



STONEY ROAD FILMS

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Production/Press Pack

WINTER SOLDIER

Year of Production: 1972.

Length: 95 minutes.

Original Format: 16mm Black & White and Color. Re-released in DigiBeta.

Location: Shot on location in Detroit, Michigan.

Produced and directed by: Winterfilm Collective in association with Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Distributor:	Stoney Road Films	Contact: Simon Hudson
	13 Upper Baggott Street	Gareth Lennon
	Dublin 4	
	Eire	

UK Theatrical Release: May 8th 2008
ICA, The Mall, London.

Winterfilm Collective

Frederick Aronow, Nancy Baker, Joe Bangert, Rhett Barron, Robert Fiore, David Gillis, David Grubin, Jeff Holstein, Barbara Jarvis, Al Kaupas, Barbara Kopple, Mark Lenix, Michael Lesser, Nancy Miller Saunders, Lee Osborne, Lucy Massie Phenix, Roger Phenix, Benay Rubenstein, Michael Weil.

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Winter Soldiers in the Film

(in order of appearance)

Rusty Sachs, *1st Marine Air Wing*
Joseph Bangert, *1st Marine Air Wing*
Scott Shimabukuro, *3rd Marine Division*
Kenneth Campbell, *1st Marine Division*
Scott Camil, *1st Marine Division*
John Kerry, *Costal Divisions 11 & 13, USN*
Steve Pitkin, *9th Infantry Division*
Johnathan Birch, *3rd Marine Division*
Charles Stevens *101st Airborne Division*
Fred Nienke, *1st Marine Division*
David Bishop, *1st Marine Division*
Nathan Hale, *Americal Division*
Michael Hunter, *1st Infantry Division*
Murphy Lloyd, *173rd Airborne Brigade*
Carl Rippberger, *9th Infantry Division*
Evan Haney, *US Naval Support Activity*
Robert Clark, *3rd Marine Division*
Gordon Stewart, *3rd Marine Division*
Curtis Windgrotsky, *Americal Division*
Gary Keyes, *Americal Division*
Allan Akers, *3rd Marine Division*
William Hatton, *3rd Marine Division*
Joseph Galbally, *Americal Division*
Edmund Murphy, *Americal Division*
James Duffy, *1st Air Cavalry Division*
Scott Moore, *9th Infantry Division*
Mark Lenix, *9th Infantry Division*
Thomas Heidtman, *1st Marine Division*
Dennis Caldwell, *1st Aviation Brigade*
James Henry, *Marine Sergeant*

Background on the film *Winter Soldier*

Winter Soldier is a documentary chronicle of the extraordinary Winter Soldier Investigation conducted by Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) in Detroit during the winter of 1971. Veterans from all branches of the US military came from across the country to speak out about the atrocities they had committed and witnessed while stationed in Vietnam. Recognizing the urgency and historical importance of the investigation, a remarkable group of independent filmmakers came together to document the veterans' testimonies. Calling themselves

Winterfilm, their collective included Fred Aronow, Nancy Baker, Rhett Barron, Robert Fiore, David Gillis, David Grubin, Barbara Jarvis, Barbara Kopple, Michael Lesser, Lee Osborne, Lucy Massie Phenix, Roger Phenix, Benay Rubenstein and Michael Weil. (Members of this group of filmmakers have gone on individually to make some of the most important documentaries of our time, winning several Academy Awards in the process.) Over the course of four days and nights, using donated equipment and film stock, the

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Winterfilm members shot footage of more than 125 veterans (including a very young John Kerry). These men, who represented every major combat unit that saw action in Vietnam, gave eyewitness testimony to war crimes and atrocities they either participated in or witnessed. Members of the collective next spent eight months editing the raw footage from the hearings together with film clips and snapshots from Vietnam into the 95-minute feature documentary *Winter Soldier*. Because the proceedings went virtually unreported by the media, *Winter Soldier* is the only audiovisual record of this historic turning point in American history. The film was shown at the Cannes and Berlin Film Festivals and went on to be lauded throughout Europe. In the US, it opened briefly at the Cinema 2 in Manhattan. At the time of *Winter Soldier*'s release, underground film critic Amos Vogel wrote:

This is a film that must be shown in prime time evening on national television, and never will be.

After all three broadcast networks and PBS declined to show it, the documentary played only on New York's local public television station, WNET. Since then, only rare screenings by the filmmakers have kept the legacy alive. Now, thirty-five years after the hearings in Detroit, the veterans' courage in testifying and their desire to prevent further atrocities and regain their own humanity, remain deeply moving and provide a dramatic intensity that makes *Winter Soldier* an unforgettable experience. Their words eerily remind us of recent tortures and murders of prisoners held in detention by the American military. The terrible abuses of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, in Afghanistan and at Guantanamo have sometimes been reported as unprecedented. The voices of the veterans in *Winter Soldier* attest that they were not.

