

### Chapter 3

## **THE MOBE: HIGH NOON FOR THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT**

...this fiery mass  
Of living valour, rolling on the foe  
And burning with high hope...

— Byron's description of the allied forces at Waterloo, in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage."

The uprising against the Vietnam War was one of America's defining events. Millions of citizens, unpaid and ostracized, took the patriotically traitorous and apparently futile step of opposing their own country's unjust foreign war...and succeeded. Everyone who attacked their officers, sabotaged their patrols, burned a draft card, fled to Canada, dodged the draft, marched in a protest, put up a poster, signed a petition, voted for a peace candidate, or just griped to their neighbors can take pride in being part of that success. Yes, the Movement took too long, and yes, it failed to throttle the foreign policy that led to the War and later led to other bloody attempts to impose obedience on the developing world, but without it, we'd probably still be there, and millions more people would have been victims.

Like the American Revolution, the Movement had radical leaders and mainstream adherents, and achieved the adherents' primary goal while failing to satisfy the leaders' dreams of systematic and altruistic change. Unlike the Revolution — but like the civil rights and early labor movements and the Indian resistance — the Movement is an embarrassing challenge to the cultural myths that mask America's lethal amorality, and so has also been excluded from the historical Canon whose themes, names, and dates have been hammered into our common knowledge.

The November 15, 1969, "Mobe" — the New Mobilization to End the War — was the Movement's high noon, a shoot-out that left both it and its adversary fatally wounded. Everything ante-Mobe was the Movement's morning, its youth, full of growth and a bright sense of possibility. Everything post-Mobe was its slide toward night, its middle age, full of decline and a bitter sense

of futility, because the Mobe was the last time that most of us believed that being right and being heard would end the war. The Mobe was the largest gathering of Americans ever for a political purpose, another “half a million strong” (and probably half as many again). There was never any question in my mind that I would go with them; whether I would bother coming back was another matter. I rarely attended classes during my freshman year at the University of Chicago, spending most of my week “working” at the university hospital, where we scoured ancient x-ray files for interesting cases (like the man who inserted a bottle into his anus and couldn’t get it out) and played hide-and-seek in the air ducts. On weekends I’d hitch-hike along Interstate 90 to visit Ann at her college in Buffalo. I was truly a pathetic student; if it hadn’t been for the “pass-fail” system instituted the next spring after Kent State, I would probably have flunked out.

I recall the horrified look on the face of a full professor, so admirably dedicated that he met with each of his freshmen to discuss their proposed papers on Thucydides, when I slouched into his office and said that rather than writing a paper, I was just going to “rap” with him about how the description on the dust jacket had shown me how the Peloponnesian Wars were “just like” Vietnam. The war was the focus of whatever intellectual activity I engaged in, but that activity was mostly sitting around talking with friends under the influence of various hallucogenic drugs about how to take college courses in jail, since I refused to take a student deferment from the draft and expected to be jailed the next fall for refusing induction. I’m not sure why I thought I would study any more in jail than at college. If the professor had known that I wasn’t using my deferment, he might have felt more comfortable doing what he ought to have done, which was to suggest that I save everybody a lot of valuable time by leaving college until I had an interest in what it had to offer.

The enormous fact of the war made not only academic pursuits but even anti-war organizing appear trivial. I leafletted in the business district, chanted outside the trial of the eight anti-war leaders accused of conspiracy to disrupt the 1968 Democratic convention, and marched along 55th Street from the white enclave of the university to a nearby park for a rally during the October 15 national “Moratorium” on business as usual — but I couldn’t see how any of this would help end the war. The small number of

people present as well as the ever-present “hawk,” the bitter lake wind that chilled one’s bones no matter how many layers one wore, kept me home from most rallies. Even the successes seemed silly to me, as when our campus (and hundreds of others) shut down during the Moratorium to listen to speeches. I recall Ted Lowi, the professor who eventually succeeded my father at Cornell, giving a meandering analysis of why America was acting as if it were imperialist in Vietnam, but was not in reality, and a local politician and undertaker telling us he was sick of burying black kids who died in Vietnam. It was all very interesting, but my restlessness kept asking what we were going to do about it, and my immaturity kept answering that nothing in Chicago would make any difference.

