

Episode 9

In December of 1970, I graduated Miami Dade with an AA degree in pre-law and transferred to the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville. I was still supporting the war but my transition to being anti-war was 2 months away.

In January of 1971, I attended a rally at UF. The speaker was Jane Fonda. I went to the rally because I wanted to see what Barbarella looked like. I had no thoughts about why Jane was there. The rally took place at Graham Pond. It was very crowded so I was at the back edge of the crowd atop a hill. I had just smoked a joint and was playing frisbee, not paying attention to what Jane was talking about.

All of a sudden, some of her words captured me. She said that we lived in a democracy and in order for a democracy to work properly, the public needed access to the truth. She said that the government was lying about the war in Vietnam and that it was the duty of patriotic Vietnam veterans to tell the public the truth about what was really going on in Vietnam in their name with their money. She asked for any Vietnam veteran that was willing to tell the truth to come forward.

I thought, "I am a patriotic Vietnam Veteran, I understand duty, I believe in democracy." I knew the government was not telling the truth and I believed that the public had a right to the truth. So I went forward to the stage. I told someone that I was a Vietnam veteran and that I was willing to tell the truth.

They asked me my branch of service and rank. I said that I was a sergeant in the Marines. They did not ask me anything else about Nam. I gave them my name, address, and phone number. The rally ended and I went back to my regular routine.

Several days later, I received a phone call from a veteran named Michael Oliver from an organization called Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). I had never heard of them. Michael wanted me to come to Detroit and testify at some hearings on Vietnam in Detroit scheduled for January 31st - February 2nd. The hearings were called The Winter Soldier

Investigation. I told Michael that I was poor and had no way to get to Detroit. He said that he would send me a plane ticket and get me a place to stay. I agreed to go.

I think that what is really important here is that at no time was I asked what I did in Vietnam. My agreement to go included some selfish motivation. I was never thanked for my service or my sacrifices. I wanted thanks and recognition for my service.

I got to Detroit and went to the Howard Johnson hotel where the hearings were. There were right-wing demonstrators picketing against the hearings. One of the signs said "Howard Johnson Harbors Reds". I thought, "Why would telling the truth about what I did and saw in Nam make me a commie?"

My transition to becoming an anti-war activist took place at the Winter Soldier Investigation and you can watch it unfold on the Winter Soldier Investigation documentary. Here is a short intro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPXAxNr8Cno>

For the full documentary, go to: <https://www.milestonefilms.com/products/winter-soldier>

Of particular importance to me is the way that the filmmakers interviewed me. They were very nice and just wanted the truth. They were not judgmental so I never became defensive. I owe them so much for asking the questions that made me think.

The picture on the cover is me in 1967.

The last day of the investigation, all of us veterans had a closed meeting. We discussed the impact that these 3 days had had on us and what if anything we wanted to do about it. We decided to have a meeting later that month in New York.

The meeting in New York was hosted by VVAW. VVAW was organized in 6 northeastern states.

We decided to make it a national organization. We wrote a constitution, by-laws, and most importantly the objectives. The writing of the objectives was a great learning experience for me. We fought over every single word. You can see these important goals here: <http://www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/>

id=897

We also planned a march on Washington for April which culminated with us throwing our medals away: <http://www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/?id=1656>

We decided to split the country into 28 regions and I became the coordinator for Florida, Georgia and Alabama.

Around this time, Playboy magazine gave us a free full page ad which resulted in about 20,000 responses. I received a list of all of the veterans who wanted to join VVAW that lived in my region.

I decided to break the list into cities and sent a copy of the list to each person in each city. I included a letter saying that here are all of the veterans in your city who want to be part of VVAW, organize a meeting and I will come to visit. This was all done by snail mail - we did not have computers or e-mail.

I started visiting the cities in Florida, Alabama and Georgia to help organize VVAW chapters. I thought that the first thing we should do is set up Winter Soldier Investigations in each city so that the citizens could hear from their own veterans. This was now my first priority.

There were many meetings, including a meeting every 3 months of the regional coordinators.

You can go to the VVAW website and on the left is a tab: THE VETERAN - this is the VVAW newspaper.