The Winter Soldier Conference

"Everyone is talking about the war that you know from the inside. If you want to have anything to say about it, come to Detroit and tell it like you saw it."

The Winter Soldier invitation found in the FBI file on the Winter Soldier Investigation, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act

In late January 1971, more than 125 Vietnam veterans, representing almost every major unit to see action in Vietnam, gathered in a second floor ballroom at a Howard Johnson's motor inn in Detroit. They met to discuss and testify to war atrocities they had committed and witnessed in Vietnam. The conference was named the "Winter Soldier Investigation" and was organized by Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW) and Citizens Commission of Inquiry (CCI) in the hopes of revealing the true nature of American military policy in Vietnam and the extent to which war crimes were common procedure. The organizers hoped to "[tell] the American people of the war crimes that are being committed every day in their name and as the result of national policy." Celebrity anti-war 5 activists including Jane Fonda, Donald Sutherland, Graham Nash, and Phil Ochs helped raise funds for the meeting. The three-day Winter Soldier Investigation was the first time a group of Vietnam veterans publicly testified about their experiences. The conference revealed the violent and racist nature of American military policy in Vietnam. Veterans

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explained that incidents akin to the massacre at My Lai were not only commonplace, but were, as John Kerry described it, “committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command.” The investigation took place over three consecutive days, January 31 – February 2, 1971. People from all over the area attended the hearings, as well as newspaper and magazine reporters and camera crews from many major television stations. Unfortunately, few journalists stayed to cover the event and those who did ultimately did not report on it. The veterans’ testimonies were candid, detailed and devastating. But the media deemed that their words were too controversial for the eyes and ears of the American public. The conference organizers chose the name *Winter Soldier* from Thomas Paine’s first Crisis paper, in which he wrote: *These are the times that try men’s souls. The summertime soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.* The Vietnam veterans saw themselves as soldiers battling the wrongs of the war and speaking out against the brutal training that made them capable of unthinkable violence. Among those involved in the organization of the conference was future senator John Kerry, who later stated in his address to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: “We who have come here to Washington have come here because we feel we have to be winter soldiers now. We could come back to this country; we could be quiet; we could hold our silence; we could not tell what went on in Vietnam, but we feel because of what threatens this country, the fact that the crimes threaten it, not reds, and not redcoats but the crimes which we are committing that threaten it, that we have to speak out.” While some young men choked back tears of humiliation and others spoke with numb indifference, all revealed their shocking participation in acts of violence. They testified to the destruction of entire villages, the torture, rape, electrocution and murder of civilians and prisoners as well as the tossing of blindfolded POWs from helicopters, among other violations of international law. The atrocities seemed to the veterans to be an epidemic problem — one that stemmed from the very essence of American military training and procedure. In his book *Home to War*, a chronicle of the history of the Vietnam veterans’ movement, author Gerald Nicosia wrote: What the veterans insisted over and over was that America knew better than to do the things it was doing in Vietnam...the veterans were asking America to listen to its own much-touted morality, and to begin to practice what it had spent two centuries preaching. At the same time, though, the veterans were careful to point out that the war crimes the United States was committing in Vietnam did not stem from the misconduct of individual soldiers – which the government had tried to establish by scapegoating Calley and a handful of his fellow officers [on trial for the My Lai 6 massacre] – but resulted rather ‘from conscious military policies...designed by the military brass, National Security Council, and major universities and corporate institutions, and passed down through the chain of command for conversion into Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in the field.’

The hearings were monumental in its revelations, exposing for the first time that the US with Operation Dewey Canyon I had illegally and secretly invaded neutral Laos. It was at this conference also that the health dangers of Agent Orange were first discussed. Although media coverage of the event was

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disappointingly limited and it did not have the immediate impact its coordinators had hoped for, the words of the soldiers who testified did not entirely go unheard. A group of independent documentary filmmakers in New York heard about the event and traveled to Detroit to spend three days documenting what would become for them a lifelong cause.

How the Film Came About Intro by the Winterfilm Collective.

In late 1970 the Vietnam Veterans Against the War sent out a call to vets all over the country to participate in the Winter Soldier Investigation. They hoped that they could attract media attention and could speak directly to the American public and, in this way, could help bring about an end to the war. But the national news media for the most part did not cover or mention the Winter Soldier Investigation, though it was an historic event. When that call went out from the veterans, a few people in the documentary film community of New York City recognized the importance of what was about to happen. They contacted friends, then friends of friends, asking who was available to go to Detroit for a long weekend to record the testimony as an independent effort.

