

# **Unfit for Command Study Guide**

**Unfit for Command by Jerome Corsi**

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# Plot Summary

The 185 pages of *Unfit for Command* detail John Kerry's service in Vietnam as the commander of a Patrol Craft Swift (PCF), or "Swift Boat," as well as his post-Vietnam activities as a leader of the anti-war movement. The book's perspective is through the eyes of the men with whom he served. With rare exception, his comrades-in-arms view the Democratic nominee for President of the United States as a coward, liar, opportunist, and war criminal. They claim Kerry designed his military service and post-service activities for the self-stated purpose of creating a legend of falsehoods that would provide a platform for Kerry to later run for President. The authors state that their sole purpose for writing *Unfit for Command* was to expose John Kerry as unqualified to command the nation's military. The Democrats, of course, denied both the intent and substance of the book; claiming it was a smear tactic of the George W. Bush campaign.

Section 1 of *Unfit* covers Kerry's enlistment in the U.S. Naval Reserve in February 1966. Kerry had requested a deferment from the draft board to do post-graduate work in Paris after his graduation from Yale, but was denied. In the spring of that year, Kerry delivered an anti-war speech at Yale.

Between August and December of 1966, Kerry attended Officer Candidate School and graduated as an Ensign on active status. Between June of 1967 and June of 1968, Kerry served on board the U.S.S. *Gridley*, a Guided Missile Frigate that patrolled off the coast of California and Australia. *Gridley* spent five weeks well off the coast of Vietnam. Later, Kerry would claim this service as one of two *tours* of duty he "volunteered" to serve in Vietnam. However, a "tour" in Vietnam consisted of at least one year in-country. Kerry's first tour never got closer to in-country than one mile offshore, and his second "tour" lasted only four months; one of which he spent in training in a former French beach resort location.

Kerry claimed his first Purple Heart medal for an injury his fellow "*Swifties*" say was accidental but self-inflicted from a rocket-propelled grenade that Kerry fired. The medic who treated the wound described it as a "Band-Aid and tweezers affair," removing a one-centimeter piece of shrapnel. The authors claim Kerry's other two Purple Hearts were of similar severity, and were granted solely on the basis of Kerry's after-action reports. These reports, according to the authors, describe enemy hostilities that none of the other participants recall. The authors detail an incident in particular in which Kerry's boat fired on an innocent Sampan, killing a small child. Kerry disguised this in his report as one enemy dead. They also charge him with inventing a fleeing group of Vietcong in that incident. Kerry's Silver and Bronze Star Medals come under fire as well and are claimed to be similarly bogus.

In Section 2, O'Neill recounts his outrage at Kerry's testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, chaired by outspoken anti-war Senator Fulbright. The committee was charged with exploring possible scenarios for a U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. It was before this committee on April 22, 1971 that Kerry made his now famous—and debunked—charges of intentional war crimes committed with the full



complicity of the entire chain of command of the U.S. Military. Author O'Neill wrote to the Fulbright Committee prior to Kerry's testimony asking to be heard, but the committee responded that they had no room for another speaker. Incensed by Kerry's testimony, O'Neill eventually took on Kerry in a one-on-one debate on the *Dick Cavett Show*. Kerry could not substantiate his charges, and by all accounts plainly lost the debate. In the book, the authors continue to detail Kerry's political career, which changed with public opinion from war-*protester* to war-*hero* based on what they claim is a false record.



# Introduction

## Introduction Summary

O'Neill and Corsi introduce their political argument with the following quote from Rear Admiral Roy F. Hoffman, USN (Retired), who was the commander of the Swift Boats in Vietnam during 1968 and 1969:

*"I do not believe John Kerry is fit to be commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States. This is not a political issue. It is a matter of his judgment, truthfulness, reliability, loyalty, and trust all absolute tenets of command."*

They follow this indictment with a quote from John Edwards, Kerry's vice-presidential running mate: *"To really understand John Kerry, you have to listen to those who served with him in Vietnam."*

Following these introductory quotations, O'Neill relates his first-hand observations of the Swift Boat Veterans Reunion, which took place in the summer of 2003 in Norfolk, Virginia. O'Neill explains that the honored attendees of the reunion had all served on Patrol Crafts Fast. PCFs, as they were called, had originally been intended for coastal surveillance. Later, they were tasked to patrol the rivers and canals of the Mekong Delta and further inland to the U Mhin and Nam Can forests; held by the Vietcong for many years. He describes how the visiting dignitaries received polite applause which became uproarious and vocal when the actual Swifties were introduced. When the Senator was introduced, claims O'Neill, a "deafening silence followed. Even a single clap would have sounded like a cannon." O'Neill says Kerry had made a cameo appearance earlier in the day with an entourage of cameraman and handlers. The authors claim that he had pushed other Swifties out of the way to prepare his video photo op and had more or less ignored his former comrades-in-arms. O'Neill says this surprised no one, as it reflected Kerry's self-serving attitude while in Vietnam.

The most memorable moment of the reunion for O'Neill was when Joe Ponder, a disabled vet who was seriously wounded in a battle that Kerry recounts in his biography *Tour of Duty*. Ponder recalled the battle vividly, says O'Neill, because of his severe war wounds. Ponder's account was entirely different from Kerry's recollections, which postured Kerry as a hero.

The next incident covered by the authors is a May 2004 press conference in Washington featuring Rear Admiral (Ret.) Hoffman and concerning an open letter to Kerry from the Swifties. The letter (reprinted in the appendix of *Unfit*) claims that Kerry misrepresented his service in Vietnam and lied about claims of atrocities. The letter also labels him as a liar and a fraud. The nearly 200 signatures on the letter, claims O'Neill, include almost all of Kerry's commanders, as well as 15 of the 23 officers who served with him during his truncated four-month tour in Vietnam. O'Neill also says that out of all the Swifties contacted for signature, fewer than 10 percent declined to sign the letter.



The third event outlined in the *Introduction* concerns Bill Lupetti, a naval corpsman, who had treated many of the Swiftes. Lupetti returned to Vietnam for a visit after the war. While there, Lupetti visited the War Remnants Museum, formerly the War Crimes Museum, in Ho Chi Minh City. There, Lupetti discovered an exhibit dedicated to "World Heroes," whom the communists credited with significant contributions to the North Vietnamese victory. Among those so honored were such American luminaries as Jane Fonda and John Kerry, a prominent leader in the American anti-war movement.

These three events, say O'Neill and Corsi, raise questions they hope to answer in the book that follows. "Who is the real John Kerry?" the authors ask:

"What sort of combination of hypocrite and paradox is John Kerry? How can someone who, until recently, claimed he was a war criminal, who threw away his medals and supported the North Vietnamese with his words, who even met with enemy delegations in Paris while our soldiers were still fighting and dying in the field, now switch sides to run as a hero of those he condemned as criminals in that war?"

The answer to those questions, according to the authors, are based on the testimony of first-hand witnesses and a record of "lies" since Kerry returned to the U.S. as a leader of the anti-war movement. It is their "hope that the American people will consider this information in deciding Kerry's fitness to be the Commander in Chief."

## Introduction Analysis

O'Neill and Dr. Corsi are open and honest about their intent with *Unfit for Command*. They want to defeat John Kerry in his run for the presidency of the United States. They avoid the use of the title *President*, preferring instead *Commander in Chief*; which is consistent with what amounts to an indictment of his military fitness. It is appropriate that readers should approach this, and all politically motivated works, with a measure of skepticism. In fairness, *Unfit* appears to have been written in direct response to John Kerry's quasi-biography, *Tour of Duty*. An equal test of veracity should be applied in that case as well.



# Part 1: John Kerry in Vietnam

## Part 1: John Kerry in Vietnam Summary

The bad blood between Kerry and O'Neill, which fully blossomed during the 2004 Presidential race, actually began more than 30 years previously. In the spring of 1971 Kerry testified before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. In his testimony, he claimed that the U.S. Army in Vietnam resembled that of Genghis Khan, and that war crimes such as rape and baby killing occurred on a day-to-day basis with the full knowledge at all levels of command. Seeing excerpts such as this on the TV news angered O'Neill, who claimed the charges were totally false. He wrote to the Committee as someone who had served at the same time and place as Kerry, asking for an opportunity to enter his observations into the record. The Committee replied that they did not "have room for another speaker."

