

## Part 1

**Stephen Smith:** Barry Romo was 19 years old when he went to fight in the Vietnam War. It was July, 1967. Romo had volunteered for the Army, trained as an officer, and arrived in Vietnam a Second Lieutenant. He was assigned to be the platoon leader of an infantry unit. Within weeks of landing in Vietnam he was leading men on search and destroy missions. They were fighting enemy soldiers and guerillas - at close range.

**Barry Romo:** I was afraid I was going to make a mistake; I was a 19-year-old lieutenant. I was gonna be in charge of 45 men in combat. I wasn't afraid of dying, but I was worried that I would get people killed.

**Smith:** Barry Romo was only five foot two. But he was strong and fit, and he wanted to kill communists.

**Romo:** I volunteered because I was a dedicated anti-communist. I'd grown up in the 50s. I thought the world was being controlled by an international communist conspiracy.

**Kate Ellis:** But from the beginning, there were things about the war that troubled Romo. He identified as a Chicano, and he saw a deep strain of racism in the military. There was one event, in particular. At a base where Romo was stationed, U.S. troops paid Vietnamese civilians to turn in unexploded American bombs and artillery shells. The U.S. military wanted those explosives back before enemy soldiers could find them.

**Romo:** And there had been three or four children bringing back this round, which as they carried it, they jarred it and it exploded. And all but one of them were burned and dead and didn't exist. I mean they were pulverized.

**Ellis:** One girl survived but her body was burned all over. Romo wrapped her in a poncho and carried her to a helicopter. They flew to a nearby Naval Hospital. When Romo arrived with the girl in his arms, the military doctors refused to help her. They said they didn't treat Vietnamese nationals.

**Romo:** And it didn't matter that this little girl was what we were supposedly fighting for. And it didn't matter that she had got blown up because she was bringing back an unexploded round. It didn't matter that she was doing America's bidding. The only thing that mattered was the color of her skin and the shape of her eyes.

**Ellis:** Romo took the girl to a Catholic missionary hospital. He never found out whether she lived or died.

(Music cue)

**Smith:** Barry Romo's tour in Vietnam ended in the spring of 1968. He was sent to an Army post in California where infantry units were trained for combat. Nine months later he was discharged. He enrolled in a community college in San Bernardino, California, where he'd grown up. Romo liked college, but he was haunted by the war and what he'd done in Vietnam.

**Romo:** And I got out and felt guilty... not only for the people underneath me that died. But I felt guilty. I'd killed six Vietnamese, that were close enough so that I could see their faces. And whenever we would talk about the war, I would start to cry.

**Smith:** Romo was in torment. He quit going to church, even though he'd been a devout Catholic. He talked with peace activists, but he never thought of joining them. It was 1970. President Nixon ordered US forces into the neighboring, neutral country of Cambodia. The purpose: to attack enemy bases there. Romo thought Nixon had lied, that he was going back on an earlier promise to end the war. It seemed that end would never come, and that jolted Romo into action.

**Romo:** Once I admitted to myself that that the people I had killed, I had killed for nothing, that my men had died for something less than nothing, an unjust cause, I had to become politically active. I didn't want to. But people were still dying.

**Ellis:** People were still dying, and Romo felt he could help stop that. As a combat veteran, Romo thought Americans would listen to him when he said the war in Vietnam was immoral. That it needed to end. And it turns out Romo wasn't alone. Tens of thousands of other Vietnam War veterans opposed the war. So did a large number of active-duty GIs, both at home and in Vietnam. And they, too, were taking action.

(APM Reports theme music)

**Smith:** From American Public Media, this is Soldiers for Peace, a podcast about the GI and veteran anti-war movement during the Vietnam War. I'm Stephen Smith.

**Ellis:** And I'm Kate Ellis.

**Smith:** While American GIs fought abroad, people at home battled each other and their government over whether the United States was waging a just war. More returning veterans spoke out against the war than in any American military conflict before or since. The same was true of active-duty GIs. Historians estimate that at least one in five openly opposed the Vietnam War. One in five.

**Ellis:** These soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen came to believe that they were not liberators in Vietnam. They were agents of tyranny.

(Music up and fades under)

**Ellis:** American involvement in Vietnam started in the wake of World War Two. The United States provided military and financial support to the French...whose forces were fighting to recolonize Vietnam. Communist rebels in the North defeated the French. The North Vietnamese

rebels were backed by China and Russia. The U.S. sent military advisors to South Vietnam to help quell an uprising there. It was the height of the Cold War. American officials, including President Dwight D. Eisenhower and then John F. Kennedy, feared that if South Vietnam fell to communists, the rest of Southeast Asia would topple like dominoes.

**John F. Kennedy:** If we withdrew from Vietnam, the communist would control Vietnam. Pretty soon Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya would go.

**Smith:** In spring of 1965, President Lyndon Johnson sent the first US combat troops to fight for South Vietnam. It was a fateful decision. Over time, more than 3 million American troops would be sent to Southeast Asia. Nearly 60,000 would die, and many more would be wounded in the war. More than 3 million fighters and civilians are thought to have died in Vietnam and across Southeast Asia. As the casualties mounted, resistance to the war by Americans back home, and by veterans and by active-duty GIs, would grow more intense by the year.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** The first widely publicized protest by active duty soldiers against the war happened at Fort Hood, Texas in 1966. It involved a 20-year-old man from the Bronx.