The search began for donations of equipment and film stock. Many of the people in the group didn't know each other when they started out, but life-long friendships were forged that week-end. The shooting took place over the course of 4 days and involved about 17 people. The editing took about eight months with usually 5 or 6 people working at a time, although not always the same people because of demands of family and work. A few stuck it out for the entire effort. Periodic screening allowed members of the group to contribute on a regular basis. The process was stressful because of the intensity and complexity of the material and the importance of finishing the film and getting it right, and the demands of trying to work as a collective. The filmmakers came to understand that if there were to be in-depth coverage of this historic event that the veterans had created in order to be heard, it would come about in the many hours of film the group shot. It was a constant struggle to find money to continue editing and respond to the pressure from VVAW for something they could use for their own organizing and fund raising. A 17-minute version that was quickly put together got a great deal of use across the country and helped to raise money for continuing the project. There were a lot of people, including many veterans, who gave the filmmakers input and helped in various ways during the year of editing, which took place in NYC and in rural New Jersey. The film *Winter Soldier* was shown and praised in Europe, at festivals, in theaters and on television. But it was largely overlooked in the U.S. because it was a first-hand account of the war in Vietnam, which the U.S. was still waging when the film was made.

Jane Fonda on *Winter Soldier* The Brian Lehrer Show, WNYC, Tuesday, April 12, 2005

In 1971 an earlier caller had mentioned that I had spoken some place where she was and that was a trip that I was taking to raise money for the Winter

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Soldier investigation. Over one hundred military personnel from every branch of the service, American soldiers, sailors, marines, officers, pilots, they came and testified in Detroit as to atrocities that they had committed or had seen committed in the presence of officers while in Vietnam. It took such unbelievable courage for them to do that. They were disparaged by the Nixon administration, but all of them were telling the truth and they shook while they spoke and I realized while I sat there that these men, by virtue of their collective truth telling, were being redeemed. They had seen the heart of darkness and because they were willing to own their experience and speak to the American people, they were healing. They were asking American people, 'Come with us, understand what this has been. Understand the nature of this war that your young men are being put into by its nature atrocity producing. This is how we will be redeemed as a nation' and we did not listen. A film was made of it called *Winter Soldier*. Barbara Kopple, the award winning documentarian was one of the young filmmakers that did it. Graham Nash was one of the people who helped me fund it and raise money for it and it's out there and it is grainy black and white reality and it is very important.

John Kerry on the Winter Soldier Investigation Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee April 22, 1971

I am not here as John Kerry. I am here as one member of the group of 1,000 which is a small representation of a very much larger group of veterans in this country, and were it possible for all of them to sit at this table they would be here and have the same kind of testimony ... I would like to talk, representing all those veterans, and say that several months ago in Detroit, we had an investigation at which over 150 honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia, not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command ... They told the stories at times they had personally raped, cut off ears, cut off heads, taped wires from portable telephones to human genitals and turned up the power, cut off limbs, blown up bodies, randomly shot at civilians, razed villages in fashion reminiscent of Genghis Khan, shot cattle and dogs for fun, poisoned food stocks, and generally ravaged the countryside of South Vietnam in addition to the normal ravage of war, and the normal and very particular ravaging which is done by the applied bombing power of this country ...

We who have come here to Washington have come here because we feel we have to be winter soldiers now. We could come back to this country; we could be quiet; we could hold our silence; we could not tell what went on in Vietnam, but we feel because of what threatens this country, the fact that the crimes threaten it, not reds, and not redcoats but the crimes which we are committing that threaten it, that we have to speak out.

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Winterfilm: The Soldiers

Rusty Sachs

Rusty Sachs served in Vietnam as a USMC Aviator from August of 1966 to September of 1967. By the time he had finished, receiving an Honorable Discharge as Captain, he had participated in over 725 combat missions and 221 carrier landings. Following his period of service in Vietnam, Sachs studied at Harvard College and Vermont Law School, receiving a Bachelor of Arts (in 1972) and a Juris Doctor (in '78), respectively. He also went on to study at the Universite de Grenoble, where he received a Diplome de Hautes Etudes. Upon completing his studies, Sachs moved to Vermont, where he worked as an attorney in private practice for over twenty years and performed *pro bono* work on behalf of Vietnam veterans and battered women. During this time, he also taught various ground school aviation courses and acted as a freelance instructor, lecturing frequently on aviation topics at FAA safety seminars, EAA chapter meetings, and flight schools throughout the northeast US. He also, periodically, served as a guest instructor of combat leadership at US Marine Corps installations. Aviation again took the forefront for Sachs when, starting in 1997, he became the Director of Training and Chief Pilot at Signal Aviation Services, Inc., in New Hampshire. In 1999 he was named a FAA Designated Pilot Examiner. He was also appointed in the first group of Master Instructors under the National Association of Flight Instructors, and is one of three individuals to have received this designation five times. Sachs is currently the Executive Director of the National Association of Flight Instructors.

