest organization came up. At this meeting a young airman (name?) requested assistance distributing, at the Bergstrom Air Base gates, an underground newspaper he was publishing. UT Student Body President, Jeff Jones, was present and pointed out that UT had no veterans' anti-war organization, so I took on the job of organizing UT anti-war veterans. The first meeting was at Eastwoods Park, just NE of campus. We decided on the name "Vets for Peace," not knowing there was already a national organization, Vets for Peace, which was a subordinate organization of the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA).


Jeff Jones opened the coffers of the student body to the veterans, including all the materials we needed for posters, markers, paints, and helped us get established on campus. Bob Breihan, Methodist Student Union, provided us with purple, spirit mimeograph service for flyers.⁷ Breihan and the Methodist Student Union also hosted Sattva a

cooperative restaurant/dinner where anyone could get a wholesome meal for pocket change, for just a bit of help cleaning Sattva, or for nothing.⁸

Dr. Donner, chair of The Department of Radio-Television-Film at UT, agreed to be our faculty sponsor so we had access to meeting rooms, etc. on campus; though we tended to prefer to meet at local bars, Bevo's, The Orange Bull, or *Scholz Garten*.

Shortly after organizing, Jeff Jones called me because Randy Floyd had called from UT Arlington about a large protest in Washington, DC to be in April, 1971. Randy was a former US Air Force pilot who had testified at the Paris Peace Talks. He had contact with the VVAW; and a Unitarian Church (Arlington, TX?) had loaned an old school bus to get all the veterans we could get to go to Washington for VVAW's "*Dewey Canyon III*".^{9, 10, 11} When we returned to Texas, Randy moved to Austin, we formed the Texas VVAW, and Larry Waterhouse and I were named co-Coordiators. The first mention of the VVAW in *The Rag* was in the August 30, 1971 issue, p. 6.¹²

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER, 1971




The same administration(s) that sent us to war leaves us with a situation where the largest number of unemployed are veterans. 22% of all unemployed are veterans of this war, and of these 33% are third world.

If you are a veteran and are interested in joining Vietnam Veterans Against the War write for an application for membership to:

VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR
Texas
P.O. Box 12988
Austin, Texas 78711

If you are a veteran and cannot devote any time to working for the organization or if you are not a veteran but want to support VVAW, you can support us by sending a check to the above address.

In the struggle,
VVAW
Texas National Office



We must undertake one last mission in the service of our country - we have earned the right to have our say.

6

Texas VVAW started working with the staff and GIs at the Oleo Strut Coffee House in Killeen, Texas, just outside the Ft. Hood gate. We silkscreened posters and T-shirts, and at the same time taught some GIs and UT students to silkscreen. When Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, and *The FTA* (Fuck The Army) *Show*¹³ came to benefit the Oleo Strut, the UT VVAW served as security when Fonda spoke at *Scholz Garten*. Afterwards VVAW served as bartenders at the cocktail fundraiser party at Dr. Donner's.

The Rag continually ran articles, announcements, and news stories from other "underground papers;" and generally led the anti-war movement in Austin and central Texas. There were 56 article titles containing "Vietnam" and eight with

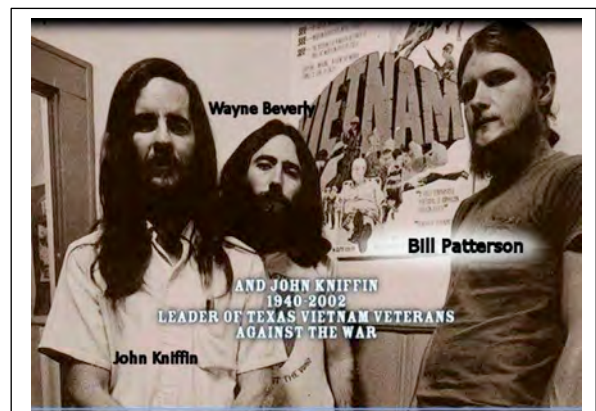
"VVAW" in *The Rag* Table of Contents between 1966 and 1977; and many other articles without those in the titles.^{14, 15} *The Rag* staff were all very welcoming to Vietnam veterans; unlike the myth that was started by Sylvester Stallone's monologue in the Rambo series, in which Stallone's character berates anti-war protesters for, "spitting on us and calling us baby killers!"^{16, 17}

Other protests and marches the Texas VVAW participated in were the LBJ Library Dedication^{18, 19}, the March on Killeen when Pete Seeger sang war protest and union songs.²⁰ There was the Texas VVAW RAW (Rapid American Withdrawal, or Operation Turning the Guns Around). The RAW march from Ft. Worth to Dallas, was fashioned after the original VVAW RAW march which was from Morristown, NJ, to Valley Forge in Pennsylvania in Sept. 1970. The Texas VVAW Raw march was guerrilla theater along the route from Ft. Worth through Arlington, Grand Prairie, into Dallas. VVAW and volunteers conducted "Search and Destroy" operations with dramatic questioning, screaming, and torture in parks, malls, and public places along the way; with a bivouac (campout) halfway through the route in a public park south of Arlington.²¹