**JJ Johnson:** I was a squad leader. And they generally picked as a squad leader, someone they believe is you know, leadership material/ Someone who, you know who might be gung-ho, who you know, who they want to lead his [laughs] -- his, his comrades into battles.

**Ellis:** J.J. Johnson was drafted in December 1965. The Army sent him to basic training at Fort Hood.

**Johnson:** I had been, a-- as a teenager, a Sea Explorer. So I knew how to -- is similar to an older version of the Boy Scouts. So, I knew how to march. I knew how to call cadence. I knew how to spit shine my shoes.

**Ellis:** The next stop for JJ Johnson was an Army base in Georgia to train in a communications unit. There, Johnson met another New Yorker, a private named Dennis Mora. Mora was active in the antiwar movement before he got drafted. He invited Johnson to join an informal study group with other GIs.

**Johnson:** Where we would read Vietnamese history and read whatever we could get our hands on about the war, about our involvement, about the history of the Vietnamese struggle for independence and against colonialism, against the French, the Chinese and everybody else, and now the US.

**Ellis:** The group read about North Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh and the time Ho spent in the United States.

**Johnson:** One of the things that impressed me most was a essay he wrote about lynching in the United States. That this person 10,000 miles away, talked about something that I hadn't even thought about that much myself.

**Ellis:** From their training base in Georgia, Johnson and others in the study group met with local peace and civil rights activists. Johnson is African American, and he could see links between the fight against colonialism in Vietnam and the civil rights movement in America.

**Smith:** In the summer of 1966, JJ Johnson and Dennis Mora got orders to ship out for Vietnam. They refused. They were joined by a 29-year-old private from Chicago, and the three men were arrested. They were charged with insubordination and sentenced to three years in prison. They became known nationally as the Fort Hood Three. JJ Johnson hoped their refusal to fight would lead to a mass exodus from the military of active-duty GIs. That didn't happen. But publicity around their case inspired GIs across the country...and in Vietnam...to resist the war.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** While JJ Johnson was still awaiting trial in the summer of '66, a recent high school graduate from Pennsylvania was at the Parris Island Marine Corps training base in South Carolina. Even though he was physically small, Bill Ehrhart was learning to be a leatherneck.

**Bill Ehrhart:** Marine Corps is full of little guys like me, with chips on our shoulders, who want to be men.

**Ellis:** Ehrhart was the son of a minister. He got beat up as a kid.

**Ehrhart:** Big poster in front of the post office with a Marine Sergeant in a dress blue uniform, and just standing there and the caption was, the Marine Corps builds men-- and nobody's ever going to beat me up again. I mean, I was gonna join the Marines period.

**Ellis:** At the time Ehrhart was a political liberal. But like Barry Romo and so many other Cold War kids, he was also worried about the spread of global communism. And like them, he trusted his government.

**Ehrhart:** When, when Lyndon Johnson said in a speech, if we do not stop the communists in Vietnam, we will one day have to fight them on the Sands of Waikiki. That sounded serious to me. I had every reason to believe that, and virtually no indication that I ought to be skeptical of that.

**Smith:** Ehrhart arrived in Vietnam in February 1967. He was assigned to a Marine infantry battalion. His job: scout. They were patrolling a heavily populated coastal area of farms and fishing villages. The enemy – Viet Cong guerillas – were elusive.

**Ehrhart:** Most of our contacts were not contacts at all. It was mines and booby traps. Seventy five incidents per month on average over eight months, half of them resulting in Marine casualties and nobody to fight back at.

**Smith:** Guerilla fighters wore the same clothes as everyone else in Vietnam. Some villages secretly supported the guerillas. Ehrhart found the phantom enemy frustrating and frightening.

**Ehrhart:** You're patrolling the same villages day in and day out. And every freaking day somebody hits a mine, you got dead Marines, you got wounded Marines. And meanwhile, there's Joe the rice farmer out there in the field. You start asking yourself, why aren't these people stepping on the mines? And after a while you start thinking: these guys, they're all the enemy.

**Smith:** Like many veterans who eventually turned against the war, Bill Ehrhart would come to regret seeing the Vietnamese as the enemy.

**Ehrhart:** There are people who never had the joy of being a father, never got to be married, never got to live out their lives. Literally because of me. And for nothing. For worse than nothing. I was on the wrong side. Those people were fighting for their country.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** As Bill Ehrhart was patrolling rice paddies with the Marines...an Army veteran named Jan Barry was back stateside. Barry had served in Vietnam in the early 60s...when American military personnel were acting as advisors to the South Vietnamese army. He came to realize that the U.S. was backing a corrupt and incompetent regime in South Vietnam. Barry became so concerned about the escalation of the war that he moved to New York City to be close to the peace movement there. One day Jan Barry saw a newspaper ad for an antiwar demonstration.

**Jan Barry:** I thought, that's it. That's the kind of organization I want to learn more about.

**Ellis:** So Barry went to the protest. It was spring 1967. As many as 400,000 demonstrators showed up. It was one of the largest anti-Vietnam-war protests to date.

**Newscaster 1:** 5,000 Manhattan marchers include students, housewives, beatnik, poets, doctors, businessmen, teachers, priests and nuns. Before the parade, massed draft card burning was urged. Demonstrators claimed 200 cards were burned but no accurate count could be determined...