Continued pressure by O'Neill and other Swifties led to several offers for a TV debate, including one by CBS's *60 Minutes*, but Kerry refused to meet his adversary in front of a live camera. By this time, Kerry had become the spokesman for Vietnam Veterans against the War (VVAW). Finally, under pressure, Kerry agreed to square off with O'Neill on the *Dick Cavett Show*. Cavett was a personal friend of Kerry's, and publicly supported his position on the war. However, Cavett also had a reputation for being a fair, objective and open-minded commentator. Kerry tanked abysmally when he failed to come up with a single particular to support his claims of atrocities committed by U.S. service personnel. Cavett even remarked to Kerry on live air that when he first came onto the stage the audience was solidly on his side, but by the end they were booing him. O'Neill encourages his readers to view the video of the debate on the Swiftie website, [www.wintersoldier.org](http://www.wintersoldier.org). O'Neill claims that Kerry in Vietnam was just "another politician, posing briefly as a warrior, to establish military credentials." He says that Kerry reached his high water mark in the anti-war movement shortly after the disastrous Cavett debate and, except for a failed congressional run, remained relatively quiet. O'Neill points out that, except for an occasional ceremonial appearance on behalf of the Swifties, O'Neill himself had remained politically inactive for 30 years. It was not until he realized that Kerry might actually become President and Commander in Chief that he became committed to "the hard task of informing an uninformed America against a media sympathetic to Kerry and his myth of John Kerry's total unfitness to command our armed forces or lead our nation."

In a sub-section entitled, *The Reluctant Warrior*, the authors quote Rear Admiral Hoffman as saying, "Kerry arrived in-country with a strong anti-Vietnam war bias and a self-serving determination to build a foundation for his political future." Later, they quote Commander Grant Hibbard USN (retired) who says, "Kerry told everybody that he was going to be president some day—you know, the next JFK from Massachusetts. Maybe he just thought Swift Boats would be a safe PT-109." At the time Kerry allegedly made those remarks, swift boats were considered safe duty because they were responsible only for intercepting shipping off the coast. It was not until later that the duty became



dangerous, when their mission changed from coastal patrol to routing out the enemy in deeply entrenched enclaves along the river canals of the Mekong Delta. Kerry, who had been a vociferous opponent of the war even before he entered the Naval Reserve, did not deny the claim that the Swifts represented a safe haven where he could wait out his time in-country. In a *Boston Globe* biography, published years before his election campaign, the author writes, "Kerry also believed a swift boat assignment would keep him away from the frontlines of conflict." The *Globe* quoted the future presidential candidate as saying, "At the time, the boats had very little to do with the war." Moreover, in a passage he wrote in a 1986 contribution to *The Vietnam Experience: A War Remembered*, Kerry wrote, "They [the swift boats] were engaged in coastal patrolling, and that's what I thought I was going to be doing. Although I wanted to see for myself what was going on, I didn't really want to get involved in the war."

When the mission of the Swifts changed from coastal to river patrol and they were ordered into actual combat, "Kerry strenuously objected," according to several Swift officers, demanding that he should be assigned back to coastal duty, which was a much safer mission. . Kerry was characterized as a "perpetual whiner" with a "belligerent disrespect for duty and the military," according to William Franke, who served with Kerry at Kam Rahn Bay.

Kerry is also remembered as a braggart. Several letters he wrote home, while serving with the Swifts boast of adventures and incidents painting him as a noble warrior for which there are no other records or memories. . According to the authors, Kerry has used his questionable four months of duty in Vietnam as the cornerstone of at least five campaigns he has waged since returning to the U.S. He has frequently used his military service to humiliate and demean political opponents from both parties who did not serve and who served in the reserves. While Kerry made much of volunteering for the Navy and Vietnam in his 2004 campaign, the authors reveal that he actually joined the Navy Reserve as an "inactive" volunteer, after being denied a draft deferment to spend a year studying in Paris. Likewise, Kerry's claim of volunteering for "two tours of duty in Vietnam," is not supported by available military records. His first tour, the authors claim, was actually spent on a guided missile frigate, which spent a few weeks far off the coast of Vietnam. The frigate saw no action, but spent the bulk of its yearlong cruise off the coast of California, in the Middle East, and Australia.

In another sub-section, entitled *The Purple Heart Hunter*, O'Neill and Corsi present John Kerry's accounts of the incidents leading up to his awards of three Purple Hearts; quoting excerpts from Kerry's web site, the *Boston Globe* biography and his book *Tour of Duty*. The authors then contrast them with accounts of the same incidents from other witnesses. Swift Boat Veteran William Franke, who served with Kerry, states, "Many took exception with the Purple Hearts awarded to Kerry. His wounds were suspect, so insignificant as to not be worthy of the award of such a medal." The authors note that the normal tour of duty in Vietnam was at least one year, and that Kerry spent a total of four months there, one of which was in training. They claim that Kerry cited an "obscure regulation that permitted release of personnel with three purple hearts." During his four months in-country Kerry gained a reputation among his fellow sailors—both officers and enlisted—of being dishonest, incompetent, and cowardly. He gained a reputation as a





constant complainer among his peers who was always deferential to his superiors. A number of his associates avoided working with him, and asked to be assigned to other boats. Some officers objected to going on patrol with him, and his commanders passed him from one command to another.

In one 1968 incident, Kerry, while still in training, was assigned to command a "skimmer," a smaller boat than the normal Swift Boat. Skimmers were used to interdict fishing boats and other civilian river traffic that were in violation of a dusk-to-dawn curfew. Kerry claims the duty was extremely dangerous, and generated a great deal of fear and anxiety. Others, who served the same duty, likened it to being a night watchman: stopping and scolding civilian curfew violators or issuing *fix-it tickets*. Kerry's boat encountered some sampans on the shore, and ordered a flare to illuminate the scene. The suspects were unloading something from their boats, and might have been Vietcong. Kerry and his men opened fire and Kerry's gun jammed. He picked up a rocket launcher, fired it at too short of a range and then felt what he described as a searing pain in his shoulder. That was the extent of the action. As it turns out, the shrapnel in Kerry's shoulder was a tiny piece of grenade fragment from his own errant round. Also on the Skimmer was William Schachte, now a rear admiral, who scolded Kerry for firing the grenade, saying, "You could put someone's eye out." When they returned to base, according to all eyewitness accounts Kerry went immediately to sickbay.

Dr. Letson removed a tiny fragment one centimeter long from Kerry's arm and treated the wound with a band-aid. Normally, commanders or witnesses submit medal recommendations, but the next day Kerry went to headquarters to recommend *himself* for a Purple Heart. Everyone else considered the prospect laughable, as Kerry was the only one present at the scene who claims the enemy actually fired on them. Purple Hearts are awarded only for injuries sustained in enemy contact; Kerry's wound, though accidental, was self-inflicted. Grant Hibbard, Kerry's division commander at the time, recalls Kerry coming into his office asking for the medal recommendation. Hibbard threw the future candidate out of his office, but somehow Kerry "gamed the system" to get approval for his Purple Heart. It is not clear to the authors or to Kerry's fellow sailors, exactly how he pulled that off. After that incident, Lt. Ted Peck, Kerry's fellow Swiftie and now a retired captain, told his colleague, "Kerry, follow me no closer than 1,000 yards. If you get any closer, I'll teach you what a real Purple Heart is."

Any hopes Kerry may have had of avoiding serious combat were ended when Admiral Bud Zumwalt III decided to employ the tactics of a highly successful Civil War campaign, used to gain control of the Mississippi, to regain control of the area's waterways. The U Minh and Nam Can forests near An Thoi had been under North Vietnamese control since the 1940s, and they were being used for POW camps.

In his own biography, Kerry claims that he had a leisurely dinner and conversation with the commander of an LST when Kerry's boat stopped to refuel during the transfer to An Thoi. That particular LST had recently been in an engagement which, according to the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, had been responsible for friendly-fire casualties. Kerry claims that the Captain presented a defensive account to Kerry, attempting to



deny culpability. All witnesses to the event—especially Kerry's crew—claim the account is an out-and-out lie. According to their statements, they were only tied up to the LST for a few minutes; just long enough to take on fuel. They say Kerry had no dinner or conversation with the captain of that vessel. The friendly-fire incident ultimately took on the media-title, "*The Bo De Massacre.*" Although Kerry was not involved in any way in the Bo De Massacre, he claims that 17 American military men were injured in the incident. Eyewitnesses, including Joe Ponder, who was permanently disabled at Bo De, says only three men were wounded.

