

THE BOSTON MANIFESTO:

*A Statement by a Group of
Vietnam Veterans
Explaining their Outrage
Over the Nomination of
Senator John F. Kerry
to be President of the United States*

Prepared by
VIETNAM VETERANS TO CORRECT THE MYTHS
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The Boston Manifesto: An Executive Summary

From July 26-29, 2004 a diverse group of Vietnam veterans, academics and experts met in Boston to discuss in depth the prevailing myths of that widely misunderstood and still misinterpreted conflict.¹ It quickly became evident that every man in the room—including Medal of Honor recipients, former prisoners of war, Special Forces and SOG warriors, and garden variety GIs who make no claim to being “heroes”—felt a strong sense of anger over the nomination of Senator John F. Kerry to be President of the United States. We decided that it was important to document some of the reasons for our anger, and the attached document has been prepared for that purpose.

This was not designed to be an “October surprise”—we wanted to do a serious job (our report is documented with nearly 500 footnotes), most of us have “day jobs,” and it has taken us nearly four months to put our views on paper. This short summary will provide a brief overview of some of our concerns. Readers wishing to examine the factual basis and authority for our conclusion are urged to read the full report—which should be considered entirely on its own intrinsic merits.

Most of us learned about the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth campaign via media reports. We listened as they were attacked for accepting money from individuals who also contributed to President Bush and for allegedly seeking personal fame and fortune. We have not solicited or raised a nickel for this project, and none of us seeks “fame or fortune” for our efforts. We believe the report stands strongly on its own, but of course if Senator Kerry wishes to confront the witnesses against him in the public forum we will be more than happy to accommodate him. Our intention is to announce the release of the document, make it available to all on the Internet, and then rely upon the grass-roots efforts of others to bring it to the attention of the public in the next two weeks. We have no “public relations” skills or financial resources, and our

¹ For the proceedings of this conference, go to <http://www.Viet-Myths.net>.

contribution will be complete when the document is placed on the Web unless others take on the task of publicizing it.

One of the great ironies of the Vietnam War is that those of us who actually served there are more than twice as likely as non-veterans to view the war in favorable terms. Professional public opinion polls established long ago that three out of every four Vietnam veterans enjoyed their service and more than 90 percent are glad they served. We are more than twice as likely as the average American to take pride in what America tried to do in the war, and more than two-thirds of us believe we were “right to get involved” and would have gone back again even if we knew the final outcome. There are many “myths” about that war, including that we were defeated militarily on the battlefield. As the Manifesto documents, by the end of 1972 we had the war essentially won on the battlefield and in the air over North Vietnam—and this point was recognized as well by our enemies. Their only hope was that by working with the American “peace” movement they could persuade Congress to abandon a commitment championed by President John F. Kennedy and approved by a 99.5 percent majority of Congress and the overwhelming majority of the American people. John F. Kerry was instrumental in that hope.

None of us who gathered in Boston served with John Kerry in Vietnam or even knew he existed until he surfaced in 1971 as a leader of the anti-Vietnam War movement. We therefore defer to the men who did know him and served with him in the Swift Boats on the questions that have been raised about his conduct in country. Having followed that debate, however, it seems to us that the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth have established certain key facts *beyond reasonable doubt*: John Kerry has told numerous material falsehoods both during his short stay in Vietnam and since then in discussing his conduct there. Specifically:

- * He has repeatedly lied about having been inside Cambodia engaging in combat with Cambodian and South Vietnamese forces on Christmas Day of 1968. On this issue, there is complete unanimity among the numerous knowledgeable parties, including every Swift Boat officer who served with

John Kerry and their subordinates and superiors in the chain of command who have addressed the issue. Not a *single* member of Lieutenant Kerry's own crew supports his claim, and Kerry's own personal records document that the story is false. And this was not just an embellished "war yarn" Kerry might have told to impress people in bars or at cocktail parties—he used this lie to try to persuade his fellow senators to undermine President Reagan's efforts to resist Communist aggression in Central America in 1985.