Scott Camil

Scott Camil enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1965 and served twenty months of voluntary service in Vietnam. He was discharged in June of 1969, having received thirteen medals and attained the rank of Sargent. After testifying at the Winter Soldier Investigation, he became a founding member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and helped organize the Dewey Canyon III March on Washington, which culminated in the soldiers' throwing away of their medals. Between 1972 and 1975, Camil faced numerous federal and state charges, including the Gainesville 8 case and one where federal agents shot him in the back during a drug bust. He was not only acquitted of all charges, but the jury recommended that the agents be charged with attempted murder. In 1987 Scott Camil went on a fact-finding trip to Central America and founded the Gainesville chapter of Veterans for Peace. In 1989 and 1990, he served as an official observer to elections in Nicaragua, and, following, went on another fact-finding trip to the Middle East, visiting Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Occupied territories and Jordan. In 1994 Camil returned to Vietnam as a US representative for the Vietnam Friendship Village Project. He also visited his old battlefields while there. Camil founded All Veterans for Kerry in 2004, and currently resides in Florida with his wife. *The Winter Soldier Investigation was more pivotal to me than any experience in my life except for Vietnam. I went to the Investigation still supporting the war and only seeking to let the public know what was going on in their name with their money. I thought of Vietnam only in terms of how much my fellow Marines and I had sacrificed and suffered. It was the way the filmmakers of Winter Film conducted their interviews that made me think, look at the big picture, and understand that the Vietnamese were humans. They asked the*

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right questions and I owe them a debt of gratitude so huge that I cannot even find the words to articulate how strong my feelings are for these filmmakers who woke me up and brought out my Humanity. It is their questions that make the Winter Soldier film so powerful. We veterans got all of the credit. It's way past time to give the credit for this great film to the people responsible for asking the right questions and then editing all of that into a film with so much feeling and heart.

Kenneth J. Campbell, Ph.D.

Kenneth J. Campbell was born and raised in a working-class neighborhood in Philadelphia. He enlisted in the Marines Corps in 1967 at the age of eighteen and served thirteen months as an artillery forward observer with a rifle company in Vietnam. He earned a Purple Heart, a Navy Achievement Medal with (combat "V") and eight other decorations and awards for his service in Vietnam. He was discharged as a corporal in 1970 and soon after became active in the Philly chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He testified at the Winter Soldier Investigation in Detroit, joined the VVAW encampment on the Capitol Mall in Washington, testified before the Dellums Committee hearings on Vietnam in Washington, and testified at the International Commission of Enquiry into US War Crimes in Oslo, Norway in 1971. He also began his undergraduate studies at Temple University, earning a B.A. in history in 1975. For the next eight years he worked as a factory worker, a shipyard worker, a taxi driver, a bus driver, and a respiratory therapy technician. During these years he was an active organizer in the labor, unemployed, community, veterans, and anti-US intervention in Central America movements. In 1983 he returned to Temple University to pursue his primary interest in American foreign policy, earning an M.A. and a Ph.D. in political science. His dissertation explored the US military's lessons of Vietnam. Ken Campbell has received distinguished teaching awards from the Temple University, the University of Delaware, the Mortar Board National Senior Honor Society, the American Political Science Association, and *Pi Sigma Alpha* National Political Science Honor Society. Professor Campbell has presented conference papers in the US, Canada, and Europe. His publications include book chapters on war crimes and genocide in the *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004), *Genocide: A Critical Bibliographical Review*, 6th ed. (Transaction, forthcoming), and *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Syracuse University Press, 1992). He has published journal articles on humanitarian intervention, national security strategy, and the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine in *Civil Wars, Armed Forces & Society*, the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, and *Human Rights Digest*. Palgrave/Macmillan published his book, *Genocide and the Global Village*, in September 2001. The importance of Professor Campbell's research on the Powell Doctrine, humanitarian intervention, and genocide has been personally recognized by General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Henry "Hugh" Shelton, and Canadian Major Brent Beardsley, personal staff assistant to General Romeo Dallaire, UN commander during the 1994 Rwanda genocide. In October of last year, during the presidential campaign, Professor Campbell filed a defamation lawsuit against Carleton Sherwood and the makers of the anti-Kerry film "Stolen Honor" for inappropriately using a scene

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from *Winter Soldier* to give the impression that Campbell was a fake veteran, fabricating atrocity stories. The suit is scheduled for trial sometime in late 2006. Ken Campbell is an associate professor of political science and international relations at the University of Delaware and the director of the University's international relations program. He lives in Philadelphia with his wife and daughter and is currently writing a book on comparative quagmires: Vietnam and Iraq.