According to all accounts, including John Kerry's, he vehemently resisted his orders to leave Cam Ranh Bay, a former French resort area, for the far more dangerous duty on the rivers patrolled out of An Thoi. In any event, Kerry lasted at An Thoi only a week before his boat was transferred to less hazardous duty at Cat Lo. Peck, his fellow Swiftee, recalls the events and says, "I never believed John Kerry should have been in the Navy—I didn't like anything about him." In his own account, however, Kerry paints Peck as a Swiftee Buddy, with no recollection of animosity. While Kerry claims that he resisted the transfer to Cat Lo, the authors tell a different story. According to them, Kerry continued to whine about his involuntary assignment to the more hazardous duty station. In fact, they claim he complained so much that he was given offshore assignments until Division leaders could figure out a way to get rid of him. In his own biography, Kerry claims that he did not want to relocate to the safer duty because his mail had not caught up with him yet. His fellow Swiftees concluded, according to the authors, "—that Kerry had a very high regard for his own well-being and very little nerve for facing serious combat. Division, they claim, figured it was, "—better just to get rid of Kerry and let him be somebody else's problem."

John Kerry, according to the authors, has painted a picture of himself as a war hero who was constantly protesting to his superior officers about the misdeeds of others and cruel and reckless policies. This image, they say, has been carefully crafted since his return from his short stay in Vietnam, extending throughout his political career. He claims that his nickname, or *handle*, among the Swiftees was "*Square Jaw,*" when in fact it was "*Boston Strangler.*" He has consistently relied on imposters posing as veterans to testify about "war crimes" committed by American troops against defenseless Vietnamese that were either greatly exaggerated or total fabrications spun from whole cloth. They say, however, that Kerry's actual behavior, which was concealed from superior officers by his own fraudulent reports, was actually quite different from the portrait he has painted of himself after the war. The authors state that he was differential to his superiors, cowardly in battle, and quick with the trigger in instances where he found himself in perceived, and sometimes imagined, danger.

In one infamous incident, Kerry claims they approached a sampan on patrol and that he ordered a few warning shots to be fired. His crew, however, became "confused" and opened up with all guns. He then attempts to exonerate the two enlisted men he blamed for the incident by claiming they were within their rights because they were in a *free-fire zone*, and the sampan was out past curfew. On the sampan, the Swiftees found an innocent Vietnamese mother and a dead "small child." In his report, Kerry rationalized the action first by blaming his crew. He then suggested there might have been a bomb



in the sampan that could have been thrown into his boat, and that he "was only following orders." In his after-action report, Kerry said nothing about killing the child, and invented a fleeing squad of Vietcong. Kerry refused to make this report public during his Presidential campaign. Nonetheless, the *Boston Globe* cited in its Kerry biography an excerpt from official Naval records in which Kerry claimed to have captured two enemy personnel (the mother and child), had killed one enemy in action (presumably the small child), and had fired on four fleeing Vietcong.

According to eyewitness, Kerry never came out of the pilothouse during the entire incident, completely abandoning his command responsibilities. Once all was quiet, he emerged from his hideaway to threaten the crew for mucking up the incident. *The Globe* reporters concluded, "Kerry simply butchers a small sampan in a free-fire zone because it might have been dangerous to approach." Stephen Gardner, Kerry's gunner, describes the sampan incident as "simply butchery." Other Swifties contend, "Kerry was reckless with human life when the lives in question were Vietnamese." They state that the boats stopped thousands of sampans in the canals after curfew in free-fire zones without loss of civilian life. The only legitimate war crimes Kerry witnessed, they claim, were the ones he committed. Swift Boat officer Bill Franke says that while it was permissible to fire on a civilian craft after curfew in a fire-fire zone "if it was navigating up river between dusk and dawn, and was attempting to flee" there were thousands of boats that navigated upriver during the curfew. "In virtually every case," he stated, they were simply returning late from fishing. Franke goes on to say that no honorable officer would unleash the wrath of a Swift Boat's three .50 caliber machine guns, which fire 1,100 rounds per minute each, on a target without clear and present danger. PCF Commander Tom Wright reports, "Kerry thought free-fire meant *kill anyone you see*," when in fact free-fire placed the greatest responsibility on a boat commander to exercise judgment and restraint. Wright had such difficulty working with Kerry that he finally objected to going on patrol with him.

George Bates, a fellow officer in Coastal Division 11, participated in several operations with Kerry and characterized the man who would be president as, "a coward who overreacted with deadly force when he felt threatened." Bates also describes Kerry as a man without a conscience and describes another incident of atrocious behavior on the Song Bo Do River in 1969. The boats on patrol with Kerry approached a river village with no political symbols or signs of the enemy. When the boats approached, the villagers fled. Rather than moving on as policy dictated, Kerry beached his boat and commanded his crew to slaughter the pigs and chickens that were now the only occupants of the village. "Acting more like a pirate than a naval officer, Kerry disembarked and ran around with his Zippo lighter setting fire to the grass huts in the village."

Admiral Hoffman described Kerry as a loose cannon, while Captain Charles Plumly called him, "devious, requiring constant supervision." The authors quote numerous Swifties about tales of unauthorized trips to Saigon and other places for purposes of entertainment and amusement. During these trips, the Swifties claim Kerry simply left his assigned duties to go off for a night on the town. Shortly after requesting a transfer from Vietnam, Kerry was placed under the command of Captain Plumly for duty on the



Hap River. Plumly states that on repeated occasions, Kerry simply disappeared from position, "□like a child with an attention problem." Plumly says that Kerry was so bad about following orders that (now) Admiral Hoffmann came to An Thoi to tell the Swiftie officers that anyone not following orders would be shipped to Saigon without further notice.

Another Kerry story has him stumbling into shared living quarters with a live Claymore mine which he apparently planned to keep as a war souvenir. He also carried a video camera and would enact scenes portraying him as a war hero, sometimes even in infantry dress. Commander Elliot, with whom Kerry served, was reminded of Winston Churchill who said, "I expect history to treat me kindly since I wrote it."

The authors claim that Kerry's second Purple Heart was as bogus as his first. In his operations report, Kerry described intense rocket and rifle fire, and the "decks running with blood." In fact, say his detractors, there was no hostile fire. Kerry fired an M-79 rocket grenade and again faked a Purple Heart wound with a tiny piece of shrapnel from his own round. At one point, Command ordered the Swifties to use Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), rather than live fire, to persuade the enemy to be nice. The Swifties would play amplified tapes as the boats cruised vulnerably upstream. Kerry claimed that tactic grew out of his original suggestion. It turned out to be an unmitigated failure that cost the lives of many Swifties.

For some thirty-five years, John Kerry has shaped his political life around a much-vaunted incident for which he was awarded the Silver Star. Although the Swifties remember the incident in which he claimed to be a hero, no one seems to know who recommended the medal. His commanding officer kicked him out of his office when Kerry approached him for a recommendation. The incident occurred on February 28, 1969. Kerry allegedly returned while under intense enemy fire to fish a comrade out of the river. Kerry was awarded the medal two days after the incident, according to O'Neill and Corsi, to raise morale among the Swifties. However, the award was based solely on Kerry's after-action report, which they say was totally false. The citation states that all three boats on the mission came under "entrenched enemy fire from less than 50 feet away," that all units beached and opened fire, and that Kerry personally led a raiding party ashore, attacking a numerically superior enemy. The authors claim the award never would have been made if the request had gone through normal review channels.

According to the accounts of other Swifties who witnessed the event, Kerry had made an arrangement with the skippers of the other two boats on the mission. If they encountered fire, they would beach all of their boats. This procedure violated policy and tactical logic but it was considered bold; even if somewhat foolhardy. The gambit was intended to garner some minor medals and other *attaboys* for the crews. The boats did encounter fire and did beach, but Kerry did not lead this action as stated in the citation. His boat was the second boat to beach. One boat had taken an RPG round in the aft cabin. As a teenaged Vietcong in a loincloth emerged from hiding, he was shot in the leg by Tom Belodeau, a forward gunner. The boy fled, and Kerry pursued him along with a fellow Swiftie, even though their boats were filled with Army soldiers who were better trained for ground combat and were to be inserted upstream.. Kerry killed the fleeing,



wounded teenager with a shot in the back. While this action was not illegal, it is considered cowardly, improper and opportunistic by many Swiftes.. Kerry also took a hit from the *Boston Globe* in its 1996 Kerry biography. Commander George Elliot, who wrote up the original citation for Kerry's Silver Star, says he did not know until 1996 that Kerry was facing—or rather, facing the back of—a single wounded and retreating adolescent Vietcong.

