



Vietnam Vets Against War March in Valley Forge
Three soldiers dressed in uniforms cross field in front of bell tower.

Inquirer photo by ALEXANDER DEANS

Antiwar Vets Stage Rally At Valley Forge

By HOAG LEVINS
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Strung out along the sun-splashed ridge of Rte. 23 which runs through Valley Forge National Park, the 200 uniformed men with guns looked ominous.

Below, in the grassy bowl of the grand parade grounds, about 2000 spectators who had gathered Monday morning cheered the troops' arrival.

Minutes later the soldiers—carrying plastic guns—began to charge down to the parade ground while chanting "Peace Now."

90-MILE HIKE

For the khaki-dressed veterans, that last 100 yards marked the final step of a 90-mile march staged to dramatize their opposition to the war. The 200 marchers, all members of the Vietnam Veterans against the War, began their march in Morristown, N. J. on Friday and ended it Monday at the parade grounds where a peace rally was held.

The marchers—all armed service veterans of at least one tour of duty in Vietnam—wore the uniforms of all four services.

The colorful medals hanging from those uniforms told of war-related wounds, bravery, heroism and duty in the old traditional sense of the word.

At the same time, however, the many beards, shoulder-length hair, arm bands and slogan buttons told of a new style of duty.

"We are here because we above all others have earned the right to criticize the war on Southeast Asia," said John Kerry, whose campaign ribbon said he had been to Vietnam three times and also been wounded three times.

"We are here," he told the cheering crowd which included hundreds of other service veterans who did not participate in the three-day march, to say that it is not patriotism to ask Americans to die for a mistake, and that it is not patriotic to allow a President to talk about not being the first President to lose a war, and using us as pawns in that game."

CHANGING WRONGS

Early in the morning, marchers were greeted along the last mile by Jane Fonda, actress and outspoken war critic.

The perky actress at one point stopped her car and got out on Rte. 23 to embrace one of the weary marchers.

"This is not my country right or wrong," she later told the rally. "It's my country but what is wrong must be changed. I can't escape the belief," she said, "that My Lai was not an isolated incident but rather a way of life for many of our military."

She received a standing ovation from the vets, who sat crowded near the truck-bed used as a makeshift stage.

Halfway through the rally, a small band of American Legion members staged a brief counter-demonstration on the other side of the parade



MY PHILADELPHIA

War Brought Home To Middle America

By AL HAAS
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THEY WERE CALLED Vietnam Veterans Against the War and this was Monday, the fourth day of their march.

They had started Friday morning in Morristown, N. J., and had crossed a river and three counties. Their column of 115 vets, armed with toy rifles, was intended to dramatize a Vietnam-type search-and-destroy mission to the Middle America it passed through. It was to confront the people with a war-zone sight in the midst of their yard-work, literally to hit them with the war where they live.

And now, late Monday morning, they had arrived in Valley Forge, where an antiwar rally would culminate their long walk for peace.

Valley Forge is a beautiful, enchanted place, haunted by history. Even in the undeniable presence of the blue beauty of the moment, woods, meadows and monuments conspired to conjure up a heavy awareness of the desperate rag-tag thousands who wintered here almost two centuries ago—when the American Revolution was in doubt, when only sickness, suffering and starvation were for sure.

The Vietnam vets stopped their march along the road in front of the Washington Memorial Chapel and faced the opposite direction. In front of them, a huge meadow gradually fell away, past a monument "to the soldiers of Washington's Army who sleep here," toward the large grassy depression where the rallygoers awaited them.

Vets Wait to Make Dramatic Sweep

STRUNG OUT FOR SEVERAL hundred yards along the road, they waited quietly to make their dramatic "sweep" toward the rally crowd, which was perhaps only 15 to 20 percent of the 10,000 they had anticipated.

You couldn't help noticing the similarities between this group and those soldiers who had camped here so long ago.

These men were also young. The variations in their GI dress and the dissimilar plastic weapons they carried gave them the same motley, ragged appearance. They also were tired and hungry and the fate of their campaign was also in doubt.

The vets started down the gentle incline moments later chanting:

"What do we want? — Peace: When do we want it? Now."

As they closed on the cheering spectators below, they abbreviated this to "Peace now."

I was left behind the "sweep." But the people toward which it moved said the effect of the men coming at them deliberately and shoulder-to-shoulder was a telling one. A reporter I know, who is not maudlin, said the sight brought home what it must feel like to be a villager in the path of a sweep. He said it brought tears to his eyes.

Old Person Among Rallygoers

WHILE THE SIZE of the rally crowd was a disappointment to its architects, its composition was not. Amidst the predictable preponderance of bellbottoms and unfettered young feet and breasts, there was a significant number of the conventionally dressed, middle-aged and old.

Among the old was 73-year-old William C. Briggs, a member of Veterans for Peace in Vietnam. Briggs had fought with the 26th Infantry Division in the Argonne Forest during World War I. Too old to carry a rifle during World War II, he had served as a civilian aircraft observer and auxiliary pilotman.

"I tried to serve my country then and I'm trying to serve it now," he explained.

He had come all the way from Pittsburgh in what he believed was his country's best interest and as we walked across the field toward the crowd, his breath came hard.

But he didn't stop to rest. In his resolve, there was the suggestion that this American revolution, which also looks to mean...