**Ellis:** Vietnam veterans were encouraged to march in front. Barry remembers seeing vets in their military field jackets.

**Barry:** And then we stepped out into people hollering and screaming. Construction workers threatening or throwing some things. And then this great big huge block of veterans came marching along and this crowd noise just changed like, wow, what are these veterans doing with these peaceniks? And I thought, this is where I want to be.

**Ellis:** After the march, Jan Barry joined with a handful of other men to form a new group called Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Over time, the VVAW would become one of the most influential anti-war organizations of its kind.

**Barry:** And for the first few months, since we're such a small group of people, we gone around with things we handed out on street corners in the village, in Times Square and argued with people. And started real conversations. I somehow was of the misimpression that Americans really respected veterans, and, and particularly people who spoke from experience and therefore they would listen, which some people did. But the government didn't want to hear about it.

**Ellis:** More and more veterans were opposing the war. But President Johnson still insisted the U.S. could win in Vietnam. As 1967 gave way to 1968, Jan Barry had no idea how long and difficult the peace campaign would be.

(Music cue)



**Smith:** In January 1968, the North Vietnamese and their Viet Cong allies in the south launched an extraordinary military operation on the Vietnamese New Year of Tet. It became known as the Tet Offensive.

(Sounds of machine guns, shelling, radio traffic)

**Christian Appy:** Well the Tet Offensive was a massive, coordinated, surprise attack by communist led forces throughout all of South Vietnam, almost every provincial capital.

**Smith:** Christian Appy is an historian who has written a number of books about the war in Vietnam.

**Appy:** And it was an enormous shock to the American public because for the year preceding it, they had been told again and again by their civilian and military leaders, that progress, though slow, was steady and gaining and that the enemy was tiring and on the ropes and that the end of the war was in sight.

**Ehrhart:** What it did was put the lie to everything the Johnson administration had been saying about what's happening in Vietnam and the progress we are making.

**Smith:** Marine veteran Bill Ehrhart.

**Ehrhart:** Then from that point on, it was, it became perfectly obvious that the only-- the only thing left to be determined was how long the United States would stay before we finally packed up and went home.

**Smith:** The Tet Offensive was Bill Ehrhart's last battle in Vietnam. His tour of duty was up. It was time to go home. He hoped he could put the war behind him...but that would prove impossible.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** The Tet Offensive in early 1968 is widely seen as a pivot point in American public support for the war in Vietnam. News reports from the war zone had grown increasingly pessimistic. More Americans came to believe that President Johnson had thrust the country into an unwinnable war. And the Pentagon said it needed 200-thousand more troops. As public opposition to the war swelled, President Johnson made a startling declaration.

**Lyndon B. Johnson:** I will not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president.

**Ellis:** The war was a central issue in the 1968 presidential campaign. Former Vice President Richard Nixon, the Republican nominee, made this television ad.

**Richard Nixon:** I pledge to you we shall have an honorable end to the war in Vietnam.

**Smith:** Nixon was elected in November 1968. That same year, a Navy nurse in Oakland, California rented a single-engine airplane with a friend who was a pilot. They flew over five military bases in the Bay Area, dropping anti-war leaflets. When they touched down at the Palo Alto airport, they met with reporters.

**Susan Schnall:** So we had a press conference, and I wore my uniform and said, “this is who I am. I'm in the Navy, opposed to the war, and we just dropped these flyers on military bases.”

**Smith:** The flyers that nurse Susan Schnall dropped from the sky encouraged active duty GIs and military veterans to march against the war that Saturday morning in San Francisco. 200 active-duty GIs and a hundred reservists would turn out-- the largest gathering of the GI peace movement to date.

**Schnall:** The demonstration was October 12th 1968. It was, at the time when there was the highest number of troops on the ground in Vietnam.

(Rally sound and applause)

**Smith:** Lieutenant Susan Schnall never served in Vietnam, but she saw first-hand the cost of war. She spoke at the rally in her Navy dress uniform and cap.

**Schnall at rally:** As a nurse in the armed forces of the United States, the war in Vietnam has taken on a very real and personal meaning. It means young soldiers...

**Schnall:** I thought that if we stood up in uniform, and you could see that there were people in the military who were opposed to the American war in Vietnam, that it would have an impact on public opinion.

**Schnall at rally:** It means training, working with young corpsman to care for the ill and the injured, only to see them returned home shot up, minus a limb, grossly infected, or in a flag draped coffin.

**Schnall:** We had a unit at the hospital that was called the amputee ward. There was a smell of infection. And their terrible cries of pain. And it just was, oh my God, I am part of this military machine, and I need to do something about it.

**Smith:** Doing something about it would cost Lieutenant Schnall and many of the other GIs who openly opposed the war. Schnall was court martialed for conduct unbecoming an officer – dropping the leaflets -- and for wearing her uniform at the rally. Schnall was found guilty on both charges. She was eventually dismissed from the Navy – the equivalent of a dishonorable discharge. But Schnall stayed active in the anti-war movement and in recruiting active-duty GIs to oppose the war.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** About the time of that San Francisco GI protest, a soldier living on the East Coast was having his own crisis over the war. Earlier that year he had graduated from college with a degree in history.