In the casualty report of March 13, 1969, Kerry claimed that he was wounded from a mine that had been placed in the river. He also claimed a bleeding wound to his shoulder. According to colleagues and the official medical report, however, the arm wound was a small bruise requiring no medical treatment whatsoever. Likewise, the wound from the so-called mine was a "tweezers and band-aide" fragment from Kerry's own grenade. Larry Thurlow, whom the authors describe as "an experienced, genuine hero and PCF veteran," commanded the boat behind Kerry's. He says that Kerry actually wounded himself in the buttocks that morning when he was blowing up an enemy rice cache with a hand grenade. Kerry and Rassmann were assigned to destroy the enemy food stash. They each threw a grenade into the rice bin and then hit the ground. Rassmann escaped the exploding rice, but Kerry did not fare so well. The blast covered Kerry in enemy rice, which reduced the men to howling laughter, and they formed a comic bond.

Over the years, Kerry has presented several different tellings of the tale of his actions leading to his third Purple Heart, which became his ticket back to the U.S. and began his career as an anti-war organizer. Thurlow was "astounded" to see the metamorphosis of an incident he knew about had been so convoluted into the version Kerry posted on his campaign website. On his site, Kerry claimed that his tweezers and band-aid buttocks wound occurred as a result of "friendly fire" from some Nung mercenaries fighting for the South Vietnamese. In his account, it was the Nungs who blew up the rice during a firefight Kerry claimed that he and the Nungs were withdrawing under fire. Actually, the self-inflicted wound occurred well after all enemy fire had been suppressed. By claiming it was friendly fire, Kerry qualified himself for a third Purple Heart.

During this incident, Kerry also fabricated his part in a battle scene, for which he claimed a Bronze Star. This was a much-publicized episode in which Kerry supposedly demonstrated Herculean bravery by rescuing his presidential-campaign companion, Army Special Services officer Jim Rassmann, by coolly turning back into a devastating hail of enemy fire. According to Thurlow, what actually occurred was quite different. In reality, he says, Kerry was on the opposite side of the river when a boat hit a mine on the left shore, blowing some of the crew into the water. There was no hostile fire, just a stationary mine. In spite of the absence of real danger, says Thurlow, Kerry fled in his boat to safety several hundred yards distance. He did return to pick up Rassmann but only after the action. Kerry also claims to have towed the stricken boat to safety, when in fact, say others who were there, he left his boat in the hands of a subordinate; climbing aboard a U.S. Coast Guard vessel returning to base with wounded to claim his medals.





According to the authors, it was not Kerry who became aware of the "three strikes and you're out" rule that would send triple Purple Heart winners home. Instead, they say it was the officers who wanted him out of their division, where he was a danger both to himself and to them. The speed with which Kerry's request to return to the U.S. was processed by a normally cumbersome military bureaucracy would suggest there may have been some command influence involved. The Rassmann incident occurred on March 13, 1969 on the Bay Hap River, and by March 17—just four days later—Kerry's request to be reassigned to the U.S. had already been sent to "far-away An Toi," where it was typed up and signed by his commander there. It was immediately sent to the Navy Department in Washington D.C. Yet, in 1971 on the *Dick Cavett Show*, Kerry claimed to have tortured over the decision to abandon his comrades for three weeks before deciding that he could be more useful protesting at home than staying in Southeast Asia and fighting. Shortly after arriving back stateside, Kerry went to a naval hospital to recruit Peck, who was recuperating from a serious wound, to join him in organizing protests against the war in Vietnam. Bewildered, Peck asked him, "How can you do this? All of our guys are still over there, in Vietnam." Kerry had no answer, say the authors in their concluding statement of *Part 1*. "We have never been given any more of a real answer than Ted Peck received while lying in his hospital bed," they say.

## Part 1: John Kerry in Vietnam Analysis

*Unfit for Command* is clearly a political hatchet job, written for the primary reason of preventing John Kerry from becoming the Commander in Chief of all U.S. military forces. Since there was only one other viable candidate in the race, the book was plainly helpful in George W. Bush's ultimate victory over Kerry. That being said, the preponderance of evidence, including eyewitness testimony, military records, and demonstrable inconsistencies in Kerry's reporting of the various incidents, makes a strong case for the veracity of the authors' claim that John Kerry's main interest during the four months he was in Vietnam was self promotion rather than service to country. It is significant that nowhere in *Section 1* do the authors endorse or even mention George W. Bush. They say nothing about John Kerry's qualifications to be President, other than his being unqualified for command of America's military. It is clear that the strong negative emotions the authors express toward Kerry are not simply an opportunistic response to a presidential campaign, but have been festering for many years—long before *any* Bushes were involved in presidential politics. Indeed, the public record of the dispute between these disparate U.S. Naval officers, all members of an elite fraternity, dates back to a debate between O'Neill and Kerry on the *Dick Cavett Show*. That confrontation occurred shortly after Kerry's 1971 testimony before Congress, where he claimed that U.S. servicemen were committing egregious war crimes in Vietnam on a daily basis with the full knowledge and complicity of the entire command structure. By all accounts, O'Neill trounced Kerry in the Cavett debate, which Kerry later claimed was a plot by Richard Nixon and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Ultimately, these charges by Kerry assumed the status of urban myths, circulated as common knowledge among a new, young, left-leaning counter culture eager to believe anything negative about the system they opposed.



No clearly political reporting should be taken at face value, and the prudent reader will approach such works with a healthy dose of skepticism. In his own biography, *Tour of Duty*, Kerry recalls most of the incidents recorded in *Unfit* entirely differently than authors O'Neill and Corsi. Kerry published his book first, so the authors of *Unfit* had the advantage of being able to thoughtfully respond to Kerry's claims, and put the candidate in the position of having to answer their charges in the pressure environment of live TV, often without the luxury of time to craft responses that are more convincing. Such is the way of American politics. However, O'Neill and Corsi assemble an impressive array of testimony from witnesses who have no apparent reason for coming forward other than the stated motive for the book; and who have neither an obvious reason to lie nor a previous record in partisan issues. The volume of these witnesses makes it difficult to believe their overwhelming consistency is something other than the truth, as they perceive it. Likewise, the official documents they cite, combined with John Kerry's refusal to release those that could clear the air on certain contested issues, suggest a significant degree of veracity on the part of O'Neill and Corsi.

O'Neill and Corsi devote the bulk of *Section 1* to an attempt to debunk the war-hero image John Kerry has carefully crafted throughout his political career since he returned from Vietnam. They paint a picture of a spoiled and completely self-absorbed young man, who fabricated stories of heroism in his after-action reports that no other participants or witnesses are willing to validate. They claim he had reckless disregard for others' lives—especially the Vietnamese—and was responsible for not only killing an innocent child in an unwarranted attack on a civilian sampan, but also shooting a fleeing teenaged enemy in the back. They point out that he was awarded an unprecedented number of medals for someone with only three months in a combat zone; and that far from being the willing soldier who volunteered to place himself in harm's way for love of country, he was a reluctant coward who made every attempt to get a deferment from military obligation. He finally joined the Navy Reserve, they claim, because his draft board refused to give him a deferment to do graduate work in Europe. The U.S. Navy was playing a small role in the Vietnamese conflict, one that seldom came under live fire and was far safer duty than being drafted into the Army. True or not, this seems to be the perception of most of those with whom he served, and they describe intense pain and anger they felt when Kerry proclaimed to the Fulbright Committee that they were committing massive, institutional, and sanctioned war crimes. They cite Kerry's portrait, a centerpiece exhibit in the former War Crimes Museum in Ho Chi Minh City honoring him for his assistance in helping defeat the United States in an "unjust" war against innocent Vietnamese, as tangible evidence of the dire consequences of his actions.