Winter Soldier Reviews 2005/6

Film Echoes the Present in Atrocities of the Past

The New York Times, August 9, 2005
by David M. Halbfinger

LOS ANGELES, Aug. 8 - Like a live hand grenade brought home from a distant battlefield, the 34-year-old antiwar documentary "Winter Soldier" has been handled for decades as if it could explode at any moment.

Now, the 95-minute film - which has circulated like 16-millimeter samizdat on college campuses for decades but has never been accessible to a wide audience - is about to get its first significant theatrical release in the United States, beginning on Friday at the Film Society of Lincoln Center. (Other bookings, including Chicago, Detroit, Hartford and Minneapolis, can be found at www.wintersoldierfilm.com.)

Its distributors say that the war in Iraq has made the Vietnam-era film as powerful as when it was new, and its filmmakers are calling it eerily prescient of national embarrassments like the torture at Abu Ghraib.

Seldom has a film seen by so few caused so much consternation for so many years.

When it was made at a three-day gathering in 1971 of Vietnam veterans telling of the atrocities they had seen and committed, major news organizations sent reporters but published and broadcast next to nothing of what they filed - prompting the veterans to organize what would be a pivotal antiwar demonstration in Washington a few months later.

When the film was finished a year later, it was shown at the Cannes and Berlin film festivals. But in the United States, the television networks would not touch it, the film never found a distributor, and it disappeared for decades after playing a week at a single New York theater and a one-time airing on Channel 13.

When one of the veterans - John Kerry, who was seen on screen for less than a minute - ran for president last year, the old film turned up as propaganda on both sides of the partisan divide: Mr. Kerry's friend, the filmmaker George Butler, used footage from "Winter Soldier" to lionize him in a biographical film underwritten by Democrats

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called "Going Upriver." His political enemies on the right, meanwhile, created a Web site called Wintersoldier.com and made a film of their own, "Stolen Honor," to assail him as a traitor and a fraud.

"The context is why we wanted to do it," said Amy Heller, co-owner with her husband, Dennis Doros, of Milestone Films, perhaps best known for re-releasing Marcel Ophuls's 1971 masterpiece on the Nazi occupation of France, "The Sorrow and the Pity."

"We have a 9-year-old son," Ms. Heller said, "but if he were 19 and wondering what he should do with the next stage of his life, I sure would want him to see this film before considering going into the military."

The relevance of this grainy, ancient documentary comes from descriptions of abuse that could have been ripped from contemporary headlines, notwithstanding the changes in today's professional soldiers and their evolved, high-tech methods of warfare.

Listen, for instance, to the former Army interrogator as he describes using "clubs, rifle butts, pistols, knives" to extract information - "always monitored" by superiors or military police, he says - and recounts his superiors' overriding directive: "Don't get caught."

Or hear the former Marine captain, speaking of "standard operating procedure," describe how easily individual transgressions, overlooked by superiors, became de facto policy: "The general attitude of the officers was - I was a lieutenant at the time - 'Well, there's somebody senior to me here, and I guess if this wasn't S.O.P., he'd be doing something to stop it.' And since nobody senior ever did anything to stop it, the policy was promulgated, and everybody assumed that this was right."

What gives "Winter Soldier" its power, is not merely what is said on screen - accounts of Vietnamese women being raped or mutilated, children being shot, villages being burned, prisoners being thrown alive from helicopters - but who is saying it, and how they are shown.

It introduces us to Rusty Sachs, a handsome, curly-haired former Marine helicopter pilot, who recalls with an ironic smirk how his superiors instructed him not to "count prisoners when you're loading them on the aircraft - count them when you're unloading them," because, he says flatly, "the numbers may not jibe." He describes contests to see "how far they could throw the bound bodies out of the airplane."

And it introduces us to the gentle-sounding, Jesus-like Scott Camil, a former Marine scout and forward artillery observer, who in a whispery voice relates his personal journey from rah-rah patriot to trained killer to medal-winner to self-preservationist Angel of Death. "If I had to go into a village and kill 150 people just to make sure there was no one there to kill me when we walked out, that's what I did," he says.

Like other veterans, Mr. Camil - whose testimony at the Winter Soldier Investigation inspired Graham Nash's song "Oh, Camil!" - conveys how desensitized they became, and how dehumanized the Vietnamese became in their eyes. "Whoever had the most

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ears, they would get the most beers," he says of his comrades' corporeal trophies. "It became like a game."