- * At least two of John Kerry's Purple Heart awards were obtained on the basis of false reports prepared by Kerry himself. With respect to the incident on December 2, 1968, the senior officer in the boat (who went on to a distinguished career as an admiral in Navy JAG), the Navy physician who treated his superficial "wound," and Kerry's commanding officer at the time confirm that there was no exchange of fire with the Viet Cong that night and Kerry negligently wounded himself while in the process endangering everyone on the boat. Kerry's own records confirm that after this incident he wrote that he had not yet been shot at.
- * Similarly, both John Kerry and Lieutenant James Rassmann (an active Kerry campaigner) admit that Kerry negligently injured himself on March 13, 1969, by failing to seek proper cover after throwing a hand grenade into a supply of Viet Cong rice while on land. Since no enemy contact took place during that incident, the superficial wound to his buttocks did not qualify for a Purple Heart. But several hours later, when a Viet Cong mine detonated under another Swift Boat across the river from Kerry's, Kerry falsely prepared a report claiming that the piece of shrapnel that had struck his buttocks hours earlier had instead been caused by the exploding mine. By pretending that the injury resulted from enemy action, Kerry obtained a third Purple Heart which—despite the lie he later told on the Dick Cavett Show—he immediately used to obtain reassignment back to American out of harm's way.

John Kerry's lies don't stop with falsifying official records to obtain unearned decorations. In other versions of the events of March 13, he has claimed that the mine exploded under his own boat, which is easily proven false by the absence of any damage to his boat and by the testimony of every other witness. Most of the Swift Boat officers who were present at the time also allege that Kerry obtained his Bronze Star that day on the basis of a false report, and serious doubts have also been raised about the incident in which he received his Silver Star. He also clearly lied when he asserted that he had thrown away his Vietnam medals. Some of these lies involve criminal behavior. American presidents have been driven from office or impeached for less.

But in our view, these are relatively trivial matters when compared to Kerry's behavior after he returned to America. At that time, he regularly and voluntarily associated himself with some of the most radical anti-America forces in the country, including the so-called "Vietnam Veterans Against the War" (VVAW) and the pro-Cuban Institute for Policy Studies. Like many of its members, the titular leader of the VVAW was an imposter. "Captain" Al Hubbard falsely claimed to have been seriously wounded during his second tour as an Air Force pilot in Vietnam. In reality, Hubbard was a militant Black Panther who had served as an Air Force sergeant and had never set foot anywhere in Indochina until sent to Hanoi to represent the VVAW in 1971 on a trip financed by the Communist Party, USA. Hubbard sat beside John Kerry during a Meet the Press interview in April 1971, and like Kerry and Jane Fonda (a principal financial backer of the VVAW) addressed various VVAW rallies. When some non-Communists within the VVAW complained about the radical Communist influence in the organization, Kerry rejected their efforts as a threat to the unity of the "peace" movement.

Presidential candidate Kerry now asserts that he never criticized U.S. *troops* during his anti-war years, only our government's policy. That is another lie. He told the Senators that between sixty and eighty percent of American forces in Vietnam were "stoned" twenty-four hours a day, and that we routinely engaged in rape, murder, and numerous other war crimes. When his VVAW com-

rades conducted a march through New Jersey to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, on September 7, 1970, to listen to speeches by John Kerry, Jane Fonda, and other anti-war leaders, they distributed leaflets telling the people they encountered that U.S. infantry soldiers in Vietnam were “butchers” who routinely raped and murdered innocent civilians.

In January and February 1971, John Kerry took part in a Jane Fonda-funded “Winter Soldiers Investigation” in Detroit where alleged Vietnam veterans (many of them later shown to have been imposters) testified to both committing heinous war crimes and witnessing similar actions by other American soldiers. Kerry now claims that he didn’t realize that some of the stories were blatant lies. But one of the witnesses, Steven Pitkin, has recently come forward and signed a sworn statement that he personally told Kerry he had no knowledge of any war crimes in Vietnam and the Kerry and others pressured him to make up stories—suggesting that if he did not testify he might have to find his own way back to Baltimore. This shows that John Kerry was not simply “duped” by the Communists with whom he willingly associated, but that he was actively involved in perpetrating a fraud on the American people and the U.S. Congress.

Some of Kerry’s radical VVAW comrades later joined with cashiered CIA operative Philip Agee—who after the fall of the Soviet empire was identified as a KGB and Cuban DGI intelligence agent—in starting the publication *CounterSpy* for the purpose of exposing the identities of American and allied intelligence officers. Agee’s efforts led directly to the murders of several exposed intelligence officers. After a British intelligence officer identified by Agee was murdered, Kerry’s friends at the Institute for Policy Studies played a key role in helping Agee find a new base of operations in the Netherlands. When Agee’s efforts resulted in the murder of Richard Welch, the CIA station chief in Athens, Congress passed a statute making it a felony to reveal the identity of a covert U.S. intelligence officer. John Kerry’s well-documented hostility to the CIA dates back to his war protester days and has been reflected by his voting record on Intelligence Community funding as a Senator.