**David Cortright:** Which was a most unfortunate time to be a young man available in America. Because the draft was going full blast. At that time, there were already more than a half million American troops in Vietnam. 1968 was the peak year of the war, I believe that year, there were 19,000 fatalities among American troops. And I hadn't really thought about the war.

**Ellis:** David Cortright was so immersed in college life he didn't pay much attention to the war. When Cortright's draft notice arrived, he was at a loss for what to do.

**Cortright:** I knew kids were getting deferments right and left. And -- but they were the wealthy kids or the kids who are more connected.

**Ellis:** Young men with sympathetic family doctors got deferments for asthma, flat feet, mental health problems and the like. Cortright had no such connections. So Cortright decided to enlist in the Army. He was a trumpet player and he hoped to get into an Army band. That might help him avoid getting assigned to a combat unit.

**Cortright:** Almost everybody who was being drafted on those days went right into the infantry. Because the army was suffering high levels of casualties, the war was raging at its peak. And they needed cannon fodder, literally.

**Ellis:** Cortright says he hated basic training. Its senseless brutality. Its dehumanizing depiction of the enemy. A lot of the other guys in basic had also enlisted to avoid being drafted. Cortright says, by then, few of them believed in the war. Cortright remembers them being shown a film in basic training produced by the Army called "Why Vietnam?"

**Cortright:** There was a lot of, you know, hoots and howls. And the sergeants were yelling, you men be quiet down there.

**Archival Video:** If freedom is to survive in any American hometown, it must be preserved in such places as South Vietnam.

**Cortright:** There was an atmosphere of doubt and skepticism, right from the beginning among most of the troops.

**Smith:** Cortright ended up in an Army band at Fort Hamilton, a base in Brooklyn. He was never sent to Vietnam. From the beginning of his military service, Cortright had questions about the war. At Fort Hamilton he read a book about the history of the war in Vietnam and he felt an intense moral crisis.

**Cortright:** What really hit me was that I was part of something that was really wrong, profoundly unjust. And, and if I kept on with this, I couldn't be true to myself. I would be turning into something I didn't want to be. I didn't know what - - exactly what I wanted to be in life, but I didn't want to be compromising basic values of what's right or wrong.

**Smith:** So David Cortright joined other GIs, in uniform, at anti-war rallies in New York.

**Cortright:** This was a way in which I could try to speak against the war, talk back to the Army, if you will. And, and I thinking was, if people see that even the soldiers are opposed to the war, surely, they're going to pay attention. I mean, it's one thing to have students protesting or whatever. But if soldiers and veterans are speaking out, they've got to pay attention to us, right?

**Ellis:** Commanders at Fort Hamilton certainly paid attention. It wasn't long before Cortright and fellow GI protestors were transferred to Army bases scattered across the country. But David

Cortright's personal fight to end the war was just beginning. In November 1969, he joined a three-day protest in Washington DC. As many as half a million people marched on Washington.

**Film Narrator:** The new mobilization to end the war in Vietnam began its 36-hour March Against Death from Arlington National Cemetery to the Capitol.

**Ellis:** The protestors came from all across the country. Some wore their military uniforms. The marchers carried placards with the names of GIs killed in the war.

**Film Narrator:** Before the White House Each called out that name.

(Sound of men saying names and state)

**Film Narrator:** At the end of the route the placards were dropped into 5 coffins.

**Ellis:** That march in Washington is believed to be the largest anti-war demonstration in American history. Similar protests were held simultaneously in communities across the country. David Cortright was driving home afterward on the New Jersey Turnpike. He heard on the radio that Nixon had ignored the marchers. Instead, the president said he watched a football game on TV.

**Smith:** Cortright was crestfallen. He thought to himself, what will it take for these people to pay attention? As it turned out, Nixon and his administration were plenty worried about the growing anti-war movement.

(APM Reports theme)

**Smith:** Soon, events in Vietnam - and at home - would drive even more veterans and GIs to join that movement.

**Appy:** There was as much rebellion and dissent within the military by 1970, as there was on most college campuses.

**Man 1:** I was angry, angry, angry

**Smith:** That's in the next episode of Soldiers for Peace, a podcast from APM Reports.

Soldiers for Peace was produced by Kate Ellis and me, Stephen Smith. It was edited by Chris Julin. Mixing by Craig Thorsen. Web editors Dave Mann and Andy Kruse. The APM Reports team includes Alex Baumhardt, Sabby Robinson, and Shelly Langford. Fact checking by Betsy Towner-Levine. The Executive Editor is Chris Worthington. Theme music by Gary Meister.

You can find out more about the veteran and GI peace movement at our website, APM Reports dot org. While you're there, browse our catalog of more than 100 documentary projects, check out our award-winning podcasts, and let us know what you think of this program. There's also a place to make a contribution to support our work. That's APM Reports dot org. This program is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This is APM...American Public Media.

## **Part 2**

**Stephen Smith:** From American Public Media, this is Soldiers for Peace, a podcast about the GI and veteran anti-war movement during the Vietnam War. I'm Stephen Smith.

**Kate Ellis:** And I'm Kate Ellis. Just a note of caution: some material in this program contains graphic descriptions of violence.

**Newscaster 2:** The army today ordered a general court martial for First Lieutenant William Calley Jr. on six charges of premeditated murder in the death of 109 Vietnamese civilians.