I assumed that there was a place out there to stand that would move the world, and I assumed that it was Washington. I was never so naïve as to think that our arguments would win over evil people like Nixon, Kissinger, the generals and Congress, but I thought that if we kept the heat on them, they’d have to stop the war to deal with the mess it was making at home. Perhaps in Washington I’d find people who wanted to do that every day until the war ended, and I’d stay there with them rather than return to college. It was with such inchoate thoughts that, assuming the Washington police would swing their sticks as readily as Chicago police, I grabbed my motorcycle helmet for protection and boarded the bus that Friday night in Chicago.

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I’ve been in a lot of towns by highways, but only one real highway town, and that is Breezewood, Pennsylvania, which is at, which is, the intersection of the interstates running across Pennsylvania and down to Washington. At about seven in the morning our chartered Greyhound pulled into the bus station, a sprawling compound for transfers between main routes that sits amidst a proliferation of gas stations, motels, and diners. There seemed to be as many bays as at New York’s Port Authority, and each was filled. We straggled off the bus into a bracing mixture of chilly sunshine and stale diesel fumes, and as we entered the gigantic restaurant and saw the buzzing swarms of young people in the unisex uniform of long hair, blue jeans, and army parkas, we turned to each other in amazement and intoned: “Holy shit!” The troops were out, and were taking over: all those buses were

for protestors! If thousands of us weary travelers from colleges and communities throughout the politically placid midwest were sitting here in the middle of nowhere, there'd be even more of us when we got somewhere.

Our long wait in line for breakfast was made longer by the fact that we had passed around potent joints for much of the night and were now consumed with marijuana's infamous aftereffects — not the craving for sex, violence, and heroin that medical authorities told us of in health class films, but the even more demonic craving for food, especially for about five greasy eggs over easy, a mountain of crisp home fries laced with onions and laden with paprika by the doctor and then smothered in ketchup and Louisiana Red Hot by the patient, stacks of hot white toast and mystery jellies, and the famed bottomless cup of truck-stop black coffee. Brought up to our fighting weight, we reboarded and roared southeast into the brightness. By the time we got off the highway in suburban Silver Spring, our incredulity at our numbers was aroused again. As far as we could see ahead and behind us, the main street down into Washington was filled with busses, many, like ours, bearing an anti-war slogan as a destination sign. (Historians, who do things like check charter records, say that 4,000 chartered buses arrived that Saturday morning, meaning that 200,000 people came that way alone.) We opened the windows to wave to pedestrians and greet our compatriots on other busses.

As we disembarked near the mall and drifted into the crowd, we picked up news of the previous day's two actions, which had received a healthy dose of press: The March against Death and the "trashing" of Dupont Circle. The former was a brilliant work of symbolism organized by religious groups: for 42 hours, at the rate of 1,000 per hour (one every 4 seconds), people holding candles who had begun their march at Arlington Cemetery walked by the White House and called out the name of a dead American soldier. The latter was the work of the "crazies," factions of the Students for a Democratic Society, notably the Weathermen, who took their name from a jaded Dylan line that rejected not just the authorities but the very concept of authority: 3,000 marched on the South Vietnamese embassy without a permit, and when the police turned them back with tear-gas, a few hundred ran through a commercial area, breaking windows and setting trash cans on fire. I wished that I'd been able to join in both actions (an incon-

gruous wish, given their mutually exclusive nature and their sponsors' animosity), but expected that similarly exciting events would transpire now that we were there.

A friend and I left the Chicago contingent near the Washington monument, and went off in the search of the scene. We walked east toward the Capitol, looking for the loudest, rowdiest group with which to march when things got underway in a couple of hours. On the way through the swarm, incredibly, I found my brother David, the devoted radical who was about to leave Yale to go cut sugar-cane in Cuba, just standing bemused by the curb! The three of us linked arms like Dorothy, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion, and lit out for the Emerald City. We wound our way to the giant papermaché faces of Nixon and Agnew that were dancing in the air just below the Capitol. The crowd was so dense there that we couldn't start down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the White House for over an hour after the march began.

When we finally stepped off at a brisk pace that made the street surprisingly roomy, we looked back on the mall and saw nothing but people all the way to the Monument a mile away, where the tail of the march would still be waiting when the head had completed the loop. Gravitating toward a radical bunch whose chants were strident but cheery, we swaggered along and waved to the spectators, laughing as we sent our contradictory messages up the echoing corridor of federal buildings:

HO, HO, HO CHI MINH; NLF IS GONNA WIN.