This page gives you a drop-down box that allows you to see each issue. If you want to know more about the rest of 1971 - 1973 and what we are doing, it is all here: <http://www.vvaw.org/veteran/>

We had many meetings in 1972 and a lot of them dealt with preparation for both the Democratic and Republican conventions that would take place later in the year. Both were scheduled to take place in Miami Beach, FL. Because both of these actions were taking place in my region, as regional coordinator I had a lot of responsibilities. There were a lot of logistics, like sending out maps showing the best routes to Miami Beach, showing places on the maps and contact information where we had support for camping,

medical issues, automobile repair, and those kind of things. I also had to meet with organizations, government bodies, and the police to secure permits and permission to use places for camping.

Security was also my responsibility. I was receiving intelligence information concerning possible problems. I met with representatives from groups like Alpha 66 and Abdala to try to make sure that we wouldn't have trouble with the right-wing Cubans.

I told the Cubans that we were both working for the same thing. They wanted Independence and self-determination for Cuba and we wanted independence and self-determination for Vietnam. To my surprise, they offered me machine guns and mortars. I declined and during the Gainesville 8 trial, I found out that the people I met with were undercover agents who had infiltrated the Cubans. They had offered me the weapons hoping that I would accept so they could bust me.

Other reports indicated that the government was planning a police riot like there had been in Chicago, only this time they would raise the 5 draw bridges linking Miami Beach to the mainland, leaving the demonstrators no avenue of escape. This ran counter to my riot control training. In training, we were taught to leave those we were dealing with an avenue of escape - otherwise people would have to fight to defend themselves.

We decided that we were not going to let this happen so we made contingency plans for all possibilities and planned to use the minimum amount of force necessary to protect our people and their constitutional rights. If we were willing to fight halfway around the world to defend the constitution, why wouldn't we be willing to fight right here to defend our rights?

I want to remind you that we learned our conflict resolution skills in Vietnam.

It turned out that much of our intelligence was coming from infiltrators and undercover agents looking to get us to commit illegal acts so they could destroy our credibility. We did not know this at the time.

I wrote the plan and it was a main piece of evidence in the Gainesville 8 trial. Unfortunately for the government, I couched each action and step in terms of what I called collective self-defense.

The jury did not accept the idea that this plan was an offensive plan.

In January 1972, I was arrested for Kidnapping for Ransom and was facing the death penalty.

The night of the alleged kidnapping, I was a guest speaker at a dinner for the Concerned Democrats in Tampa, Florida and at my dinner table was Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska who also spoke. I had an airtight alibi. The person who drove me from Gainesville to Tampa, my assistant regional coordinator, was Emerson Poe.

It turned out that Poe was working for the FBI. The FBI didn't want to blow Poe's cover so they remained silent. Poe's official job was working at the VA. Poe asked me not to reveal that he could confirm my alibi because he was afraid of losing his job so I protected him and that protected his cover. Eight months later, we filed a speedy trial motion and the charges were dropped.

In February of 1972 right after I made my bond on the kidnapping case, my house was raided and I was arrested for possession and delivery of drugs. Back to jail and I was now facing an additional 30 years in prison. I made bond and was released.

In June of 1972, I was subpoenaed with 23 others to a grand jury in Tallahassee. This coincided with the start of the Democratic convention in Miami Beach. We were now effectively kept from attending the convention.

The grand jury released us from our subpoena and we left the court house.

In the meantime, unbeknownst to us, 6 of us were indicted for conspiracy to disrupt the convention and federal agents started looking for us within an hour or releasing us from the grand jury. The VVAW house in Tallahassee received a phone call saying that the police were on the way and that they had orders to shoot Scott Camil. I was on the way to the airport to pick someone up and was intercepted by someone from VVAW.

The police and Feds blocked off both ends of the street and deployed smoke covering the entire street. They raided the house and were carrying my picture and looking for me. I was not there.

I went to the house of Marion Haye who owned a travel agency in Tallahassee - she was a supporter. I told her what happened and asked if I could stay until the morning. She was happy to help.