**Ellis:** In November 1969 Americans began learning of a massacre committed by U.S. troops in South Vietnam. It happened in a hamlet called My Lai.

**Newscaster 3:** The villagers' version of the incident was given by survivors yesterday. They said a patrol of 100 Americans stormed into the hamlet, drove all the residents out of their huts, and opened fire with automatic weapons.

**Ellis:** The slaughter took place in March 1968. For more than a year, the Army kept it secret.

**Newscaster 4:** Since the story of the alleged massacre first broke a number of former soldiers in Vietnam have come forward with eyewitness reports.

**Reporter Mike Wallace:** How many people do you imagine were killed that day?

**Paul Meadlo:** I'd say about 370.

**Wallace:** How do you arrive at that figure?

**Meadlo:** Just by lookin.

**Wallace:** Men, women, children?

**Meadlo:** Men, women, children.

**Wallace:** Babies?

**Meadlo:** Babies.



**Newscaster 5:** All of the people of My Lai tell the same story: their hamlet was destroyed deliberately by Americans.

**Ellis:** Investigators found that American troops had killed more than 500 Vietnamese civilians in My Lai. Soldiers took several hours to carry out the mass killing. They took breaks to eat and smoke cigarettes. Americans were shocked. Some of them thought the story was a hoax. But many GIs and recent vets were less than surprised. To them, what happened in My Lai was an extreme example of U.S. military policy in Vietnam. They had witnessed – or even taken part – in some of the very same actions.

(Music cue)

**Smith:** News of the My Lai massacre pushed some veterans to go public with war atrocities they saw and committed in Vietnam. They hoped to increase opposition to the war by telling the truth about what was happening there. Meanwhile, active duty GIs used their own strategies to disrupt, to sabotage, and to openly protest the war. Events in early 1970 pushed a new wave of veterans and GIs to join the anti-war movement.

**Richard Nixon:** Good evening, my fellow Americans...

**Smith:** In April, 1970, President Richard Nixon spoke to the nation on TV. Ten days earlier he had announced plans to withdraw 150,000 American troops from Vietnam. But this message was different. Nixon warned that North Vietnam was using Cambodia – a neutral country bordering Vietnam – to stage attacks on South Vietnam. He said the enemy had to be stopped.

**Nixon:** In cooperation with the armed forces of South Vietnam, attacks are being launched this week to clean out major enemy sanctuaries on the Cambodian-Vietnam border.

**Smith:** As President Nixon spoke, American and South Vietnamese troops were massing on that border.

**Nixon:** ...We take this action not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam and winning the just peace we all desire.

**Ellis:** The anti-war movement erupted, especially on college campuses.

(Sounds of commotion and gunshots)

**Ellis:** On May 4, 1970, 1500 students were demonstrating on the campus of Kent State University, in Ohio. The National Guard moved in on them.

(Continued sounds of gunshots and commotion)

**Ellis:** First, the guardsmen lobbed teargas. Then, they opened fire.

(Sound up of more shooting and chaos.)

**Newscaster 6:** Four persons including two women were shot and killed on Kent State University's campus today during renewed demonstrations involving hundreds of students. The university was ordered...

**Ellis:** News of the Kent State shootings sent even more college campuses into chaos.

**Newscaster 7:** Authorities used tear gas to control rock-throwing crowds at such scattered locations as The University of Wisconsin, The University of Buffalo, and the University of Texas.

**Ellis:** Students weren't the only ones reacting to Kent State.

**Barry Romo:** Vets came out of the woodwork.

**Ellis:** Vietnam veteran Jan Barry was on the campus of Syracuse University when he got news of the shootings. He says students there instantly went on strike, and that hundreds of vets showed up to protect them.

**Barry:** We're going to make sure that nobody is going to get shot on our campus, if they have to come through us.

**Ellis:** Barry says Kent State outraged a lot of veterans. The government told them they'd been in Vietnam to fight for democracy; watching it get violated at home was unbearable. That outrage drove many of them to the peace movement.

**Smith:** Bill Ehrhart was one of them. Ehrhart got out of the service in June of '69. That fall, he enrolled at Swarthmore College. It was a major anti-war school. At first, Ehrhart didn't get involved. He was too messed up by his experience in Vietnam. He drank. He did drugs. And he told himself that the war had nothing to do with him.

**Ehrhart:** Up until the murders of Kent State. That was the thing where I finally began to understand that I had brought the war home with me. That it was my problem. That they were killing us. Now it's not enough to send us halfway around the world to die. Now they're killing us in the streets of our own country.

**Smith:** Ehrhart had what he calls a nervous breakdown.

**Ehrhart:** Sat on the street corner for I don't know how long sobbing my eyes out. And when I finally got done crying, I couldn't cry anymore. I stood up and I walked up to the student center and I gave my first anti-war speech.

**Smith:** After that first speech, Ehrhart was recruited by peace activists. They arranged for him to speak at a Rotary Club luncheon. Students invited him to join them at demonstrations.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, an Army veteran named Bill Branson was going through a similar transformation. Branson was attending a community college in southern California. He was no fan of the military, but he'd never actively opposed the war. Kent State changed that.

**Bill Branson:** I just absolutely despised these National Guard jerks that fired on civilians. So I, I got a black armband and started wearing it around the campus.