The NLF maintained the fiction that it was independent of Ho Chi Minh and the North Vietnamese army, so this chant linking Ho with the NLF could have been cited by the administration as proof of their and our mendacity. For us, though, the chant showed that we supported the Vietnamese resistance in whatever guise it need to adopt, without question and without granting our opponents' argument that Vietnam was two separate countries.

"1,2,3,4, WE DONT WANT YOUR FUCKING WAR.

5,6,7,8, STOP THE FIGHTING, NEGOTIATE."

Here was another loaded chant: if Ho Chi Minh was going to win, there wasn't a whole lot to negotiate. This chant could have been designed to appeal to the radicals in the Movement in the first line and the moderates in the second. More likely, the rhymes were unstudied, and consisted of any words of opposition to the administration, regardless of their logical consistency.

As we neared the White House for the left turn back to the mall, I looked back over the mile to the Capitol, and pulled my companions aside to see the sparkling sea of bodies, colors, banners, flags, and signs, undulating and mesmerizing like an "ocean in a bottle," the goop that one tipped back and forth in a clear container for hours during a mescaline adventure. Then we jumped back into the roaring human tide, and were swept around the curve and past the hundreds of massed peace marshalls. The Secret Service was taking no chances: in addition to the marshalls, who had already had to lock arms to keep bands of crazies from trying to break through to God knows what firepower, there were flat-nosed busses parked bumper-to-bumper around the White House grounds. To visit Tricky Dick, the crazies would have had to go under them or knock them over to get through, in either case giving a warning and an advantage to the 300 U.S. Army "airborne" boys who were waiting with their latest toys.

The rally itself was anti-climactic, as the words of the legislators and labor leaders who spoke and the lyrics of the folk musicians who performed were almost irrelevant, since we had already made our point with our presence. To look over one's shoulder at the mass of people rising from the stage to and over the hill by the monument was to know, even more explicitly than at Woodstock, that there were so many people who opposed the war that it just had to end soon, and that's all we and the world needed to know. I couldn't have heard much even if I had wanted to, since we were sitting near a bunch of crazies with NLF flags who kept screaming: "Fuck You! We want to hear the NLF speak, not you assholes! Fuck you!" They were laughing and showing off to each other and having a great old time; there was no real anger in their verbal assault, but rather the same good-natured rejection of the boring old farts who ran the Movement that we often directed toward the boring old farts who ran the world.

I found this all great fun, again not sensing any major contradictions within this one, big, happy family. It had seemed appropriate along the parade route to cheer on and welcome into our ranks the straights, the middle-aged people in coats and ties or proper dresses and the soldiers on weekend passes who identified their units with banners, because if we got them on our side, the war would be over that much quicker. But at the rally it seemed appropriate to be screaming obscenities at the stage and waving

NLF flags, things that even an ounce of thought would have told me would drive away the straights. Seeing our motorcycle helmets, the crazies assumed we were into their thing, and they told us that there was going to be a real demonstration, meaning a confrontation, at the Justice Department right after the rally ended, so of course we ambled that way, not really looking for trouble, just looking for the action.

Coursing down the hill toward the Justice Department, we recognized Cornell SDS leader Dave Burak, and hooked up with him for a few minutes until tear-gas blanketed the area and a police charge started us all back toward the monument...this was the incident that by the next summer he had fantasized into him and the Rossiter kids standing together in hand-to-hand combat with the pigs. Right before the tear gas came, we were standing under the balcony on which Attorney General John Mitchell, his wife Martha, and a number of aides were visible. With unbridled delight at getting a chance to communicate with one of the enemy — Nixon was spending a restful afternoon in the White House watching football — we screamed “Fuck you Mitchell, fuck you Mitchell,” and threw at him whatever debris we could find. He looked down calmly from the railing, which was far too high for our missiles, holding his pipe, and with great deliberation gave us the finger right back. His wife said later that the scene below her looked like old newsreels of the Russian revolution. I accepted this insult as an accolade, a tribute to our dangerousness. Of course I and probably Mrs. Mitchell had no idea of what had actually transpired during the Russian revolution, so my analogy was as obscure in the interpretation as hers was in the making.