It is often difficult to separate spin from reality in politically motivated works, but the authors of *Unfit for Command* are forceful and convincing about the pain and frustration they experienced when Kerry defiled their efforts before the U.S. Senate with charges that were later exposed as lies. However, they are members of a highly patriotic warrior class, which views the world from an entirely different set of premises. Their code uses words like duty, loyalty, honor and other romantic-sounding notions, far different from Kerry, an Ivy-League product of the 60's rebellion within the Democrat Party. It may be that John Kerry, coming from a more global perspective which diminishes the significance of the nation state in favor of world peace, righteously believes that

exaggeration or even fabrication of anecdotal incidents is appropriate in pursuit of a greater good.



## Part 2: Antiwar Protester

### Part 2: Antiwar Protester Summary

From the jungles of Vietnam to the halls of Congress and the nation's TV screens,

O'Neill and Corsi take up their narration of John Kerry's political ambitions after he returns to the States from his four months in Vietnam. Kerry arrived late for his appointment with the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, with an apology and a flair of drama. The so-called Fulbright Committee was hearing testimony in their investigation into ways to end the war in Vietnam. Kerry was appearing as the head of his newly formed Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), a protest group ostensibly consisting of former Vietnam vets. The organization was in fact largely made up of charlatans, pretenders and wannabes dressed in then-fashionable grubby hippie garb. The whole event, according to the authors, was highly orchestrated political theatre; involving Senator Fulbright, Senator Ted Kennedy, Senator Gary Hart, and other liberal members of the left wing of the U.S. government. Kerry's speech, which Kerry claimed was extemporaneous, was actually written by speechwriter Adam Walinsky; renowned for his work on behalf of the late Robert Kennedy. Walinsky later bragged that while Kerry was a dynamic speaker, the parts of the speech that were most often played on TV were his work.

Among the most familiar lines from Kerry's Fulbright performance were the ones played over and over during the campaign by the Swifties in their commercials in which Kerry accuses U.S. soldiers of routinely killing civilians and burning villages in the likeness of Genghis Kahn. Ironically, the child killings and village burning are the exact actions with which the Swifties credit John Kerry during his brief visit to the Mekong Delta. Those claims became a left-wing mantra, shouted and chanted across the U.S. during the tumultuous anti-war movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Setting aside questions of the rightness or wrongness of the war, the claims Kerry made were clearly fabricated, say the authors. He produced no corroborating documents to the Senate committee; relying instead on unsubstantiated testimony given during an event he had staged in Detroit called the *Winter Soldier Investigation*. The *Winter Soldier* gathering was later debunked by the authors as stagecraft that promoted testimony from people who had not been in Vietnam claiming to have witnessed the atrocities about which they glibly testified first hand. Indeed, some of the "witnesses" had not even served in the military. O'Neill claims to have written to the Fulbright Committee wanting to express his account of the events Kerry would be addressing, but the committee replied that the agenda was full and there would be no time for him to speak.

Frustrated by this muzzling, O'Neill went to the media with his story; seeking a forum to openly debate Kerry. There were numerous offers, including one from CBS's *60 Minutes*, but John Kerry declined to pick up the gauntlet. Finally, when O'Neill refused to go away, Kerry accepted the offer from *Dick Cavett*, who was openly pro-Kerry and anti-



war. Even with the deck stacked, O'Neill trounced his anti-war opponent in front of a pro-Kerry crowd and talk show host.

In his testimony before the Senate Committee, Kerry carefully wove in a racism argument by demonstrating that more U.S. blacks died in the war than did Caucasians. No one disputed his statistics because the numbers were probably accurate, and it may be that institutional racism was the culprit. But the more telling point is that this gathering of separate causes—racial equality, feminism, student's rights, etc.—under the anti-war banner eventually provided the clout to force the end of the war in what may or may not have been a prudent withdrawal. Another Walinsky *ala* Kerry phrase that became common coinage in the protest movement was, "*How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?*" O'Neill and Corsi reply with a question of their own. "*Who was the last American POW to die languishing in a North Vietnamese prison, forced to listen to the recorded voice of John Kerry disgracing his service by dishonest testimony before the Senate?*"

Paul Galanti, a fighter pilot shot down over Vietnam in 1966, spent seven years in a North Vietnamese prison camp. He is quoted in a February 2004 *Los Angeles Times* article as saying that during torture sessions his captors cited anti-war speeches as "an example of why we should cross over to their side."

As far as Galanti is concerned, "John Kerry was a traitor to the men he served with—Kerry broke a covenant among servicemen never to make public criticisms that might jeopardize those still in battle or in the hands of the enemy." Now retired and in his 60s, Galanti clings to his anger, claiming, "The Vietnam Memorial has thousands of additional names due to John Kerry and others like him."

John Kerry's testimony before the Fulbright Committee came shortly after the revelation of the My Lai massacre and the conviction of Lieutenant William Calley. Kerry apparently seized upon the emotion of that incident and coupled it with a general unrest among the political left to paint an image of the American soldier in Vietnam as a drug-addicted psychotic thug. That image lingers today among many Americans, bolstered by Hollywood and other media. According to the authors, this portrayal led to rude and sometimes-violent welcoming committees when troops returned to the U.S. and purportedly led to general despondency and suicides among veterans. Numerous POWs including Marine aviator Jim Warner have testified that the enemy used Kerry's remarks before the Fulbright Committee to justify torture and attempt to break them under intense interrogation. Kerry also testified that the enemies in Vietnam were civilians who would sway to and from with whichever government of ideology happened to be in power at the moment. He claimed that they didn't really care about politics one way or another and just wanted to be left alone to lead their simple lives. He told the committee that only 2,000 or 3,000 people in South Vietnam would have to be evacuated to escape reprisals from the North if the U.S. were simply to pack up and leave. These remarks came even in light of Senator Akins' reminder that 800,000 fled North Vietnam when French-held Dien Bien Phu fell to the Viet Cong. In actuality, when the U.S. did pull out of Vietnam somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million fled, many to die at sea or fall victim to pirates.



Ion Mihai Pacepa is the highest-ranking Soviet intelligence agent ever to defect to the West. In his view, the entire American anti-war movement was one of the greatest communist propaganda coups in history. The thoughts, words, phrases and plans voiced by Kerry and the VVAW were indistinguishable from the lies and exaggeration that the Soviets were planting throughout Western Europe in a full-out effort to discredit the U.S. in Vietnam. Although Kerry first denied direct involvement with the Communists, he later confessed to meeting the representatives of the government of North Vietnam and the Viet Cong prior to the Paris Peace Accords in 1971. Perhaps far more damning is a collection of 20,000 FBI documents recounting the agency's on-going investigation of John Kerry and the VVAW. According to the FBI record, Kerry and the VVAW were actively involved in negotiations with the enemy to highlight the "rightness" of the VVAW cause by releasing a handful of POWs directly to that organization. Kerry has frequently stated his opposition to Communism, but according to O'Neill and Corsi the record does not support the claim. The authors say that Kerry consistently coordinated efforts with both foreign and domestic communists and was the U.S. poster boy for *The Daily World* (formerly, *The Daily Worker*,) the official newspaper of the U.S. Communist Party. "[I]t is hard," say the authors, "to find any disagreement whatsoever between Kerry's words and actions as a leader of the VVAW and those of Hanoi and the Viet Cong leadership." At a meeting in Kansas City in 1971, according to FBI records, Al Hubbard, a controversial VVAW leader returned from a trip to Paris. Hubbard said the trip was paid for by Communists and that he had negotiated a deal for a prisoner release sometime around Christmas. Kerry, whom the FBI reports in attendance, says he does not recall the KC meeting. It was at that meeting that Hubbard, chairman of VVAW and a close Kerry friend, simply crossed over to become an avowed communist. Kerry continued to serve as primary spokesman for the group for another five months.

In the November 1971 Kansas City meeting, Scott Camil, the Florida coordinator for the group, brought to the VVAW membership a plan he had first suggested in April of that year to assassinate key pro-war U.S. senators. He offered a specific schedule and a precise plan. This apparently was not a joke, and the proposal was brought to a vote. It was defeated, but the question remains: *Were those who even considered it guilty of conspiracy to commit murder; and were they obligated to report the incident to authorities?* Perhaps more telling is the fact that Kerry remained an outspoken supporter of the group at numerous public functions over the following five months. The plot envisioned the murder of Senators John Tower of Texas, John Stennis of Mississippi and Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. When investigative reporter Tom Lipscomb of the *New York Sun* broke the assassination story in a series of articles in March of 2004, Kerry denied the story; claiming he was not at the meeting and that he had disassociated himself from the group even before that time. However, witnesses and FBI reports place him there as an active participant. When the record exposed the lie, say the authors, Kerry simply said that he had no recollection of the meeting. Regardless of what really happened John Kerry was having a tough time reconciling his vehement and vitriolic behavior as an anti-war activist, in which he condemned the entire U.S. Military Command from the Oval office down to the Vietnam grunt, with his new image as a loyal war hero.