**Smith:** Once campus peace activists spotted Branson's armband, they invited him to their meetings. There, he met Barry Romo. Romo was the soldier we met earlier – the guy who tried to take the injured Vietnamese girl to the hospital. Pretty soon, Branson and Romo were consumed with anti-war work. Branson says they worked closely with civilian peace activists.

**Branson:** We had the advantage of a gigantic anti-war movement to be involved in and to help educate us and support us and to say, yeah, we want you guys there. They treated us like human beings.

**Ellis:** The relationship between the civilian peace movement and returning veterans was not always easy. But, one of the greatest myths about anti-war activists – according to historian Richard Stacewicz - is that they frequently heckled and spat on returning soldiers.

**Richard Stacewicz:** That whole image of the spat upon veteran returning was really something that was developed in the 1980s with the Rambo films and other things. So it became, you know, a trope in popular culture,

**Rambo Clip:** It wasn't my war! You asked me, I didn't ask you. And I did what I had to do to win! But somebody wouldn't let us win! Then I come back to the world and I see all those maggots at the airport, protesting me, spittin'.

**Stacewicz:** There was no such evidence of attacks on veterans in this kind of way.

**David Cortright:** I always found that the civilian anti-war movement people were very welcoming. In fact, in a way that kind of made us into heroes.

**Ellis:** This is David Cortright, one of the active duty GIs who openly protested the war.

**Cortright:** You know, we were tentative, uncertain, you know, didn't know what we were trying to do but we were trying to speak out against the war. Really, they were so helpful and supportive. And then when we would go to the anti-war rallies, people would thank us, not thank us for our service, thank us for our protest. And they put us at the front of the march.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** Anti-war GIs weren't just protesting in marches. They also rebelled back on base.

**Walter Cronkite:** A new phenomenon is cropped up at several army bases these days-- a so called underground GI Press, which consists largely of anti-war newspapers. Military authorities are clamping down hard on the papers...

**Ellis:** The brass were clamping down because the underground papers encouraged resistance among the troops and advertised antiwar gatherings they could attend. More than 300 underground newspapers circulated on American military bases worldwide. There were even papers on Navy ships. Marine Sergeant Paul Cox secretly published a paper at Camp Lejeune, in North Carolina.

**Paul Cox:** I polished my shoes, and I showed up every day and did my job. And then would go in at night and work all night on this, uh, on this paper. And we would go to Chapel Hill where we would have it printed up under the table, load up a car with it and then drive onto base at midnight.

**Ellis:** Keeping a lookout for military police, Cox and his crew dropped the papers throughout the barracks. The men could have been jailed if they were caught. Cox says he took the risk because some guys in his unit commit a massacre and he stayed silent. Cox felt ashamed. The underground paper was his way to start speaking up.

**Cox:** Collectively, all those anti-war newspapers really had an effect on the military because they saw their discipline and their unquestioning obedience of the enlisted troops coming apart.

**Christian Appy:** There was as much rebellion and dissent within the military by 1970, as there was on most college campuses.

**Ellis:** This is historian Christian Appy.

**Appy:** And this, of course, included every sort of rebellion imaginable by, you know, putting peace signs on your uniform or not saluting or refusing to carry out an order or sabotaging a tank.

**Smith:** Another factor impeding America's war effort was racism in the military. For a good part of the war, African Americans were more likely than whites to get drafted and see combat. They were less likely to be officers. And while desertion as a form of rebellion was increasing across the military, it was particularly high among black troops.

**Appy:** Race is an important factor in explaining so much of the growing dissent against the Vietnam War, and African Americans were among the first to understand and to call to attention the racial politics of that war-- first by raising questions about why they were being sent in the name of freedom and democracy to fight and Vietnam, when those same rights were being denied them at home.

**Smith:** Another factor in the GI rebellion: drugs.

**Newscaster 8:** Recent surveys estimate that well over 50 percent of the soldiers in Vietnam use marijuana.

**Veteran 1:** Get really stoned. Then you know like who cares about the war? (laughs)

**Smith:** It wasn't just pot. Heroin and opiates were also widely available. David Cortright says drugs, record-high desertions, and troops refusing to fight...added up to what he calls "soldiers in revolt." In 1975, he wrote the first full-length study of troop rebellion and dissent.

**Cortright:** And then the, the worst and most horrible manifestation of this revolt was the fragging that took place.

**Smith:** Fraggings were an attack by a GI against a superior. Soldiers fraggings officers they viewed as racist, reckless, or incompetent. Cortright says this happened hundreds of times.

**Cortright:** So, so it -- it was a manifestation of just how deep was the rebellion inside the ranks. And how bitter was the atmosphere.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** The U.S. military was increasingly dysfunctional, but the war dragged on. Back home, veterans felt a growing urgency to tell Americans what was really happening in Vietnam. They believed that if Americans knew, they would demand an end to the war.

**Galbally:** My name is Joe Galbally. I'm 23. I served as a PFC in the light infantry brigade from October 67 until April of 68 when I was medevac'd to Japan.

**Ellis:** In January, 1971, more than 125 veterans convened at a hotel in Detroit.

**Galbally:** My testimony will deal with the gassing of hungry children, the use of Scout dogs on innocent civilians. The indiscriminate leveling of villages, killing of livestock, and pollution of water supply.

**Ellis:** Vietnam Veterans Against the War – or VVAW -- held a set of public hearings on the war. For three days, vets relived the horror of Vietnam.