The scattering of the crazies under a cloud of tear gas put an end to my amorphous plans to connect with an anti-war group and not return to Chicago. By the time volunteer medics had washed the nasty stuff out of my eyes, all I wanted to do was find a bed, which we turned out to be the floor of the Georgetown University gym. It was a long walk and a rough sleep, and I was only too glad to hop on the bus the next night for the trip home. The mood on our bus was that of tired team returning triumphant from the state championships. We believed that the government would have to respond to this amazing display of opposition. As the winter dragged on and the war with it, that belief curdled within me into a bitterness I had never experienced, one that was

made all the sharper for having seen with my own eyes that even the most massive demonstration had made no difference at all.

Although we wouldn't know it for years, we had been successful that fall. Our protests constrained Nixon's ability to keep troop levels high, and also led directly to his cancellation of "Duck Hook," Kissinger's secret plan for a "savagely, decisive blow" from the air on cities, harbors, and the dike system that permitted rice cultivation. As the November 1 deadline for agreeing to U.S. conditions neared, North Vietnam braced for the worst and Kissinger prepared to test his refusal "to believe that a little fourth-rate power like North Vietnam does not have a breaking point," but the reality of the October Moratorium and the prospect of the November Mobe forced Nixon to back down. In his memoirs, Nixon acknowledged that he expected the North Vietnamese to "become contemptuous of us and even more difficult to deal with" if the ultimatum were not carried out, but that he didn't dare pull the trigger: "(A)fter all the protests and the Moratorium, American public opinion would be seriously divided by any military escalation of the war."

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All was not well under the surface of the Movement on its triumphant day. The diversity of the Movement finally overwhelmed its unity that day, making this the last truly cooperative effort of the anti-war left. The Mobe was a wary collaboration between the liberals who had organized the Moratorium and the more radical groups who had been the backbone of the Movement during its five-year rise to prominence. The Moratorium's goal was to mobilize people to help elect anti-war members of congress, while the traditional groups considered elections a matter of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and wanted to scare the real rulers, the monied class, into giving up the war. This elemental divergence between electoral and social activism led to an intense debate over "exclusion," which came to a head during the month between Moratorium and Mobe.

The Moratorium and its allies in congress wanted the Mobe to defuse the administration's charge that it was dominated by radicals by excluding from its ranks advocates of an NLF victory and "communists." Only a handful of people actually belonged to groups who admitted to this description, such as the Communist Party, whose minuscule membership included a heavy dose



of government agents, and which ironically was an advocate of collaboration with liberal politicians. The primary target was the Student Mobilization Committee, whose mainstay, the Young Socialist Alliance, was part of the Socialist Workers Party. The SWP, as administration mouthpieces like columnists Evans and Novak repeated daily, traced its roots to supporters of Trotsky in his split with Stalin. The SMC had assiduously dragged the Movement's message toward a firm stand of "Out Now!" and away from more moderate calls for a bombing halt or negotiations. It had chapters on almost every campus who provided the nuts and bolts for all the major demonstrations, something that FBI surveillance files released years later showed that the administration knew all too well.

The older members of the Mobe's board remembered all too well how in the 1930s and 1940s the left wing of the labor movement had been fractured by the expulsion of communists, and the younger members had at least heard the tales of how McCarthyism and the red-baiting of the 1950s had created a national suspicion that all agents of social change were either communists or their dupes. Exclusionism had also shaken the movement for nuclear disarmament in 1960 when the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy fired a staffer for refusing to provide Sen. Thomas Dodd with the names of alleged communists. Even more recently the civil rights movement had been besieged by J. Edgar Hoover, acting through the Kennedy brothers, who demanded and received the heads of two key staffers of Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference over allegations by highly-suspect FBI informers that the two had been communists decades before.