The authors also note that after his testimony before the Fulbright Committee, John Kerry ceremoniously threw his Vietnam service medals over a fence into a trash bin in front of the White House. As it turns out, however, he kept his medals hanging on his wall and trundled them out in 2004 to bolster his self-proclaimed "war hero" status. O'Neill and Corsi also report on John Kerry's earlier book, *The New Soldier*, which he co-authored with two other anti-war activists. The book was filled with anti-military vitriol and it contained one particularly offensive staged photograph of ragged, supposed Vietnam veterans reenacting the famous WWII photograph of U.S. Marines in proper battle dress raising the American flag after the battle of Iwo Jima. In Kerry's version of the reenacted photo, the American flag was upside down, the international symbol for distress. The authors of *Unfit for Command* say that the attempted resurrection of that book by Kerry's GOP opponent in a futile bid for U.S. Senator from Massachusetts marked a critical point. After this, Kerry began to shed his scruffy war-protester legacy in favor of the shining hero figure he manufactured for his later political career. Kerry would not grant his opponent the right to reprint excerpts from his book during the campaign; and according to O'Neill, Kerry supporters bought up all available copies. Further, he says, his apologists attempt to distance Kerry from his work by claiming he didn't really author it but just lent his name to it. John O'Neill says that he attempted to purchase the republication rights to *New Soldier* in 2004 so that everyone could read it, but that Kerry, not surprisingly, refused.

In a sub-section entitled *Kerry's Communist Honors*, the authors detail the monuments the Vietnamese communists have put in place to honor Kerry and other activists in the anti-war movement for helping them defeat the United States. The most galling example is a photograph showing Kerry posed with the secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party and other enemy officials. It is displayed on a wall honoring Jane Fonda, who supported the enemy during the war; and David Miller, who publicly burned his draft notice. A plaque in the exhibit thanks these "progressive human beings, for their wholehearted support and strong encouragement to our people's patriotic resistance against the US, for national salvation." The authors further condemn Kerry for supporting the Vietnamese communists during his tenure in the U.S. Senate since 1984, and for backing legislation that hampered the search for POWs and MIAs after the U. S. surrender he helped engineer. In the authors' words, "Looking at John Kerry's record in the senate since 1984, it is difficult, if not impossible, to find any position he took regarding Vietnam that the communists would not favor." They credit Kerry for opening trade with Communist Vietnam after the war and note that one of the first contracts awarded was for developing a \$905 million deep-sea port in Vung Tau; and went to Stewart Forbes' company. Forbes is Kerry's cousin.

In the final subsection of *Unfit for Command*, the authors offer no new information. Instead, they reiterate, enumerate and summarize the material they have covered in the rest of the book. They quote from a commencement speech by William F. Buckley to the graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, in which Buckley described Kerry as "an ignorant young man," and the "crystallization of an assault upon America." They also reiterate their motive for writing the book.



"Since the days of the Roman Empire, the concept of military loyalty up and down the chain of command has been indispensable," they write. "The commander's loyalty to the troops earns him their loyalty in return. How can a man be commander in chief who for over thirty years has slandered his fellow veterans as war criminals? On a practical basis, John Kerry's breach of loyalty is a prescription of disaster for our armed forces."

The authors point out that Kerry borrowed Shakespeare's phrase "band of brothers" from *Henry V*. Noting that Kerry served only a bit more than one-third of a normal tour in Vietnam, the authors rejoin the selection of "band of brothers" as a Kerry campaign tagline with a different quote from the same play: "*He which hath no stomach to this fight, let him depart we would not die in that man's company.*"

## Part 2: Antiwar Protester Analysis

Where as Part 1 of *Unfit for Command* dealt mainly with John Kerry's activities and alleged duplicity in Vietnam, Part 2 addresses what the authors see as a shameful exploitation of those experiences in the political arena back home. The cornerstone of John Kerry's post-Vietnam activities is the testimony he provided to the Senate Special Committee on Foreign Affairs in April 1971. In front of that committee, chaired by fervent anti-war Senator Fulbright, Kerry claimed to have witnessed atrocities and war crimes in Vietnam committed by U.S. soldiers. He stated that these soldiers were following orders that came down from the highest levels of the chain of command. He chose to exempt himself and his fellow warriors from the guilt implied by these actions because they were "just following orders." Most of the evidence Kerry cited was hearsay testimony from alleged Vietnam veterans, who had gathered at a staged production of the Vietnam Veterans against the War (VVAW); a Kerry-inspired event called the Winter Soldier Conference. The conference had been held in Kansas City a few months earlier. Kerry presented no hard evidence to the committee. Many of the Winter Soldier claims were later debunked and those giving testimony were exposed as frauds and charlatans; yet Kerry's testimony fed a hungry domestic anti-war movement that eventually caused the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam.

There are still many in the United States who admire John Kerry for triggering the uproar that enforced a political solution to the military situation in Vietnam. Perhaps there are some who condone the techniques of distortion and fabrication of events as well. To the military minds of the authors, however, John Kerry's actions were those of a craven coward who betrayed the most sacred and ancient covenants of the professional soldier: trust and loyalty within the fighting force. They see the recent Democrat candidate for President of the United States as a self-serving, sociopathic politician; determined to seize power by any means available without regard for the truth or the consequences to others. Without addressing the other aspects of the presidency, they steadfastly insist that such a man is unfit to command the U.S. military forces; and to install him as Commander in Chief would spell disaster for American security. They also imply that John Kerry used his position in the Senate to curry favor with the Vietnamese communist government; which led to lucrative business for relatives and huge donations to the DNC. These donations helped fund his election campaign; all at the cost of



potential MIA and POWs still unaccounted for in Vietnam. They point to numerous monuments in the communist Capitol that laud Kerry, Jane Fonda and other anti-war protestors for contributing to the defeat of the United States.

When the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth first burst onto the political scene shortly after Kerry had declared himself a war hero at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, the Democrats immediately claimed that George Bush was behind their effort. Kerry's campaign attempted to deflect attention away from an examination of Kerry's military service to questions about George W. Bush's service in the Texas Air National Guard, where he served stateside as a fighter pilot. No proof of a link between Bush and the Swifties has ever been exposed; and there is certainly nothing in *Unfit for Command* to suggest such a link. Throughout the book, there is no mention of George Bush except as an object in Kerry's campaign. There is also no discussion of his qualities or lack thereof regarding the Presidency. For that matter, there is no discussion of John Kerry's qualifications for the office of the Presidency of the United States beyond that of the role of Commander in Chief. While the readers may infer from *Unfit for Command* that a man who would falsify and/or exaggerate his war exploits and mislead the U.S. Senate might not make a good leader of the Free World, the authors' restraint from such discussion tends to support their claim that their only motivating purpose is to expose Kerry as an unfit military commander.





# Characters

## John Kerry

The authors portray the 2004 DNC candidate for the office of the President of the United States as a manipulative politician who joined the U.S. Naval Reserve after being denied a deferment to study in Paris. He is depicted as a whining, cowardly, self-serving manipulator with little concern for anyone but himself. He is shown to have boasted that someday he would be President; from the first day he arrived for a truncated four-month tour of duty in Vietnam. He is portrayed as a shameless pursuer of unearned medals that later became the "war-hero" legacy he used as a foundation in his 2004 presidential campaign. The authors depict Kerry as a traitorous military officer who compromised the safety of his crew and fellow combatants with cowardice, self-promotion, and dereliction of duty; citing unscheduled trips to Saigon for a night on the town and a poorly navigated attempt to reach a Bob Hope show that led his boat into dangerous waters. The authors charge the would-be President with out-and-out lies and gross exaggerations about war crimes sanctioned by all levels of the U.S. Military Command; based on unsubstantiated testimony from bogus witnesses before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. Their purpose for writing the book, say O'Neill and Corsi, was to prevent John Kerry from becoming the Commander in Chief of the U.S. military.