Representing the VVAW and pretending to speak for *all* Vietnam war veterans, on April 22, 1971, John Kerry told numerous lies to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that were broadcast across the nation and helped persuade Congress to pass a law two years later that made it *unlawful* for the United States to continue carrying out the solemn pledge made by President John F. Kennedy in his 1961 inaugural address. By following John Kerry's advice and legislating a surrender in Indochina, Congress paved the way for the Communists to conquer their neighbors behind columns of Soviet-made tanks and then to slaughter an estimated three million human beings—more people than were killed in combat during the previous fourteen years. And tens of millions of other people who had relied upon John Kennedy's pledge of support were consigned to a Communist gulag that continues to be ranked among the “worst of the worst” human rights violators. Recent efforts by Congress to tie American assistance to Vietnam to improvements in their human rights policies have been blocked by Senator Kerry.

John Kerry's 1971 Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony shocks the conscience of us all. He didn't just argue that the war was a mistake, he portrayed the United States as the villain and repeatedly parroted Hanoi's official Communist Party line while demanding that America abandon its commitment, pay “reparations” to the Communists, and stop complaining about the torture of our POWs and demanding their return as a part of any settlement. After meeting secretly with North Vietnamese and Viet Cong officials in Paris, Kerry returned to the United States and became personally involved in the exploitation of POW wives and families by Hanoi. The *New York Times* reported on July 23, 1971, that at one press conference at which John Kerry was presenting the wives of two POWs who had agreed to denounce the war (in return for promises of more mail and better treatment for their husbands in Hanoi), other POW wives showed up and shouted to Kerry “What office are you going to run for next?” The *Times* reported: “One of the women accused Mr. Kerry of ‘constantly using our suffering and grief’ for his political ambitions.”

Appearing on Meet the Press on May 6, 2001, Senator John Kerry asserted: “I think our soldiers [in Vietnam] served as nobly, on the

whole, as in any war.” But three decades earlier, he had accused American troops of routinely committing war crimes, murdering POWs, and behaving in a fashion “reminiscent of Genghis Khan.” Such lies misled Congress and the American public and betrayed the sacrifice of every man, living or dead, who served honorably in an effort to prevent the Communists from conquering South Vietnam.

After returning from his captivity as a POW in Hanoi, John McCain said he thanked God President of the United States had demanded that Hanoi comply with its obligations under the 1949 Geneva Conventions and end the torture of American POWs, “because if it hadn’t been for that a lot of us would never have returned.” But less than two years earlier, John Kerry had falsely alleged America was the greatest violator of the Geneva Convention in history and denounced to the Senate “the hypocrisy in our taking umbrage in the Geneva Conventions.” In reality, the International Committee of the Red Cross had praised the United States for having gone “far beyond the requirements of the Geneva Convention” by voluntarily extending the Geneva Convention to cover Viet Cong detainees (other than those apprehended in connection with acts of “terrorism”). The ICRC called the American regulation one of the important documents “in the history of the humanitarian law.”

In his Senate testimony John Kerry implied that democracy was not really a better system of government than Communism, and asserted that what really mattered was whether a government could meet the needs of its people. He focused his strongest criticism upon America’s policy of resisting international Communism, telling the Senators: ““There is no threat. The Communists are not about to take over our McDonald hamburger stands.” Kerry accused America of being “paranoid about the Russians,” and declared “we cannot fight communist all over the world, and I think we should have learned that by now.” We thank God that President Reagan didn’t believe that when he challenged Soviet President Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall. Many of us who stayed in Vietnam for more than a few months saw first-hand the realities of Communism, which the *Black Book of Communism*, published by

Harvard University Press in 1999, estimates claimed between eighty and one hundred million lives during the twentieth century. But had John Kerry's advice been followed, America might well have *lost* the Cold War.

Then there are the humanitarian consequences of his actions. In demanding that the United States immediately abandon its commitment to Indochina, John Kerry told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 22, 1971, that there would of course be "recriminations," and perhaps "several million" lives would ultimately "be on our conscience." But in Kerry's view, "the United States is not really in a position to consider the happiness of those people" who made the mistake of relying upon America's promise to help defend them. Approximately three million people were slaughtered by the new Communist regimes after Congress followed Kerry's advice, and tens of millions more were consigned to a Communist tyranny that continues to rank among the "worst of the worst" in terms of respect for human rights. Efforts by Congress to attach conditions to U.S. trade with Communist Vietnam in recent years have been blocked by Senator John Kerry.