I then called the media and made arrangements for them to meet me the following morning and go with me to turn myself in. The next morning I turned myself in and they also arrested 2 of the people with me who had also been indicted.

Now 4 of us were in jail. They held us in a separate part of the jail because we were federal prisoners. The cell was all metal except for the back wall which was brick and had a toilet and sink. The door had a slot for food and a window that was covered. They would open the cover to check on us. The light in the ceiling was on 24/7.

All of us were trained on how to survive being captured. We sang songs to keep our morale up. They came and said that we were not allowed to sing. We said, 'Fuck You, what are you going to do arrest us?' and we kept singing and laughing. We were combat veterans and they were not used to people like us who couldn't be intimidated. There was also a large contingent of VVAW members camped out in front of the jail.

We could not raise enough money to bond everyone out. The prosecution used our service records against us in arguing for a high bond. "Look at these men's service records, Silver Stars, Bronze Stars, Purple Hearts - you don't get medals like these being nice guys". So much for honoring our service.

We started to rotate: we would bond someone out, a day later they would turn themselves in and we would use that money to bond someone else out. The government got tired of this and reduced our bonds.

Next came the arraignment - that was scheduled during the Republican Convention. We did manage to get to Miami Beach in time for some of it.

While we were in Flamingo Park, the American Nazis raided the women's encampment and took over their stage. We marched in a large contingent of VVAW members, kicked their asses, carried them out of the park, and piled them in the street. The police did not interfere and many old Jewish people from Miami Beach cheered us on.

Next came the election and again we were ordered to Tallahassee. There was a superseding indictment and 2 more were charged with conspiracy. We were now 8 and prevented from voting because none of us lived in Tallahassee.

Now I had my drug trial and was found not guilty on all charges by the jury.

The rest of 1972, I continued to organize, go to school, and meet with lawyers.

In May of 1972, Nixon mined Haiphong Harbor. We considered this an escalation of the war and we were concerned that if a Russian or Chinese ship was blown up, things would really get bad.

We took action and blocked University Avenue and 13th St. This would be an inconvenience to the public but nothing like the inconvenience of living under the bombs that the Vietnamese suffered. We wanted to get the public's attention.

This action became known as "The May Riots of 72" and lasted 2 1/2 days.

We were ordered to disperse and refused. They brought in fire trucks and tried to remove us with water. This was May in Florida, it was hot, and the water was a relief. Their tactic caused the mood to change to a party mood and we now had 3000 people blocking the street.

Next they brought in the cops. Many of them came from non-local agencies and became heavy-handed, beating up the students and non-students. Rather than confront them, we moved to University Ave and 17th and blocked the road there.

It took the police over an hour to organize sidewalk to sidewalk about 6

rows deep with face masks and shields. They tried tear gas but they ended up down wind. So now they marched toward us. Right before they got within striking distance, we cut across UF Campus and blocked 13th St in front of Tigert Hall, the UF administration building.

It took the cops another hour to set up and march on us again. We did the same thing - when they got close we cut across campus and blocked University Ave again.

This frustrated the police so they sent in plain clothes and under cover agents behind our lines.

This time when the police got close, their undercover forces threw rocks and such over our heads at the police lines and the police broke formation and viciously attacked. People ran into restaurants on University Ave. The police tear-gassed the restaurants and beat people coming out, including patrons and workers.

The police chased people down other streets, people ran into apartment buildings, the buildings were teargassed and those that came out were beaten and arrested, including people in their pajamas and nightgowns who were sleeping. It was very indiscriminate.

We decided that this was unacceptable and we went after the police. We broke up into 4-man teams who were given different areas to protect. We monitored the police radio and we sent teams to ambush the police. We used hunting sling shots, no noise and no muzzle flash to give away our positions.

We hit the police with balloons of ammonia, their face shields came off and we hit them with marbles and ballbearings. On campus there was some hand-to-hand against the police.

In the end, after 2 1/2 days I met with the mayor and we agreed on a truce. We stopped the demonstrations the out-of-town cops left.

400 students were arrested. I had 77 men and none were hurt or arrested. The police suffered 18 taken to the hospital and 54 treated on the scene. My Vietnam thinking is showing.