## John O'Neill

The primary author of this book emerges occasionally in the first person to comment on events he witnessed while serving with Kerry in Vietnam but for the most part remains the invisible narrator. O'Neill is outspoken about his efforts to challenge Kerry's assertions of atrocities and war crimes dating back to April 22, 1971 and continuing through the formation of the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and the 2004 presidential campaign.

## Jerome R. Corsi

The secondary author is a Harvard PhD, and an expert in political violence and the U.S. antiwar movement of the 1960s and 70s. He is not obvious through the book in voice or as a witness to significant events in Kerry's past. His presence, however, lends authority and credibility to the co-authored effort and offers some assurance that proper historic and academic methodologies were observed in the compilation and reporting of incidents.



## Senator Fulbright

This powerful politician chaired the Special Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to study various scenarios for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam on April 22, 1979 when Kerry testified about everyday atrocities and war crimes occurring in Vietnam. Author O'Neill requested time before the committee to refute Kerry's claims, but was told, "We don't have room for another speaker." Fulbright was known as an avid antiwar senator and was assisted with the staging of the Kerry appearance by Senators Ted Kennedy and Gary Hart.

## Rear Admiral Roy F. Hoffman, USN (Retired)

Hoffman was Kerry's commander in Vietnam, and in *Unfit for Command*, labels the defeated presidential candidate as unfit to command the military services of the U.S. He says, "It is a matter of his judgment, truthfulness, reliability, and trust—all absolute tenets of command."

## John Edwards, 2004 vice-presidential candidate

O'Neill and Corsi turn an Edwards quote back on him to help make their case. Apparently the vice-presidential candidate said, "To really understand John Kerry, you have to listen to those who served with him in Vietnam."

## The Swiftees

Some two hundred Swift Boat Veterans (Swiftees) signed an open letter to John Kerry, urging him to release military and medical records so that the American people could have a clear view of the man who would be President. Kerry refused to acquiesce, and many of these veterans lined up to cite instances of cowardice, foolishness, dishonesty, poor judgment, indifference to life and safety, and-serving behavior that put others at risk, demeaned their efforts, and exaggerated Kerry's participation in combat situations.

## Dick Cavett

Cavett hosted John Kerry's disastrous debate with author O'Neill on his popular primetime *Dick Cavett Show*. The host was openly pro-Kerry at the beginning of the one-hour interview show but commented that Kerry had been shown up so badly by his lack of any real evidence to support the charges he had made before the Fulbright Committee that he had reduced the originally favorable audience to boos and catcalls.



## **William Buckley**

Buckley is quoted in a commencement speech to the graduating class at West Point. He refuted Kerry's claims of war atrocities and crimes allegedly committed by the U.S. Military, and praised the cadets for their commitment and service to lofty ideals.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Yale University**

Kerry graduated in 1966, and had already established his position against the Vietnam War.

### **Officer Candidate School, Newport, Rhode Island**

Kerry was commissioned as an active-duty ensign in U.S. Naval Reserve, August 1966.

### **Guided Missile Frigate USS Gridley**

John Kerry served on the Gridley during what he refers to as his "first tour in Vietnam." The Gridley patrolled off the coast of Vietnam for only five weeks during Kerry's service aboard.

### **Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam**

Kerry served one month of training at this former French vacation resort. He claimed his first Purple Heart medal here.

### **An Thoi, Vietnam**

Kerry was assigned to Coastal Division 11 and became Officer in Charge (OinC) of Patrol Craft Fast (PCF) No. 44.

### **Cat Lo, Vietnam**

Kerry was ordered to this location seven days after being located to An Thoi.

### **Sa Dac, Vietnam**

Kerry spent Christmas in this location while claiming he spent it in Cambodia.

### **Bob Hope USO Show, Dong Tam base**

Kerry's navigation error took PCF 44 and crew into harm's way while attempting to pay an unauthorized visit to the USO Show.



## **Cua Lon River, Vietnam**

Kerry's PCF fired on Vietnamese sampan, killing an innocent father and son.

## **Dam Doi Canal, Viethan**

Kerry claimed his second Purple Heart under questionable circumstances.

## **An Xuyen Province, Vietnam**

Kerry claimed controversial Silver Star medal.

## **Bay Hap River, Vietnam**

Kerry claimed his third Purple Heart, which proved to be his ticket back to U.S.

## **Paris, France**

Kerry met with a North Vietnamese and Vietcong peace delegation while still a Naval Officer.

## **Senator Fulbright special Foreign Relations Committee on Vietnam**

Kerry testified to routine atrocities and war crimes committed by U.S. troops that he claims were ordered and sanctioned by U.S. Military Command. Charges were later proven bogus.

## **Dick Cavett Show**

Kerry met John O'Neill in an open debate concerning Kerry's charges before the Fulbright Committee.

## **The New Soldier by John Kerry**

John Kerry's personal account of his time in Vietnam, which the authors claim was bought up by powerful democrats to prevent it becoming public in 2004.



# Themes

## Media in Politics

Many historians and pundits remember John F. Kennedy as "the first media president," meaning that his 1960 campaign was the first in which television became a major determining factor in who won the election. Since the advent of media as a major player in elections, things have never been the same in U.S. politics. In the days of large metropolitan dailies and monthly magazines, electors were forced by the nature of the medium to form their opinions based on reasoned arguments and substance. Obviously, there was still journalistic slant and political spin, but arguments put forth in print require more thought than is needed to respond to a TV sound bite on the evening news. Before Kennedy, such things as presence, appearance and charisma meant much less than logic, structure, consistency and cohesion. Indeed, the vague-sounding words have become the new lexicon of electronic politics. The Kerry/Bush contest was waged primarily on television; where immediate reactions count for much more than facts and consistency. Consider how previous elections such as that of the crippled Franklin D. Roosevelt or the ugly Abraham Lincoln might have gone if the candidates had been in front of television cameras 24/7.

## Revisionist History

The term *revisionist history* is almost synonymous with propaganda in that it seeks to "adjust" the historical record to paint a lovelier picture than the facts would suggest. Its purpose is to cover crimes and atrocities, to salvage reputations, or to embellish reputations to increase popularity or political appeal. The 2004 presidential election campaign was very much an argument over political revisionism. The main question before the voters was "Who is the revisionist, and who is telling the truth; John Kerry or George Bush?" Kerry claimed to be a war hero while condemning Bush for being in the Air National Guard and disobeying orders by missing a scheduled physical exam. When the Vietnam Swift Boat Veterans for Truth entered the fray, they labeled John Kerry a coward, a liar, and a traitor; claiming that his war-hero status was a fiction created by a self-serving politician who was preparing for a presidential run from the first day he reluctantly entered the military service. In truth, probably both sides of the campaign were presenting their versions of the facts in a manner intended to shine the best possible light on their candidates. In *Unfit for Command*, however, the authors O'Neill and Corsi present a strong and ostensibly objective case that Kerry manipulated the historical record for his self-interest.

## Evolution of the Democrat Party

In the 1960s, the Democrat Party in the U.S. went through some startling evolutionary phases that occurred with such rapidity that many called it a revolution. Prior to the 60s,



strong party bosses such as Mayor Richard Daley in Chicago largely controlled the party. Big unions, such as the Teamsters, were corrupt and often violent. They were frequently infiltrated by the Mob and held a disproportionate sway in the Democrat Party. In the 60s, a younger, more idealistic and possibly even naïve element gained more control than ever before. They were inspired by the likes of John F. and Robert Kennedy, who became their spiritual leaders and martyrs. This new movement in the party was motivated almost exclusively by the notion of civil rights. Cutting across party lines, young idealists demonstrated—sometimes violently—for racial equality, women's rights, and even rights for students and homosexuals. Ultimately, all of these causes coalesced under the single banner of *The Unjust War in Vietnam*. The military draft became the ultimate violation of human rights; requiring young men to die—especially young *black* men—for a cause they may not have believed in. John Kerry was a product of that time, and he has played those circumstances in a largely successful political career. Many say the radical leftist philosophy, inspired in a major way by Karl Marx, no longer resonates with the majority of American citizens the way it did in the 1970s. The outcome of the 2004 election tends to support that conclusion, and some more moderate Democrats now speak of a return to the philosophies and values of Roosevelt's era.

# Style

## Point of View

*Unfit for Command* is written in the third and first person reportorial voice. Except for occasions when O'Neill is speaking as an eyewitness, the authors report mainly from official records and the testimony of other Swift Boat veterans.