Particularly horrible was the genocide carried out by the Communist Khmer Rouge in tiny Cambodia, where the *Black Book of Communism* and many other sources estimate that two million people were killed. No one fought harder to cover up this humanitarian catastrophe than D. Gareth Porter, a "scholar" with the pro-Cuban Institute for Policy Studies, who asserted that reports of widespread slaughter in Cambodia was the work of the evil CIA. Shortly after becoming a Senator, John Kerry hired Gareth Porter to be his legislative assistant.

One of the many myths about the Vietnam War spread by John Kerry and his peace movement comrades was that Ho Chi Minh was the "George Washington" of Vietnam. In reality, as the *Pentagon Papers* correctly noted and numerous North Vietnamese official biographies have confirmed, Ho was an old-line Stalinist who had co-founded the French Communist party in 1920 and traveled around the world on a Soviet passport working for the Communist International (Comintern) for thirty years before returning to Viet-

nam in 1941. Indeed, party histories acknowledge that when Ho Chi Minh showed up in Hong Kong for the founding meeting of the Indochina Communist Party, he was present not as a Vietnamese revolutionary but rather as the “official representative” of the Comintern.

Other myths that fueled the anti-war movement but are demonstrably false (and in many instances confirmed as false either by the *Pentagon Papers* or by admissions against interests out of Hanoi since the end of the war) were that the United States first became involved in Indochina to restore French colonialism, that we violated the 1954 Geneva Agreements and blocked free elections in 1956, that the “National Liberation Front” was independent of Hanoi’s control, and that the war was unconstitutional and illegal under international law. We address all of these issues in the Manifesto.

In 1970 John Kerry said that he would not support sending U.S. troops outside the territorial limits of the United States without the approval of the United Nations. In those days, the Soviet Union had a veto on the Security Council—the primary organ of the UN for keeping the peace—so Kerry was in reality arguing that America should *never* resist international Communist aggression. But when the Cold War ended and the United Nations unanimously agreed to defend tiny Kuwait from the brutal aggression of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, John Kerry voted to undermine the United Nations and to rely on economic sanctions to stop the ongoing brutal rape of Kuwait.

One of the largely overlooked contributing factors to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was the appearance of American weakness resulting from decades of congressional usurpation of presidential power in the aftermath of Vietnam. Although Congress had formally authorized the President to use military force in Indochina in August 1964 with only two dissenting votes (by a 99.5 percent majority), when the war became unpopular it usurped presidential authority as Commander in Chief by enacting the War Powers Resolution, which, among other things, pretends to deny the President the power to defend American civilians abroad from

terrorist attacks until Congress first meets and passes a new law authorizing the response. Even Senator George Mitchell recognized in the end that the War Powers Resolution threatened “the delicate balance of power established by the Constitution” and “potentially undermines America’s ability to effectively defend our national security.” This statute was at the heart of the 1983 confrontation over the deployment of U.S. peacekeeping forces to Beirut, Lebanon, where frequent warnings of avoiding “another Vietnam” led all but two Senate Democrats to vote to undermine President Reagan’s policies. Even when the deployment was narrowly approved, senators asserted that if there were any further casualties in Beirut they could “reconsider” their vote at any time, and this persuaded Islamic terrorists in Lebanon to inform their terrorists that if they could “kill 15 marines the rest will leave.” That precipitated the truck bomb on the morning of October 23, 1983, that claimed 241 American lives and helped persuade Osama bin Laden that America had no stomach to resist his demands. Myths about the Vietnam War—many of them spread personally by Senator John Kerry—continue to undermine our nation and encourage our enemies.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution makes it unlawful for a citizen who has given “aid and comfort to the enemy” to hold either the office of Senator or President of the United States. We believe that a strong case can be made that John Kerry crossed that line on more than one occasion. We don’t know for certain what was discussed during his secret meetings with our nation’s enemies in Paris and Managua, but if he either encouraged them in their war effort or collaborated in any way with them in connection with his leadership role in the “peace” movement, he probably committed constitutional treason.

At minimum, it seems clear that he has committed no less than three serious felonies by meeting and negotiating with our nation’s enemies. In 1799, Congress enacted the “Logan Act” to punish “an interference of individual citizens in the negotiations of our Executive with foreign Governments.” Quaker pacifist Dr. George Logan had traveled to Paris to assure the French government that the American people wanted peace. House Republican leader Albert

Gallatin (a fellow Pennsylvanian and friend of Dr. Logan) acknowledged in the debate that to make such a trip during time of war would be “high treason,” and in the setting of difficulties that currently characterized what has been termed the “quasi-war” with France would be a “high crime.” Gallatin added that “it would be extremely improper for a member of this House [Congress] to enter into any correspondence with the French Republic, because this country is at present in a peculiar situation; for though, as we are not at war with France, an offence of this kind would not be high treason, yet it would be as criminal an act, as if we were at war.”