The anti-war left had always resisted calls for exclusion, fearing that even minor, symbolic barriers to "infiltration" by foreign agents might be fatal first steps toward the full-scale, internecine bloodletting that was the goal of its enemies. The cutting edge of student protest, SDS, had pointedly jettisoned exclusion in 1962 as it broke away from its progenitors, the mainstream Social Democrats. SDS president Carl Oglesby wrote in 1966, in response to the *New Republic's* call for it to exclude communists and eschew alliances with communist groups, that exclusion was "one of the chief weapons of those who take comfort in (the left's) disarray," and that anti-communism did more damage to a move-

ment than the communists, open or hidden, who might be in its ranks. The call for exclusion was just a cynical ploy to be ignored, he said: "If they cannot red-bait us...then they will beard-bait, beatnik-bait, now this new depravity, Vietnik-bait; and when all else fails, idealist-bait..." This position eventually prevailed in the Mobe, despite its short-term cost in support by anti-war members of congress. The SMC was not invited to every meeting of the Mobe, but its representatives spoke at the rally and its campus chapters did their usual strong job of turning out the bodies.

Exclusionism is not such a simple matter as the Movement's proper unanimity against it would lead one to believe. Oglesby did not defend communism or deny that a group dedicated to democracy should be aware of "the danger that our democratic faith might be out-argued from within," meaning in this case that SDS might be taken over by totalitarians. Instead, he described that danger as so remote as to be "galactic," and hardly grounds for SDS to "screen, purge or use loyalty pledges" that would tear it apart. Oglesby's reasoning that the cure was more dangerous than the disease was sound in 1966, but by 1969, after many in SDS had drifted left in frustration with continuing oppression at home and abroad, the absence of clear rules for membership and decision-making bred a reverse exclusionism that beat Oglesby's galactic spread and started a rapid descent into disarray. The more radical members of SDS began to construct litmus tests that excluded the less radical, overturning the earlier commitment to let people themselves decide if they belonged.

SDS split in half at its June convention in Chicago, which with its shouting matches, walk-outs, and lock-outs was almost a parody of the Democratic party's there the year before. The split ostensibly came over the arcane issue of whether the NLF was "revisionist" for taking aid from the reactionary Soviet Union. The pro-NLF splinter itself quickly split again over whether to use violence to provoke a police reaction that would lead to revolution. All the factions claimed the SDS lineage, but the violence-oriented Weathermen retained its mystique and credibility with the left. SDS as a national movement was dead, a victim of one brand of exclusionism that another might have obviated. The Weathermen then effectively excluded themselves from the Mobe by adopting violent and disruptive tactics that they aimed not just against the police, as in the failed youth uprising of their "Days

of Rage" in Chicago in October, but against the rest of the Movement. At the Mobe, the Weathermen and the assorted crazies who swarmed around them tried to storm the stage when Sen. George McGovern came on to speak. They were turned back by marshalls, and streamed away behind their flags of insurrection toward the Justice Department. It was the last open act of the Weathermen: by the next spring, they were underground, carrying out bombings.

Having survived others' attempts to fracture it with exclusion, the Mobe coalition went ahead and fractured itself soon after its great day. The Moratorium closed down in the spring of 1970, abandoning its original plan to make its strike one day longer each month, and instead calling on its adherents to work in the campaigns of anti-war congressional candidates. The remainder of the Mobe split that summer into the National Coalition Against War and Racism, which espoused civil disobedience and focused on issues in addition to the war, and the National Peace Action Coalition, which continued to sponsor legal mass marches focused solely on the war. Both were beset by tiny, dogma-maddened factions from SDS's meltdown. They disrupted planning sessions and demonstrations so systematically that most activists were convinced they were funded by the FBI or other government agencies.

Adding to the Movement's problems as it approached the Mobe was a massive publicity offensive by the Nixon administration, which devoted as much energy to attacking the Movement and the press as it did to presenting its own version of the war. The efforts of the Johnson administration, which had been no slouch, paled in comparison to this determined assault on the truth and the truth-tellers in 1969. Made memorable by the purple prose of speechwriters Pat Buchanan and Bill Safire and spread by "independent" organizations concocted by the White House as well as by columnists and reporters who were given access to top officials in return for their cooperation, the campaign reversed the erosion of government credibility that had followed the Tet offensive.