**John Beitzel:** My name is John Beitzel. I've witnessed the mutilation of bodies. This consisted of cutting off ears, plucking out teeth for souvenirs.

**Ellis:** The veterans sat long at long tables. A team of volunteer filmmakers recorded the entire thing.

**Veteran 2:** Nineteen women and children were rounded up as Viet Cong suspects. And the lieutenant that rounded them up called the captain on the radio. And he asked, what should be done with them? The captain simply repeated the order that came down from the colonel that morning: to kill anything that moves.

**Gary Keyes:** There were some fishermen out in the ocean. And, uh, a couple of our sergeants out to be a good sport to use them as target practice. So they swung 50 calibers around and it just shot the shit out of them.

**Thomas Heidtman:** We were on our first operation and we were just shown how you destroy a village. Everything is set on fire. My squad leader personally ignited the first two hootches and then just told us to take care of the rest.

**Carl Rippberger:** The next slide is a slide of myself. I'm extremely shameful of it. It's me, holding a dead body — smiling.

**Romo:** We were hoping to expose the American public-- what was genocide, being committed in their name.



**Ellis:** Barry Romo had flown in from California for the hearings. He led the last panel on the last day.

**Romo:** Which meant we went through two and a half days of people talking about the most horrible things. And I think we felt -- or I felt like we had to touch America's soul to stop it.

**Ellis:** At the time of the hearings, Lt. William Calley was on trial for the murder of civilians in My Lai. Barry Romo and other veterans testifying in Detroit believed the U.S. military was using Calley as a scapegoat. That the My Lai massacre was not an aberration.

**Romo:** And what's been brought out during this whole testimony is that it's a general policy and not an isolated incident. It would be impossible with our background to go into a village and kill a woman and child unless we looked at those people as nonhumans.

(Music cue)

**Smith:** Several hundred people packed the hotel ballroom to hear the testimony, but it got virtually no press coverage.

**Richard Stacewicz:** Here they are trying to share their experiences and to waken the public to what's happening in Vietnam, and they're still not being listened to.

**Smith:** This is Richard Stacewicz again. He published an oral history of VVAW.

**Stacewicz:** So I think that actually led to a greater radicalization among some of the members in VVAW, who saw that they needed to up the ante so to speak, to develop new techniques and strategies to try to, you know, finally get the public to pay attention to what was happening.

**Newscaster 9:** As in previous years, Washington is again the focal point for springtime demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. But never before have the ranks of protesters included so many veterans, men who fought in Vietnam and even some officers still on active duty.

**Smith:** On April 18, 1971, VVAW finally started getting the national attention it wanted.

**Newscaster 10:** Rallying began this afternoon in a park near Lincoln Memorial. Leaders expect more than 1000 by tomorrow, then they begin a week of marches, lobbying public officials, make believe war crimes hearings, and even simulated search and destroy missions, like those they were sent on in Vietnam, only using toy guns this time.

**Smith:** More than 1,500 veterans converged on Washington D.C. They camped out on the National Mall. For five days veterans fanned out across the city to protest the war and confront politicians.

**Bill Branson:** We just wanted to get down there and get the beast by the throat, which we did.

**Smith:** Bill Branson had come in from California.

**Branson:** We had a feeling we were doin' something. We knew it was big time, but we didn't know how big.

**Smith:** Each night, the national TV networks ran stories about the veterans protesting in Washington. One of those vets was John Kerry-- he went on to be Secretary of State. Kerry spoke before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and attacked the idea that anti-war protestors were the enemies of American soldiers.

**John Kerry:** In 1970, at West Point Vice President Agnew said: some glamorize the criminal misfits of society, while our best men die in Asian rice patties to preserve the

freedoms which those misfits abuse. And this was used as a rallying point for our effort in Vietnam. But for us, his boys in Asia, whom his country was supposed to support, his statement is a terrible distortion, from which we can only draw a very deep sense of revulsion, and hence the anger of some of the men who are here in Washington today. It's a distortion because we in no way considered ourselves the best men of this country. Because those he calls misfits were standing up for us in a way that nobody else in this country dared to. Because so many who have died would have returned to this country to join the misfits in their efforts to ask for an immediate withdrawal from South Vietnam.

**Smith:** The next day the veterans assembled on the steps of the U.S. Capitol. They wanted to give their service medals and ribbons back to the government.

**Newscaster 11:** Several hundred came to turn in medals, throwing them over a fence set up for tomorrow's demonstration. Their mood flickering between anger and mourning.

**Jim Murphy:** My role was to line people up.

**Smith:** Jim Murphy, an Air Force veteran, helped stage the protest.

**Murphy:** And I'm reminding people when you get up there, take a deep breath, because it's really emotional.

**Veteran 3:** I got a silver star, Purple Heart Army Commendation Medal, eight air medals, National Defense, and the rest of the garbage. It doesn't mean a thing!

(Crowd cheers)

**Murphy:** And think about what you want to say, who you want to dedicate this moment to...

**Veteran 4:** For Captain Roger PL United States Marine Corps, the Distinguished Flying Cross. For major Robert Kramer, United States Marine Corps who also died needlessly the silver star.