This was being filmed, it should be emphasized, before the advent of rap groups and the confessional culture, before people routinely unburdened themselves on television or an Oprah granted absolution every afternoon. And it was happening at a stage in the war when the invasion of Laos was still a secret, when Agent Orange was unheard of, and when the public was still struggling to make sense of My Lai.

Yet the decidedly low-tech film does nothing to explicate what it records. It has no narration, except for an opening quotation from Thomas Paine, whence its title: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summertime soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

Nor is there any clue given to who made this film. And yet it was the product of an extraordinary collective of 18 unknown but up-and-coming documentarians, several of whom would have distinguished film careers: Barbara Kopple, who went on to direct the Oscar-winning documentaries "Harlan County, U.S.A." and "American Dream"; Nancy Baker, editor of the Oscar-winner "Born Into Brothels" and of "Vanya on 42nd Street"; Lucy Massie Phenix, editor of the Oscar-nominated "Regret to Inform," about widows of the Vietnam War; Bob Fiore, co-director of "Pumping Iron"; and David Grubin, for many years the directing partner of Bill Moyers.

Working with borrowed equipment and donated stock - much of it "short ends" left over from low-budget pornographic films - the group shot more than 100 hours over a three-day weekend, then spent six months editing it into what remains a raw and unadorned artifact, allowing the camera to gaze patiently as each witness tells his story.

But the group effort, Mr. Fiore said, meant no one could claim to be its auteur. "So it didn't have anybody pushing it, the way Michael Moore goes around," he said. "At the time, it seemed really important, it was a political statement. I wanted the film to be for and about the vets. But as a filmmaking and distributing ploy, it was a failure."

Though "Winter Soldier" was invited to Cannes and shown at several other film festivals, the group's efforts to have it shown on American television went nowhere. "We did a screening at NBC," said Fred Aronow, one of the filmmakers. "We got the reply back that this was incredibly interesting material that the American public should see, and it's unfortunate that NBC cannot broadcast it. They did not give a reason."

The film languished largely unseen, except for private and classroom viewings, until a retrospective at Berlin early last year. When Mr. Butler paid for rights to use footage from it, Mr. Fiore said, the filmmakers hoped that his lawyers would prevent anyone from using it to assassinate Mr. Kerry's character. But the producers of "Stolen Honor," an attack on Mr. Kerry that was shown on Sinclair Broadcasting stations last fall, did use excerpts from "Winter Soldier," and a veteran who testified, Kenneth J. Campbell, is suing them for defamation.

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As polarizing as the film has proven to be, the filmmakers say they hope that a year removed from the context of a campaign, "Winter Soldier" will be seen the way it was originally intended.

First, of course, they are hoping it will get an audience, at all.

"It's not any fun to see," Ms. Phenix conceded, in an understatement. "But the whole society needs to hear about that part of us, because that's part of us, too. The whole society includes these people who are having to kill and be killed, and maim and be maimed."

Why did it take 30 years for this film to get a national release?

'Winter Soldier': Cold Days in Hell
Vietnam Veterans Bare Their Souls In a Searing '72 Documentary

The Washington Post, Friday, December 9, 2005
by Ann Hornaday

See "Winter Soldier."

This extraordinary documentary, made in 1972 and having its first theatrical release, not only revisits events during the Vietnam War that have uncanny resonance today but also stands as a riveting example of pure filmic storytelling. An unadorned, black-and-white record of a three-day gathering held in Detroit in 1971, "Winter Soldier" turns the camera on the testimony of former soldiers invited by Vietnam Veterans Against the War to share accounts of atrocities they committed or witnessed. The result is a spellbinding film that achieves impressive power through little more than the spoken word.

Political junkies might remember the Winter Soldier meeting from last year's presidential campaign, when Sen. John Kerry's involvement in the event was the subject of the film "Going Upriver." Kerry is seen only briefly in "Winter Soldier," but there are some familiar faces here, chief among them Rusty Sachs, whose interview before the meeting -- in which he describes piloting aircraft from which blindfolded Viet Cong prisoners were routinely thrown -- opens the film. More than a dozen veterans from all branches of the military go on to tell their stories, each recounting some act of brutality that either explicitly or tacitly came under the heading of standard operating procedure.

Recreational killing of civilians, rape, arson, torture: They did it, or saw it, all. Having been trained to see their enemies as less than human -- they were always called gooks or commies -- and having been taught to dissociate from the violence they were committing lest they be killed themselves, they simply learned not to care.