A primary purpose of Nixon's campaign, affirmed through the use of the theme, "Tell it to Hanoi," was to portray protestors as unpatriotic. This studied decision to equate dissent with trea-

son was one of the most sordid acts in the history of American politics, and the willingness of supporters of the war to accept such a formulation was one of the most cowardly. In response to maddening and, as time proved, accurate predictions by North Vietnamese officials that anti-war sentiment would eventually drive America from Vietnam, the administration called on anti-war leaders to denounce the North Vietnamese and the NLF, and then seized on their refusal to do so as treasonous. Vice President Agnew held a press conference the day before the October Moratorium to publicize a letter of greeting from North Vietnam to participants in the protest, and to demand that anti-war members of congress show how their position differed from that of a country "which has on its hands the blood of 40,000 Americans." Failing to deflate the Moratorium, he retreated into bile after it, labeling its participants "eunuchs." Patriotism, George Washington said, is the last refuge of scoundrels, but apparently sexual innuendo provides an even deeper sanctuary.

The October Moratorium brought thousands of campuses to a halt and forced mainstream politicians into open opposition to the war. In New York, Mayor John Lindsay declared a day of mourning and had the city's flags flown at half mast: opposition was becoming not only legitimate but respectable. According to documents released during the Watergate investigation, the size of the Moratorium and the public's positive reaction threw the White House into a "full-fledged drive" to discredit the upcoming Mobe. Nixon gave his famous speech asking the "Silent Majority" for its support against the suspect vocal minority, and Agnew attacked the media for such slight criticism of the speech as there was. Agnew's speech, which included Safire's alliterative assault on "effete east coast intellectuals" (this sexual shot dripping with homophobia) and "nattering nabobs of negativism," was coupled with public and private threats against the licenses of the television networks. The administration redoubled its work with its contacts in the media, who enshrined the recently-reviled Moratorium as a well-meaning American event, in contrast to the un-American, Trotskyite-led Mobe. Undocumented leaks by the FBI promoted a slew of absurd administration claims about ties between the Mobe and foreign communists.

The administration's offensive resulted in a smashing victory over a cowed congress and media. Where 65 members of the

House endorsed the Moratorium, only one endorsed the Mobe. The networks, which had been considering broadcasting the Mobe live, instead ran short pieces on the regular news that emphasized the trashing of Dupont Circle as much as the march the next day. The media that winter portrayed the war as winding down in a reasonable search for "peace with honor," when in fact there were half a million U.S. troops still in Vietnam, higher casualty rates, increased bombing, and a continuing U.S. plan of victory. They adopted the administration's characterization of anti-war protest as being behind the curve of events, prolonging the war by encouraging Hanoi to hold off from its inevitable surrender.

The honeymoon with the media would not last, but that it had been granted at all was a stark measure of the power of the presidency. By the next summer, after the invasion of Cambodia and the killings at Kent and Jackson State colleges, some of the press responded, as it had after Tet, as a jilted lover, and became all the more irreverent for its earlier docility. The administration's complaints notwithstanding, even then the press as a whole was generally favorable to the administration and its line. Anyone who thinks that the media "lost the war" should just go and read the newspapers from those years, and see how good a ride a policy built on lies got, right up until the end.

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For all its apparent success in isolating the Mobe from congress and the public, the administration's campaign against the Movement was about to fall on hard times. Form could triumph over substance only so long, and reality was rearing its ugly head even as White House operatives were sending around memos congratulating themselves for reducing the impact of the Mobe. During the Mobe, two growing cracks became visible in the facade the administration had presented to the world, one related to what our troops did in the field, the other to what they increasingly wouldn't do. Both forced Nixon to rush forward with his strategy of "Vietnamization," which was planned as a gradual transfer of the brunt of ground combat to the South Vietnamese while massive U.S. air power held the enemy in check, but which soon degenerated into a frantic dumping of equipment and assignments on ARVN troops who were still years away from being able to handle them.

The first crack was revealed two days before the Mobe in a story that had been turned down once by all the major media, but was finally run to ground and into print by Seymour Hersh, a free-lance writer who had been a speech-writer for Eugene McCarthy's 1968 presidential campaign. It was the story of a massacre a year before of 600 Vietnamese villagers in the hamlet of My Lai by the US Army's Americal Division. Hersh had followed up on the persistent claims of a soldier who had heard of the murders, and he produced a five-part series of newspaper articles on the massacre that would resound throughout America for the rest of the war. The revulsion brought on by the revelations overwhelmed the administration's efforts to shake off My Lai as the work of a few rotten apples, rather than the result of a purposeless policy that alienated US troops from the people they were supposed to be saving from communism. It also decimated the public's long-term commitment to South Vietnam, which was an implicit condition for Vietnamization, since if the war could not be won quickly with superior US forces, it would take even longer with South Vietnamese troops backed by US airpower and advisers.