The Carl Hampton Brigade was a large march and protest of the murder, by the Houston police, of Carl B. Hampton, the 21 year old chairman of the People's Party II, a revolutionary black organization. Carl was shot by a Houston policeman with a rifle from the roof of a Baptist Church across the street from the People's Party office. Many from around Texas gathered in Houston the day before the march, including Texas VVAW and GIs from Ft. Hood and the Oleo Strut coffee house. The evening before the march there was a melee around the organizing of the speakers to be the next day in Herman Park. As memory serves, there were approximately 20 organizations that wanted to speak; the VVAW speaker would be about number 15, with the People's Party after that. We protested that VVAW and the People's Party, Carl Hampton's organization should be nearer the beginning of the program. It turned out that the YSA, again, had some guy from Ft. Hood to speak 3rd. The guys from the Oleo Strut didn't know who the YSA guy was, so it became a confrontation. The Oleo Strut people finally convinced the brigade organizers (who?) that VVAW should represent the women and men from Ft. Hood and the Oleo strut as speaker #3. But the People's Party was still way down the speakers list. The next morning as the march moved through downtown Houston toward Herman Park, there was still a lot of discussion and negotiations about the order of speakers. Finally, John Kniffin and Wayne Beverly, myself, and the Oleo Strut folks decided that this was the Carl Hampton Brigade, and the People's Party should be earlier in the program. So it was agreed that when they turned the microphone over to me, coordinator for Texas VVAW, Kniffin and Beverly would lead the GIs and veterans from the left and right rear of the stage and surround it, as I made a brief statement about the Vietnam War being racist and Carl Hampton was the chairman of the People's Party, therefore, the VVAW was yielding the rest of our time to the People's Party. The People's Party representative (name?) held the microphone and spoke clearly about the racist Houston pigs until the band started to play at the back of the crowd, the speeches ended, and the party started.²²

While the UT Shuttle Bus Strike was not a specific activity of the VVAW, there were many shuttle bus drivers who were Vietnam veterans. Eventually the condition of the busses deteriorated without maintenance, and the morale of the drivers got so low that we decided to strike and organize.²³ If the bus running lights were out or other problems (brakes, steering, etc.), the driver was responsible for traffic infractions. The Rag was a constant supporter of the shuttle bus drivers, and published updates about the Shuttle Bus strike until the strike was won and celebrated.²⁴

In the fall of 1972, I returned to school to pursue a career in health care (and to recoup my Karma), resigned as an organizer, and John Kniffin became the Texas VVAW Coordinator. John continued to lead VVAW here until the end of that war. John died of Agent Orange related liver cancer in 2002.²⁵ Wayne Beverly, was also a Vietnam veteran Marine, now an expat living in Thailand. Others who were very active in the Texas VVAW were Bill Patterson (El Paso, also died of Agent Orange related cancer), John's wife Cathy Kniffin and Kathy DuBose. John and Bill were both members of the "Gainesville 8," the eight VVAW members falsely accused of a



conspiracy to violently disrupt the Republican Convention in Miami, FL, in 1972.^{26, 27} Wayne Beverly was an un-indicted co-conspirator jailed along with three others who refused to testify before the "grand jury." Justice William O. Douglas released them. John and the Gainesville 8+4 were represented *pro bono* by the Austin law collective, Simons, Cunningham, and Coleman.

Simons, Cunningham, and Coleman represented many Austin and Texas war protesters and other cases for social justice. These included 118 jailed veterans, Ft. Hood GIs, and Oleo Strut staff for parading down a Killeen sidewalk with anti-war banners.^{28, 29, 30} All charges were dropped after they broke up the protest march. This was a common practice of the police in the day; arrest the leaders, hold them a few hours until the other protesters disperse, then drop the charges because no laws were broken, except for our 1st Amendment rights to assemble and free speech.³¹

The second siege at Wounded Knee in November, 1973 lasted 71 days. Oglala Lakota and followers of the American Indian Movement (AIM) were protesting corruption by the leadership of the tribe.^{32, 33} There were many VVAW members, including Wayne Beverly, at Wounded Knee in support of the Indians through several skirmishes and firefights.³⁴ The National Lawyers' Guild national office contacted Simmons, Cunningham & Coleman in the spring of 1973. Jim Simons and John Howard (an associated attorney) spent most of the summer defending some AIM members. Again, the court ruled dismissing the indictment, not guilty.³⁵

Fast forward to today and the Afghanistan and Iraqi Wars. From this older war protester, the Afghanistan War seemed to come out of a societal neurotic paranoia after 9/11. However, the Iraqi War was a bad decision by about five or six men in Washington; Cheney, Bush, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and others. The American War in Vietnam had evolved out of French Colonialism in Southeast Asia and French Indochina (1870s). Rubber had been a huge issue of rationing during WWII, and after the war the USA wanted Europe back on their feet economically and the Michelin Group back in Southeast Asia harvesting rubber (the USA paid Michelin a royalty for every rubber tree damaged until 1965 when synthetic rubber became widely available).^{36, 37, 38, 39}

The Vietnam War occurred before the end of the Selective Service System (draft) for military service. With the wars in the Middle East, Ft. Hood again played a major part for preparing soldiers to go to and return from the Middle East. And a new anti-war coffee house and organization (IVAW, Iraq Vets Against the War) arose in Killeen outside the Ft. Hood gates, the Under the Hood Café and Outreach Center.⁴⁰

While trying to relate to the anti-war movement at the Under the Hood, it became clear that organizing anti-war efforts with an all-volunteer military is very different from protesting the Vietnam War. I think this is because of the possibility of being drafted stimulated the students to join the Vietnam War protests. While participating in discussions at Under the Hood, it became clear to me that the draft is now very unpopular among the "professional" soldiers in our "all-volunteer" military. The "New Army" seems to think all draftees were misfits and losers who are just trouble makers that do not want to be in the military... true, for the most part when fighting "unjust wars." This brings up a serious question about a professional, mercenary, volunteer military versus a citizen military with a draft.⁴¹ I won't pretend to resolve this issue, but it seems that a citizenry, including our legislators and leaders, that have some "skin in the game" (children and grandchildren) would be less likely to invade another country without more serious consideration than we had before Cheney-Bush invaded Iraq.⁴² More discussion/debate is needed.

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