**Murphy:** What you want to say about the war, whatever you want to say. But just get it out.

**Veteran 5:** Robert Jones, New York. I symbolically return all Vietnam medals and other service medals given me by the power structure that has genocidal policies against non-white peoples of the world.

(Cheers)

**Murphy:** Throw that medal as far as you can and celebrate the moment because you're letting go of some negative energy when you get rid of that medal.

**Romo:** It felt great.

**Smith:** Barry Romo threw his service ribbons over the fence.

**Romo:** It felt like pulling a thousand tons off of my back.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** The veterans' five-day protest in Washington was followed by civilian demonstrations in the capitol. Nixon continued to withdraw troops from Vietnam, which he'd been doing since he took office. At the same time, he ramped up the bombing of North Vietnam. The war kept going, but news outlets gave it less coverage. Americans were paying less attention. Anti-war veterans invented new ways to try to keep the war in the public's mind.

**Newscaster 12:** Vietnam Veterans against the war staged a number of unusual protests today proclaiming it operation peace on earth. Phase One was a takeover of the Statue of Liberty in New York. In Philadelphia, 25 anti-war veterans barricaded themselves inside the 250-year-old home of Betsy Ross, where the first American flag was made.

**Ellis:** Meanwhile, the Nixon administration did what it could to suppress the veteran anti-war movement. In the summer of 1972, thousands of veterans gathered in Miami to stage protests at the Republican National Convention, where President Nixon was to be renominated. But the government had spies in VVAW that were causing trouble.

**Newscaster 13:** In Tallahassee, Florida today a federal grand jury indicted six members of the Vietnam Veterans against the War on charges of conspiring to disrupt the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach next month.

**Ellis:** Two more men were also charged. The group became known as the Gainesville Eight, for the town where they allegedly plotted violence at the convention. VVAW was forced to mount a legal defense that was expensive and time-consuming. Richard Stacewicz says this damaged the organization.

**Stacewicz:** It required that VVAW to move away from their primary mission for at least a year-- raising public awareness about what was happening with the war and to veterans-- and caused them to instead spend a year defending themselves.

**Ellis:** In August, 1973, a jury found the Gainesville Eight not guilty. But VVAW had been weakened.

**Stacewicz:** People in the organization began to distrust the other members. Not sure who was an agent, who was not.

**Smith:** By the time the Gainesville Eight were exonerated, the United States and Vietnam had signed a peace treaty. All the American troops had come home. The war was effectively over, at least for the U.S. And so was the anti-war movement.

(Music cue)

**Smith:** Historians don't agree about the extent to which the GI and veteran anti-war movement helped end the war. GI protests and rebellion certainly made it harder for the U.S. to wage war. But there's no question that participating in the antiwar movement could be healing – and sometimes life-saving -- for veterans.

**Branson:** And I'll tell you right now, if it wasn't for them I'd been dead.

**Ellis:** This is Bill Branson. He now serves on the board of VVAW.

**Branson:** We've had so many veterans over the years say that, that without that VVAW they'd never would have made it. Being able to sit there, smoke some weed, drink some wine with a bunch of people and plot how to go out and do something significant to try to end the war. That made a huge difference to us.

**Ellis:** VVAW wasn't the only veteran anti-war group. And in the years following the Vietnam War, these organizations have continued to campaign for peace and the well-being of veterans.

**Stacewicz:** And I think one of the big legacies of the VVAW is its work with PTSD where veterans began talking about their experiences, to share their experiences with one another and to find ways of healing.

**Smith:** The VVAW pressed the federal government to have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder recognized as a legitimate malady of war. The organization also played a crucial role in creating vet centers across the U.S. And, VVAW and other veterans' groups have spent decades trying to

expose the health impacts of the defoliant Agent Orange on Americans and Vietnamese. The U.S. military sprayed millions of gallons of the toxic chemical on Vietnam.

(Music cue)

**Ellis:** Back in 1971, during the demonstrations where veterans threw their medals onto the steps of the capitol, they also staged a candlelit march around the White House. They carried an American flag, turned upside down, an international signal of distress. Veterans and active duty GIs used American symbols of liberty and democracy to remind the public that they were still fighting on behalf of their country. That they were still patriotic Americans. But now they were soldiers for peace. Historian Richard Stacewicz.

**Stacewicz:** For them, going into the war, patriotism meant doing your duty, following the orders of your leaders, going to war to protect the United States.

**Smith:** Stacewicz says that as veterans worked to stop the war, their sense of patriotism deepened.

**Stacewicz:** Because they still held on to this ideal, that, you know, democracy matters, that as citizen soldiers in particular, they had a unique perspective to share with the American public, and that it was their duty to protect the ideals of the United States.

**Cortright:** We were trying to stand up against the political system, against what the President was telling us.

**Ellis:** Veteran and historian, David Cortright.

**Cortright:** To say, this war is wrong. This war is damaging our country. We love our country. And if we love our country and we stand with it, we want to stop this terrible war.

(APM theme music cue)

**Smith:** Soldiers for Peace was produced by Kate Ellis and me, Stephen Smith. It was edited by Chris Julin. Mixing by Craig Thorsen. Web editors Dave Mann and Andy Kruse. The APM Reports team includes Alex Baumhardt, Sabby Robinson, and Shelly Langford. Fact checking by Betsy Towner-Levine. The Executive Editor is Chris Worthington. Theme music by Gary Meister.

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