In his 1971 testimony before Congress, John Kerry acknowledged that his visits to Paris to meet with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese leaders may have violated the Logan Act. But he didn’t care, because others had done it too. Shortly after being elected to the Senate, he flew down to Nicaragua and actually sought to “negotiate” an agreement with that country’s Communist president in an effort to undermine President Reagan’s efforts to deter Nicaraguan aggression against its neighbors. America’s relationship with Nicaragua at the time was at least as strained as it has been with France at the end of the eighteenth century, and we share Representative Gallatin’s view that Senator Kerry’s visit was “extremely improper.” He not only usurped presidential power, but he did so as a member of another branch of government—creating a serious separation-of-powers crisis and violating his constitutional oath of office. At least by Gallatin’s standard, Kerry’s visits to Paris to meet with the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese were quite possibly “high treason.”

The Manifesto documents the great importance that our enemies in Vietnam placed on their ability to exploit the American “peace” movement. North Vietnamese Army Colonel Bui Tin, who commanded the tank unit that crashed through the gates of the Saigon presidential palace and accepted South Vietnam’s surrender on April 30, 1975, after the war was asked how important the American anti-war movement was to Hanoi’s victory. He replied: “It was *essential* to our strategy. . . . Every day our leadership would listen to world news over the radio at 9 a.m. to follow the growth of the American antiwar movement.” Viet Cong leader Truong Nhu Tang

wrote after the war that none of them “had any illusions about our ability to gain a military decision against the immensely powerful American war machine,” and that their hope from the start had been that America would be forced to give up under the pressures of the peace movement. He readily admitted the United States and its South Vietnamese ally were winning great victories on the battlefield, but worked hard to strengthen the American peace movement in the hope of a political victory. To suggest that John Kerry’s efforts—especially his personal visits to Paris to actually meet with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese leaders—did not give “aid and comfort” to America’s enemies is to ignore the entire nature of the conflict.

We believe it is imperative that the American people finally understand what really happened in Vietnam and start drawing the *real* lessons from that war. Those lessons have nothing to do with not sending troops into harm’s way without the support of Congress and the public, as the initial deployments in Vietnam had overwhelming support from both. In the month during which Congress authorized President Johnson to use force in Indochina by a 99.5 percent majority, public approval of LBJ’s conduct as President shot up 58 percent. And for several years, criticism of the war tended to come more from “hawks” who recognized that Robert McNamara was fighting a “no win” strategy and outweighed in numbers the the “doves” who wanted an immediate withdrawal. Even by 1968, a plurality of the McCarthy supporters in the New Hampshire Democratic primary went on to vote for super-hawks George Wallace and General Curtis LeMay in the November election. But as the war continued, more and more lies were spread by the “peace” movement and more and more Americans were deceived into believing the war was “unwinnable” in any event and the United States might well have been on the wrong side. And no single person did more to promote these lies than Vietnam “war hero” John F. Kerry.

We were not surprised when a recent polls suggested that by a margin of *three- or four-to-one* the men and women who make up today’s professional military prefer George W. Bush as their Commander in Chief over combat veteran John Kerry, and two-

thirds of those responding attribute their hostility to Kerry to his betrayal of an earlier generation of fighting men after returning from Vietnam. His candidacy and nomination have rekindled a deep sense of anger and betrayal in each of us, and his election would be both a slap in the face to men and women who in the past have served honorably and an incentive to other opportunists that betraying one's country can be a viable avenue to the highest honor this nation can bestow upon a fellow citizen. But far more importantly, we fear that a Kerry election would further divide and weaken this country at a time when American and the world need to stand firm against the forces of international terror.

Unlike some in past elections who have threatened to renounce their citizenship and move to other countries if the majority rejected their view in a presidential election, our love for America will not diminish and we are prepared to accept the will of the majority. But the polls consistently show that the men and women who currently serve this country in uniform have an overwhelming preference for President Bush as their Commander in Chief than for John Kerry. Most of them are aware of Kerry's record as an anti-war protester, they believe he is dishonest, and fully half of those who know his record "strongly disapprove" of him.

By falsely accusing President Bush of wanting to reinstate the draft, Kerry has persuaded most voters in the 18-29 age group that Bush prefers a draft. We don't think it likely that America will be unable to meet its military commitments in the foreseeable future with volunteers, but if a large number of current volunteers were to react to a Kerry victory next month by seeking other employment that situation might change. Obviously, given the polls, John Kerry would have more difficulty recruiting military personnel to voluntarily accept him as their Commander in Chief.