

I would like to talk on behalf of all those veterans. . .

In our opinion and from our experience, there is nothing in South Vietnam which could happen that realistically threatens the United States of America. And to attempt to justify the loss of one American life in Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos by linking such loss to the preservation of freedom. . . is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it is that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart. . .

We found most people didn't even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing [repeatedly attacking] them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. . . .

We rationalized destroying villages in order to save them. . . . We learned the meaning of free fire zones, shooting anything that moves, and we watched while America placed a cheapness on the lives of orientals. . .

Each day . . . someone has to give up his life so that the United States doesn't have to admit something that the entire world already knows, so that we can't say that we have made a mistake. Someone has to die so that President Nixon won't be, and these are his words, "the first President to lose a war."

We are asking Americans to think about that because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake? . . .

We are here to ask, and we are here to ask vehemently, where are the leaders of our country? Where is the leadership? We're here to ask where are McNamara, Rostow, Bundy, Gilpatrick, and so many others? Where are they now that we, the men they sent off to war, have returned? These are the commanders who have deserted their troops. And there is no more serious crime in the laws of war.

We wish that a merciful God could wipe away our own memories of that service as easily as this administration has wiped away their memories of us. But all that they have done . . . is to make more clear than ever our own determination to undertake one last mission -- to search out and destroy . . . the hate and fear that have driven this country these last ten years and more.

Source: John Kerry, testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, April 23, 1971. John Kerry was a veteran who returned from Vietnam in April 1969, having won early transfer out of the conflict because of his three Purple Hearts. He joined a group called Vietnam Veterans Against the War.