"I didn't like being an animal," one veteran explains on the hearing dais. "And I didn't like seeing everyone else turned into an animal." (During a particularly revealing aside, an African American veteran engages one of the meeting's organizers in a discussion of how the Vietnam War was informed by stateside racism.) The stories are stunning, deeply troubling and often literally unspeakable. "I don't know what to say," one veteran says numbly. "I just wanted you to know about it."

With the soldiers' testimony occasionally accompanied by color footage of the very events they're describing, "Winter Soldier" recalls the early days of political cinema verite, when filmmakers such as Richard Leacock, Robert Drew and D.A. Pennebaker were revolutionizing film with unnarrated slices of life devoid of technical bells and whistles. With its high-contrast palette and startlingly beautiful stars (were we better-looking back then or was it the film stock?), "Winter Soldier" takes on surprising urgency.

When the film was made (by a collective that included such future documentary stars as Barbara Kopple), it was deemed too controversial to be released in theaters or on TV, and instead was shown sporadically in venues such as the Whitney Museum in New York. It's easy to see why Milestone Film & Video, which is releasing "Winter Soldier" under the Milliarium Zero banner, would see a potential market for the movie now. As its subjects speak of their lack of training in the Geneva Conventions, their confusion over what constituted torture, the lack of accountability of their superiors, the misuse of military propaganda, even the use of white phosphorous (nicknamed Willie Pete), it's clear that, as a scholar once observed, history may not repeat itself, but it rhymes.

Regardless of their views on conflicts past and present, everyone should see "Winter Soldier," if only to understand that when we speak of military sacrifice, that means psychic as well as physical. And on another level entirely, the film presents a gripping portrait of something that we don't often see portrayed with such authenticity on-screen: the act of a man defining himself. Several of the film's subjects, chief among them a Florida native named Scott Camil, are seen grappling not only with their experiences overseas but also with the very definition of manhood, whether as constructed by cultural mores or one's own inner code.

"Winter Soldier" is an important historical document, an eerily prescient antiwar plea and a dazzling example of filmmaking at its most iconographically potent. But at its best, it is the eloquent, unforgettable tale of profound moral reckoning.

San Francisco Chronicle, September 2, 2005

by Jonathan Curiel

"Four-Star" designation (Little Man Jumping out Of Seat)

Why did it take 30 years for this film to get a national release? Why did ABC, NBC, CBS and PBS reject "Winter Soldier" when it was offered to them at the height of the Vietnam War? The answers are obvious from the movie's opening scenes, when a Vietnam veteran describes in detail some of the war crimes allegedly committed by

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American soldiers, including the practice of taking Vietnamese prisoners onto aircraft, binding them with copper wire, then throwing the soldiers from the sky.

The sickening pattern of acts to which these soldiers attest — the slicing of ears, the raping of women, the slaughtering of children, — was too much for an American media unwilling to face the truth: The United States was betraying its own principles in a war that was ostensibly about rescuing people from a vicious enemy.

"Winter Soldier" has obvious parallels to the war in Iraq, where American abuses at Abu Ghraib have come to symbolize the ironies of toppling a tyrant, only to have the occupying forces resort to their own tyranny. The exact symmetries between Iraq and Vietnam are debatable, but there's no debate that Washington's involvement in both wars has had troubling consequences — which in the case of Vietnam was captured with candor by the documentarians who made "Winter Soldier."

They didn't have to fly to Saigon for the footage. Instead, they drove to Detroit, where a young returning soldier named John Kerry and other members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War were organizing a truth commission for returning vets. The goal of the 1971 hearings was to tell the American public about the unpleasant realities on the ground in Vietnam — and to give the soldiers a way to heal their own guilt at harming civilians (or witnessing their slaughtering).

"I didn't like being an animal," says one veteran. "They (the Vietcong) weren't humans," says another. "They were 'a gook' or 'a Commie.' " In graphic words, another describes the disembowelment of a woman.

The hearings lasted three days. During last year's presidential election, Kerry's actions during Vietnam, the Detroit hearings and the subsequent march on Washington, in which veterans threw medals onto the steps of the Capitol, were a source of endless controversy.

"Winter Soldier" is a rare time capsule of collective dissent. Bravery, too. It took strength for these once-proud military men to admit the wrongs they experienced in the name of the United States. The feel of "Winter Soldier" (from its mostly black-and-white footage to the hippieish appearances of the ex-soldiers) is straight from 1971, but the soldiers' sentiments could just as well have been conveyed today about Iraq. Their visible anguish is a sobering reality check about the nature of war.

Coldest 'Winter' ever

A little-seen, superb Vietnam doc explodes again today.