The second crack was presaged by an advertisement appearing in the New York Times the week before the Mobe, in which 1,365 active-duty Americans soldiers put their names behind the Mobe and its demand of an end to the war. Their attitude was so widespread that their officers didn't dare take disciplinary action against them for fear of the response of their compatriots. The advertisement revealed the largely hidden yet increasingly crucial side of the Movement that existed in the armed forces. Anti-war newspapers and coffee-houses were proliferating on or near military bases throughout the country and even in the theater of war, and a growing number of soldiers were taking advantage of weekend leaves to take part in anti-war demonstrations, both in and out of uniform. The implications of such overt opposition were made clear by persistent news reports of American soldiers avoiding combat, either by making sure that the enemy knew they were coming or by ignoring dangerous orders.

The headline in the New York Daily News in August 1969, for a story about a commander who tried and failed to move his troops out on patrol, foretold what would soon be commonplace in the effort not to be the last man to die during the withdrawal:

“Sir, My Men Refuse to Go!” Increasingly in 1970, US ground forces would cooperate only with defensive missions or massive sweeps like the ponderous invasion of Cambodia that posed little risk of combat. In fact, as the vice chief of staff of the Army at the time, Gen. Bruce Palmer, has pointed out, the primary purpose and effect of the invasion itself was to create breathing room for the withdrawal of US forces to enclaves nearer the coast.

Both Palmer and a Marine Corps historian, Col. Robert Heintz, have acknowledged the rapid disintegration of the morale and performance of US ground troops when the impending withdrawal of US forces under Vietnamization made it clear that there was no reason left to risk one’s life. By 1970, Heintz found US forces “in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat...and dispirited where not near mutinous.” He says that what was once aggressive patrolling had become “search and evade,” with patrols even lighting fires so that the cooperative enemy could avoid contact. A slew of other first-hand reports show that an effective mutiny had occurred, with officers’ commands routinely debated and modified by soldiers to reduce risks before they would move out. The few officers who persisted in ordering their troops on dangerous missions were openly resisted in sit-down protests or, more commonly, were simply attacked. “Fraggings,” the rolling of a fragmentation grenade into an officer’s sleeping area, were commonplace, with the Army itself admitting 788 fraggings with 86 deaths starting in 1969.

In the mid-1960s, G.I.s in Vietnam would part with the lethal phrase, “Get some!” Whatever thoughts they may have had about US policy, they saw killing as their business, and they expected their compatriots to join them in it. By 1970, the universal parting was “Not even,” a mysterious phrase of non-cooperation that embodied a determined resistance to risking one’s life in order to “get some.” A remark that accurately reflected the impact of this reversal of morale was made in 1970 by actress Jane Fonda, who earned the gratitude of thousands of veterans with her sponsorship of the coffee houses, newspapers, and rallies of the soldiers’ anti-war movement, even as she earned the enmity of thousands of others during a trip to Hanoi by broadcasting an anti-war message to US troops and being photographed at an anti-

aircraft gun: "Nixon's worried about being the first president to lose a war. He might be the first president to lose his army."

So the reality of the war was draining popular support at home, and the reality of the Movement was draining combat effectiveness in Vietnam. After the Mobe, Congress knew that the war was unwinnable and hence, because of the perseverance of the enemy, was lost, yet it refused to take responsibility for the politically risky step of acting on this fact. Nixon was funded for his bloody search for "peace with honor," as long as he reduced US casualties during it. Of course, that Nixon was seeking something other than victory reflected the unprecedented success of the Movement, which by the time of the Mobe had grown from an irritant on the fringe of American politics to a power that forced the nation to renounce its primary goal in a war. However, the replacement of the earlier drive for victory not with an admission of defeat but with this dishonorable and equally deadly search for a face-saving way out confounded the Movement and exacerbated its barely reconcilable divisions. But how did we even get to this point? How had people come together to challenge the power of their own nation at war? Not by accident, I assure the reader, but by the work of lonely heroes, to which we now turn.

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