

Use/Misuse of the Vietnam War  
and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War  
for Political Purposes

Introduction  
Nancy Miller Saunders

Before I open our panel, I would like to thank the Vietnam Center and Texas Tech for giving Vietnam Veterans Against the War this opportunity to set the record straight and to risk having members of the preceding panel distort every word we say to use against us.

Last summer those well-financed Swift Boat Veterans for what they call Truth perjured themselves to influence our election and destroy the very virtues Vietnam vets thought they were fighting for.

Now the Swifties are here, trying to influence history.

Are you historians out there going to let them continue to distort history for their political and financial ends?

They would have you believe that John Kerry accused all Vietnam veterans of being war criminals and thus unleashed the insults most of them suffered on coming home. Nonsense.

The insults began long before Kerry addressed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in April of 1971. And if you will read Kerry's testimony, you will see that he placed responsibility for war crimes on US military policy, not the troops. But the Swifties cherry picked what Kerry said to make him look bad.

My favorite example of cherry picking is that cry of the self-proclaimed patriot, "My country, right or wrong!"

Those 5 words were taken out of context -- cherry picked -- which altered their meaning. The full quote is:

Our country, right or wrong. When right, to be  
kept right; when wrong, to be put right.

That is a much wiser statement than the blind obedience suggested by those first 5 words alone. We five are here to begin putting our country right again.

Now, let me introduce myself. I am Nancy Miller Saunders and I worked with Vietnam Veterans Against the War for 4 years because I was so impressed by these courageous and honorable veterans. I vowed to tell their story. That is why I am here now and why at 1:30, in the Hickory Room, I will be showing "Winter Soldier," one of 2 films I worked on for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. And I have told their story in a book, "Combat

by Trial: Travels and Travails with 20th Century Winter Soldiers," which is currently looking for a publisher.

Now let me introduce these four gentlemen.

Bill Hager was a Marine lifer until his second tour in Vietnam when he saw the truth of what we were doing in Southeast Asia. He returned home to forget the war, found he couldn't so he became a Vietnam Veteran Against the War. He then served as VVAW's California and Nevada regional coordinator. Bill will tell you what VVAW was really all about.

Terry Dubose was in Vietnam during the Tet Offensive, when he and a buddy volunteered for Special Forces. The buddy was transferred to such a unit, but Terry was too good at getting supplies where they were needed, so was kept him where he was. Back home, Terry helped organize the Vietnam Veterans Against the War here in Texas and was VVAW's first Texas regional coordinator. Terry will correct lies about him that members of the preceding panel put online.

Alex Prim was an information specialist in Vietnam who testified at the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit in 1971 and helped organize the week-long protest in the Capitol known as Dewey Canyon III, and served as a Midwest co-coordinator of VVAW for a year. The title of his paper has changed from what it is in the program to "Deconstructing the Anti-Kerry Campaign: An over view of operations against Vietnam Veterans Against the War nationally and locally."

And we are pleased that Gerald Nicosia has joined us. For those of you who don't know Gerry, he is the author of the highly acclaimed *Home to War: A History of the Vietnam Veterans' Movement*, which has recently been reissued with an introduction on last year's election.

Now, I would like to leave you with a question asked by John Kniffin, who appeared on Gerry's panel three years ago, shortly before he died of cancer from exposure to Agent Orange during his 32 months in Vietnam. John wrote,

I have taken an oath "to defend the government and constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic." What do I do when my government becomes the greatest enemy of the constitution?