

## Operation RAW

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rans across the country became more actively opposed to the war in the r of 1970, VVAW in New York continued to look for ways to expand its

to the press and the growing community of antiwar veterans. As new rs on the east coast and elsewhere joined VVAW, the organization led its activities, becoming more "up in your face," as Joe Urgo had put v methods of protest had to be developed if the organization was to attention and shake the public out of its seeming complacency. After ent Nixon announced the invasion of Cambodia, he tried to gain the hand over his antiwar opponents by labeling them as "bums"—and by iing a quick withdrawal of American troops from Cambodia.<sup>82</sup> Some of rican public was placated for a short while and was willing to give the benefit of the doubt; the antiwar veterans, however, were not. n effort to "bring the war home" to the American public, VVAW—like veterans' groups across the country—borrowed from civilian antiwar zations the idea of guerrilla theater. Operation Rapid American With- l (RAW) was a staged attack on an American village by American sol- who acted as they had in Vietnam. This action took place during the Day weekend in September of 1970.

(JU): In this period of early 1970, after Kent State, the organization inly putting tables out and trying to reach out that way, trying to do g to get publicity. So all that summer of 1970, we were out there with sending out packets, meeting vets out on the streets, taking names, g the organization, and getting, I would say, a couple of hundred hrough this process. Essentially, what was needed was something to ut there on the map.

ation RAW [Rapid American Withdrawal] was an attempt by VVAW a protest that brought home the reality of what we were about and e did. It was something that would shape people and something that ng to build an organization.

: of the people of the VVAW leadership thought up this simulated ind-destroy mission through a section of New Jersey and into Penn- from Morristown to Valley Forge. We marched for three days 1 these towns and villages doing simulated search-and-destroy mis- t was a very powerful experience. About 100 or so vets joined it.

enberg (JG): Every day and every mile, we continued to grow. People ne flocking to it.

nson (BH): We did things where we acted in a way an American unit act when they came into a Vietnamese village.

Ramsdell (SR): We were taking prisoners along the way and wearing and had little plastic M-16s, which the feds inspected thoroughly in tes before we marched. A man actually came out of his farmhouse with

FROM CITIZEN-SOLDIERS TO WINTER SOLDIERS

a gun to head us off. We all hid in the bushes. Combat vets were lyi going like this with these little toy guns [waving them in the air ab heads], saying, "This ain't real."

JU: Some vets forgot that they were not in Vietnam and went ove in some of the ways they were trying to torture people.

How did you handle that kind of thing?

JU: Talking—"Oh, hold on, Bob; Bob, slow down." Struggle with tl let go a little on the choke chain he had or the way he was using th knife. Anybody who witnessed this grasped the reality of how bruta been to the Vietnamese people, and we tried to make that point to j

Guerrilla theater groups joined us many times. We handed out lea ing, "If you were Vietcong, we would do all these things to you."

What was the reaction to this march?

BH: People were amazed that there were Vietnam veterans against Lots of people who had participated had only come back from months before; others had been back for, say, a year or two. Those been back a year or two had let their hair grow out, and they looked pies. People were amazed to see that those that looked like hippies w ally veterans.

JU: The only opposition we got was from the American Legion, whi on the sidelines shouting that God was our savior and that we were vets.

JG: I still have nothing to do with the VFW or the American Legion not because of their national policies today, but because of where th back then and the treatment they treated us with. The American didn't want us because we were losers and drug addicts. VFW didn't because Vietnam wasn't a foreign war.

Whether you agree or disagree, my attitude even within the vet ment, among Vietnam vets, is: We share a common experience, a c bond. If we disagree, let's talk about, let's argue it out. I respect you you respect mine. If we're not going to respect each other's rights, battle lines are drawn.

JU: We received a lot of help along the way. People met us with food ferent things; and at night, farmers would let us use land that they using.