The cops really hated me now.

One great event was the 1972 UF homecoming parade. We were a student organization so we got to march in the parade. The theme for the parade was "The Impossible Dream".

We carried a banner that said Vietnam Veterans Against the War - Gainesville. Next was a flag-draped coffin with a sign on the front that said "The Impossible Dream - No More War". Behind the casket were 2 squads of veterans dressed in combat garb with toy M16s, real bayonets, and K-Bars.

For weeks before the parade, we secretly met with and practiced guerrilla theater with volunteers from the Quakers, Unitarians, and Mennonites. We placed these people along the parade route at strategic locations like 17th St. and University Ave, 13th and University Ave. The volunteers had blood packets hidden under their clothes.

As the parade approached each of these intersections, the first squad broke out of the parade and attacked the people lining the street watching the parade. The people being attacked were our volunteers. The blood packets were broken and the volunteers fell down in the street bleeding and acting wounded. These volunteers included women with children and babies.

The first squad immediately returned to the parade and the second squad went into the crowd and handed out leaflets saying "A US Infantry Company just passed through. If you would have been Vietnamese, these are the things we would have done to you" and there was a list that included things like killed, tortured, raped...

Needless to say, the crowd, police, and the press were shocked and surprised.

After the parade, on the way to my house, we were surrounded by the police. They tried to take me and several others into custody. We refused and unbuckled our bayonets and K-Bars. The police were not used to

dealing with combat veterans and backed off. None of us were arrested. The newspapers and many others felt that we had gone over the top. I thought that we did a good job.

In 1973, we had the trial of the Gainesville 8. I represented myself and I graduated from UF with a degree in Philosophy. More on that tomorrow after Episode 10.

Tonight's Episode 9 starts off with a veteran saying that he was treated badly when he came home. In general, I did not have this experience as a veteran and when I was in the anti-war movement it was always about the war and the lying politicians. There was one instance, in 1969 when the Marine Corps sent me to Western Carolina University in Cullowhee to lecture on why the war in Vietnam was right. That was the only time that I was shown any disrespect in relationship to my Vietnam service. That disrespect was not aimed at me personally; it was aimed at a policy and tactics that I was now trying to defend.

It is really hard for to watch this series for many reasons but I am so sick of Nixon and Kissinger, I could explode. Here is an obituary that I wrote when Nixon died. I called it The Final Cover up, enjoy.<http://www.afn.org/~vetpeace/articles/nixon.pdf>

It was never about Vietnam or its people, We really didn't care about them. There was a world chess game taking place between the major powers. The country of Vietnam was a pawn and its people North and South were expendable as were we mostly poor and working class Americans.

Nixon wanted to get re-elected and everything revolved around that. It made me think about the joke, "How can you tell when a politician is lying?" "His lips are moving" comes the answer. For sure this joke has to be about Nixon.

To prove that his Vietnamization plan was working, he sent the South Vietnamese army (ARVN) to attack Laos. They got defeated but he called it a win: " We must call it a victory no matter happened". Nixon gave a speech and said this proved that Vietnamization had succeeded.

I was watching this and thinking, "Really, what has changed as far as presidents and the truth?"

For me, the government has never done anything to regain my trust. They have no credibility in my eyes. Look at the truth-challenged president we have today. Nixon tried to hide his lies and was very paranoid about it. Trump could care less.

The show jumps back to the soldiers, to a unit made up of all draftees and none of them supported the war or wanted to be there. One of them said, "There is no sense in dying for nothing." Who could disagree with that? Then someone said, "Killing for peace doesn't make sense." There is more wisdom and integrity here than in the White House.

The show talks about the low morale of the troops which is completely understandable. They said that 25% smoked pot and 40,000 were addicted to heroin. These troops were said to be "mentally extracting themselves".

Then came a discussion about My Lai, war crimes and Lt. Calley. The first thing I thought was that war is the crime. At Nuremberg, they said that the worst war crime was starting a war because all other war crimes come from that.

The precedents from the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crime hearings and trials are pretty clear. We executed the leaders saying that even if they were not there, they were responsible for the training and conduct of the soldiers.