## Setting

*Section 1* of *Unfit for Command* is set largely in South Vietnam from November 17, 1968 through March 17, 1969; when John Kerry served there. There are some mentions of Kerry's earlier service on the U.S.S. *Gridley*, a guided missile frigate that maneuvered for five weeks off the coast of Vietnam. There is also mention of his anti-war activities after returning to the U.S. in 1968. *Section 2* of this two-part volume deals with Kerry's anti-war and political activities leading up to and during his 2004 presidential campaign. The settings include Washington, D.C., Boston, and Kansas City.

## Language and Meaning

The language in *Unfit for Command* is simple and straightforward with no pretensions toward the eloquent or erudite. This is clearly a book written by someone with a story to tell rather than someone enamored with the craft of writing. It is written in the straightforward language of professional warriors; which given the subject matter, lends a measure of credibility. Occasionally, the authors give in to the temptation of expressing themselves sarcastically or attempt to spin their words toward their stated objective of discrediting John Kerry, to the detriment of their argument. Their overall argument, supported by a preponderance of testimony and evidence, is wholly convincing. The straightforward material they present is far more convincing than their rhetoric.

## Structure

*Unfit for Command* is a book of two sections preceded by a scene-setting *Introduction*, and followed by two appendices and citable footnotes. The first appendix (A) is a copy of an open letter from the *Swift Boat Veterans for Truth* to John Kerry, outlining their objection to him as a potential Commander in Chief (see *Quotations* below). Appendix B is a truncated timeline of the events covered in the previous pages.



## Quotes

*Open letter from the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth to John Kerry:*

"May 4, 2004

Senator Kerry,

"We write from our common heritage as veterans of duty aboard Swift Boats in the Vietnam War. Indeed, you should note that a substantial number of those men who served directly with you during your four month tour in Vietnam have signed this letter.

"It is our collective judgment that, upon your return from Vietnam, you grossly and knowingly distorted the conduct of the American soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen of that war (including a betrayal of many of us, without regard for the danger your actions caused us). Further, we believe that you have withheld and/or distorted material facts as to your own conduct in this war.

"We believe you continue this conduct today, albeit by changing from an anti-war to a "war hero" status. You now seek to clad yourself in the very medals that you disdainfully threw away in the early years of your political career. In the process, we believe you continue a deception as to your own conduct through such tactics as the disclosure of only carefully screened portions of your military records. Both then and now, we have concluded that you have deceived the public, and in the process have betrayed honorable men, to further your personal political goals. Your conduct is such as to raise substantive concerns as to your honesty and your ability to serve, as you currently seek, as Commander-in-Chief of the military services.

"It is vital that the American public have as much information as possible about candidates for President of the United States. In various ways, you have rightly called upon President Bush to be fully accountable and to provide full disclosure. In the same spirit, now that you are the presumptive nominee of your Party, we believe it is incumbent upon you to make your total military record open to the American people.

"Specifically, we the undersigned formally request that you authorize the Department of the Navy to independently release your military records (through your execution of Standard Form 180), complete and unaltered, including your military medical records. Further, we call upon you to correct the misconceptions your campaign seeks to create as to your conduct while in Vietnam. Permit the American public the opportunity to assess your military performance upon the record, and not upon campaign rhetoric.

"Senator Kerry, we were there. We know the truth. We have been silent long enough. The stakes are too great, not only for America in general but, most importantly, for those who have followed us into service in Iraq and Afghanistan. We call upon you to provide a full, accurate accounting of your conduct in Vietnam.



Respectfully,

*(Signed by some 200 Vietnam Swift Boat veterans)"*

"If John Kerry had just been another politician punching his ticket in the military, I wouldn't have cared. But for John Kerry to lie at the expense of his former comrades living and dead, in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, just so he could outbid other radicals in the antiwar movement and gain attention was something else. Even his own crew members who now (after long persuasion) support him for president were "pissed" at the time. They "knew he was dead wrong," and their stomachs "turned" listening to Kerry speak and felt "disappointed and betrayed." Millions of Vietnam veterans will never forget Kerry's spinning of lies□lies so damaging to his comrades but so profitable to himself."

"Commander George Elliott, who wrote up the initial draft of Kerry's Silver Star citation, confirms that neither he nor anyone else in the Silver Star process that he knows realized before 1996 that Kerry was facing a single, wounded young Viet Cong fleeing in a loincloth. While Commander Elliott and many other Swifties believe that Kerry committed no crime in killing the fleeing, wounded enemy with a loaded or empty launcher, others feel differently. Commander Elliott indicates that a Silver Star recommendation would not have been made by him had he been aware of the actual facts."

"Numerous Coastal Division 11 Swifties recall the Cua Lon River sampan debacle with true distaste for Kerry, remembering him as someone who lied and who pushed the envelope of accepted conduct. Many Swifties believe that Kerry was reckless with human life when the lives in question were Vietnamese."

"The truth is that at the time of this incident Kerry was an officer in command (*OinC*) under training, aboard the skimmer using the call sign "Robin" on the operation, with now-Rear Admiral William Schachte using the call sign "Batman," who was also on the skimmer. After Kerry's M-16 jammed, Kerry picked up an M-79 grenade launcher and fired a grenade too close, causing a tiny piece of shrapnel (one to two centimeters) to barely stick in his arm. Schachte berated Kerry for almost putting someone's eye out. There was no hostile fire of any kind, nor did Kerry on the way back mention to PCF *OinC* Mike Voss, who commanded the PCF that had towed the skimmer, that he was wounded. There was no report of any hostile fire that day (as would be required), nor do the records at Cam Ranh Bay reveal any such hostile fire. No other records reflect any hostile fire. There is also no casualty report, as would have been required had there actually been a casualty."





## Topics for Discussion

While it is not uncommon for politicians to *spin* the facts and associated records to achieve their personal ends, seldom are interpretations of events so diametrically opposed as they are in the case of John Kerry's military service in Vietnam. If you are to believe Kerry, he is a highly decorated war hero who fought valiantly for his country during one of its most controversial periods of history. If you believe the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, Kerry was a liar, coward, opportunist and borderline traitor. Which version of the facts do you believe is most accurate, and what evidence is there to support your belief?

The Swift Boat Veterans for Truth claim their motive in writing the *Open Letter to John Kerry* that appears as an appendix to *Unfit for Command*—and indeed, the authors' motives for writing the book—was to prevent Kerry from becoming the Commander in Chief of the U.S. military forces. They cite their silence for more than 30 years as evidence that they are not simply reopening old wounds or nursing old grudges. Kerry and his campaign workers, however, claim that the letter and the publication of *Unfit for Command* was simply an opportunistic "dirty trick" by the Bush campaign. What is your position on this conflict, and what evidence supports your position?

In the 1960s and 70s John Kerry was one of the most outspoken and high-profile anti-war activist leaders. He condemned the war as an illegal, criminal enterprise by the United States; claiming that the military command supported and committed heinous atrocities and war crimes against the people of Vietnam. To express his contempt, he threw away—or at least *said* he threw away—the medals he was awarded from that war. Yet, when he ran for Congress and later for President of the United States, he built his campaign on an image of himself as a "war hero"; touting his service in the same war he earlier condemned. He also derided opponents—both Democrat and Republican—who had not done active duty during the war. Do these positions seem mutually exclusive, or is it perhaps quite possible to despise the war, yet claim pride and credentials for service in it?

The position of the authors of *Unfit for Command* is that, based on John Kerry's record in Vietnam and his anti-war activism after he returned to the U.S., Kerry is disqualified from the role of Commander in Chief of the military services; which is an integral duty of the office of the President. However, Vietnam was more than 30 years ago. Do you believe that Kerry's behavior that long ago should have been even considered in his 2004 presidential campaign?

Do you believe John Kerry made a strategic political mistake by announcing himself as a war hero at the 2004 DNC nominating convention in Boston? If he had not lauded his own military service, do you believe the arguments made by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth about his service and anti-war activism would have become such a major point of contention? If he had not based his campaign on his war record, do you believe John Kerry would have been elected President in 2004?



How damaging do you believe it was to John Kerry's campaign when he refused to release contested military records for public scrutiny after insisting that George Bush release his? Tactically speaking, did George Bush score major points by releasing all of his military records when John Kerry refused to release all of his? Why do you believe that John Kerry refused to release the medical records regarding the awarding of the three Purple Hearts he claimed in Vietnam?