The San Francisco Bay Guardian, Aug. 31 - Sept. 6, 2005

by Johnny Ray Huston

MADE IN 1972, *Winter Soldier* has the otherworldly yet firmly earthbound immediacy of the best documentaries of its era, in particular, the black-and-white work of William Klein, Frederick Wiseman, and the Maysles brothers. Voices and faces are the main ingredients here: The participants in the *Winter Soldier*

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investigation testify to the atrocities they witnessed and took part in while in Vietnam. Combined, their statements become an overwhelming litany, one of the most horrifying and emotionally wrenching indictments of war recorded on film. This is no Oliver Stone leap into Samuel Barber-scored heroic tragedy, just an unflinchingly clear-eyed extended gaze at military-brand, all-American inhumanity - the racism, emotionally cauterized machismo, and governmental evil that results in mass bloodshed.

When 109 Vietnam veterans and 16 civilians gathered at a Howard Johnson's in Detroit to discuss a war that was still raging, the media reacted with skepticism, if at all. Only the local Detroit Free Press bothered to confirm the veracity of accounts and the credentials of participants. Television primarily turned a blind eye, and conservative publications like the Detroit News cast doubt on the allegations made without offering any specific proof of deception. If a collective of filmmakers - including people who've gone on to put history on celluloid in Harlan County, USA; Regret to Inform; and The Word Is Out - hadn't been present, the human impact of war would not have been captured. Instead of tears and the shell-shocked expressions of young men indoctrinated in mass murder, there would only be words on a page.

Not that those words lack wrenching impact. Winter Soldier cuts to the pained faces of onlookers as one soldier talks of phosphorus burning through the flesh of Vietnamese civilians. As the testimony rolls onward, the filmmakers increasingly turn to the event's slide presentation of still photos that give visual proof of the stories being told - a prisoner forced to sit by a pile of dead bodies, a starving old woman made to beg for slop. In a moment that calls Lynndie England's infamy to mind, 1st Marine Air Wing Rusty Sachs confesses his shame about a photo of himself smiling by the body of a man he killed. Like many of his peers, Sachs's smile remains, though now it has contorted into something closer to a pained grimace.

The accusations echo, especially statements that any dead Vietnamese civilian was automatically considered a member of the Vietcong. The horrors accumulate: a boy stoned to death for throwing rocks, more little boys shot for giving the finger, a woman raped in front of her family before all of them are slaughtered, another woman gutted and then skinned by a higher-up in front of his grunts, that method of killing in exact accordance with the rabbit slaughter demonstration one speaker remembers as a typical lesson received just before being sent off to war. The unrelenting force would be numbing if the filmmakers didn't cannily choose to focus on particular faces, holding them in extended close-up. The most haunting belongs to much-decorated Scott Camil, whose Christ-like, bearded visage and delicate way of speaking take on an almost hypnotic quality as - with glazed, still-stunned candor - he's led by questioners through remembrances of his brutal training and murderous survival tactics. When Winter Soldier received its initial limited theatrical release, the great Amos Vogel wrote (in a Village Voice review) that it must be shown on prime-time, national television. It should go without saying that statement holds true today. Unfortunately, both the movie and the event that spawned it have been used for campaign purposes by right-wing figures with no sense of shame or decency. John Kerry is seen briefly toward the beginning of the movie, and his participation in the Winter Soldier investigation became a conservative lightning rod last year, particularly when Steve Pitkin - another participant, who comes across as the most camera-ready and TV-eager - launched accusations [via an affidavit] that Kerry and

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others had bullied him into saying he'd witnessed atrocities when he hadn't. Pitkin doesn't refer to any specific crimes in Winter Soldier, and it's worth noting that, oddly, none of the other 108 military participants have come forward with similar claims. In addition Pitkin was recently forced to recant some of his affidavit when Camil filed one of his own noting that every statement Pitkin's affidavit made pertaining to Camil was false.

Such petty factual details matter very little these days, when Pitkin's about-face proliferates across the Internet, where a Bush apologist by the name of Scott Swett lords over a site called wintersoldier.com. Swett's site is happy to endlessly parse whatever minor falsehoods it can find, yet it remains interestingly mute - if not outright incorrect - when it comes to much of the actual content of Winter Soldier. You certainly won't find him responding to the fact that the movie contains photographic as well as verbal evidence, and the Purple Hearts, ribbons, presidential citations, and Crosses of Gallantry given to Camil alone matter little to him and others when they apply blanket "impostor" labels to the participants. Nothing could be easier than to blindly state that Winter Soldier is more a work of fiction than fact. It sure would help citizens of an ethically starved and immoral country that's repeating the outrage of Vietnam to sleep easier.

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