Who was the commander-in-chief at My Lai? It was Nixon. Who was punished? Only Lt. Calley. The US is not a member of the International Court. The rules and the precedents apply to others, not us. We always hear about the rule of law but we don't practice what we preach.

79% of the public disagreed with the Calley Guilty verdict. I guess that's called supporting the troops.

I liked when Gunny said "We are the kids of Nixon's Silent Majority." I never thought of it like that. My parents were not happy with me turning against the war but after the government came after me, my parents supported me.

Gunny and I were together in the march on Washington. I got in the line to throw my medals away but I did not know for sure what I was going to do when it was my turn. My medals represented all that I had for my sacrifices. When I got to the front of the line, I threw them away. It was like cutting the umbilical cord between me and the government.

I loved John Kerry's speech before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Later in the evening, John Kerry, myself, and 2 others went to Senator Hart's home and showed Winter Soldier to a bunch of senators including William Fulbright. I got into a little argument with Senator Fulbright over his Gulf of Tonkin vote. You can see that I did not have much tact - these guys were on our side and I harbored a lot of anger over the war. Here is Kerry's speech.

http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/VVAW_Kerry_Senate.html

The release of The Pentagon Papers by Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo changed everything. It was the "Emperors have no clothes". It felt like getting resupplied in the bush, more ammo for our effort to stop the war. Tom Hayden published a great Pentagon Papers Digest which put everything in perspective. At first, the opportunist Nixon was OK with it because the papers made the Democrats look bad but then he became concerned that his secrets might be leaked, especially his treasonous undermining of the peace process.

So they went after Ellsberg to discredit him and the operation ended up being called Watergate and led to the downfall of Tricky Dick Nixon, as he was called by many of us.

There was talk about Agent Orange. That was another thing that I was angry about. I filled my canteens from streams and rice paddies where all of these chemicals were ending up. Not only were we poisoned by our own leaders but when we came home, we had to fight tooth and nail to get the government to recognize this problem and help us. They covered 25% of South Vietnam with this poison. What about the poor Vietnamese?

In Paris, it was all about us getting out without losing face and then blaming

it all on President Thieu. It made me feel sorry for him - he won re-election in a one-man election but had no real power; it was very clear who was really in charge. Both he and his country were going down. He knew it but could do nothing.

The morale of the ARVNs was going down, the North continued to press the war with vigor. Whole battalions were deserting; even a whole regiment deserted.

Someone in the show called Vietnam a meat grinder and that is very apropos - that is how Hamburger Hill got its name. 'Meat grinder' - please think of this term every time you think about war.

Nixon was referred to as an "International Outlaw". I see that as the status of my country today. We are International Outlaws raining death and destruction around the world. Our lying politicians give us reasons for this behavior but those reasons clearly lack credibility.

When I was in Nam, I was really a kid, not married, no children. Now I am a grandparent. I have 3 daughters. The pictures of Kim Phuc being burned by napalm are horrific. She looks so calm while they are giving her a drink. She stirs empathy in everyone. When you think of war, please picture Kim Phuc. We have sympathy for her because she is young and so innocent. She really represents what victims of war go through. How many Kim Phucs did we leave in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria.....?

Then there was Jane Fonda, being pummeled for a mistake in judgment she made when she was young. Yes, it was a mistake for her to allow herself to be photographed sitting behind an NVA anti-aircraft gun. I know a ton of Vietnam veterans who would do things differently if they had the chance. We all make mistakes and I believe that motivation should count in the evaluation of our conduct.

I know and worked with Jane - she is the person responsible for bringing me to the peace movement. She cares deeply about Vietnam veterans. Her motivation was to end the war and keep more people from dying.

When you weigh Jane Fonda's mistake on one side of the scale and the

lies, conduct, and motivations of our government on the other side, Jane's mistake doesn't even register.

Nixon continued being Nixon. The show says “the last combat troops” came home by March of 1973. The last two men to die in Vietnam were both Marines, Corporal Charles McMahon, age 21 and Lance Corporal Darwin Lee Judge, age 19. They both died on April 29th, 1975 in Saigon.