

# Cal Poly's Vietnam Veterans: Neglected but not Voiceless

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By

Faye Messner

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**Abstract:** Veterans, G.I. Bill, Vietnam War, Student Protest, Veterans' Club

Vietnam Veterans at Cal Poly offered an interesting and important voice to the overall discussion of the war on campus. Student veterans participated in the same debates on the war and offered their opinions. They spoke skeptically about the war and participated in campus protests alongside civilian students. Unfortunately, life as a student veteran at Cal Poly was difficult. The benefits they received through the G.I. Bill were difficult to acquire and had many limitations. Likewise, Cal Poly administration made it difficult for veterans to receive the support they needed. Because of this, they formed their own groups to create a supportive environment on campus. This paper will examine the lives of Vietnam veterans at Cal Poly and how their story fits into the greater narrative of the Vietnam war period at Cal Poly.

**Introduction:**

“The Vietnam war was a disaster” said veteran and Cal Poly student, Glenn Baxley. Veterans of the Vietnam war were members of the Cal Poly community during the late 1960s through 1970s. The number of student veterans increased significantly throughout the Vietnam war era. In 1970 it was reported in the *Mustang Daily* that there were 747 veterans on campus.<sup>1</sup> In 1979, there were around 800 student veterans at Cal Poly.<sup>2</sup> These students made up a significant portion of the student population and influenced Cal Poly during and after the Vietnam War. They participated in war protests, spoke at rallies, organized clubs and got their degrees, all while balancing the emotional distress of living with the memory of combat in Vietnam. Despite the challenges they faced, Cal Poly student veterans played an integral role at Cal Poly during and after the war. Their unique perspective on the war, expressed through

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<sup>1</sup> “Veterans club meeting place for ex-servicemen” *Mustang Daily*, February 6, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Lori Umberger, “Vietnam vet aids other Poly vets,” *Mustang Daily*, February 13, 1979.

protests and anti-war movements, made their opinions and concerns a vital component of the movement at Cal Poly. These veterans organized themselves into self-governing and operating support groups which, I argue, formed out of the lack of resources provided by Cal Poly's administration. Ultimately, Cal Poly's administration could have done more to help the student veterans reintegrate and feel supported on campus.

### **Historiography:**

Veterans of the Vietnam war received support from the federal government through the G.I. Bill. The literature on the effects of the G.I. bill on enrollment and veterans' benefits points to the conclusion that Vietnam veterans received comparatively less support from the G.I. bill than did veterans of World War II or the Korean War. In his article titled "G.I. Bill Benefits and Enrollments: How did Vietnam Veterans Fare?" Peter J. Matilla analyzes the success of the G.I. bill for World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War veterans. He ultimately concludes that the G.I. bill was least successful for Vietnam veterans and argues that they fared much worse than veterans of the two previous wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through his research, he states that

Congress was generous in providing benefits to World War II veterans. However, Korean veterans received about 25 percent less in relative benefits in 1953 than did their predecessors in 1947. Vietnam veterans fared even worse initially, receiving only about half as much in relative benefits in 1967 compared to 1947. Congress did raise benefits several times over the following decade, so that by the mid 1970s Vietnam veterans were nearly as well off as Korean program veterans had been, although they were still below the 1947 benchmark.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Peter Matilla, "G.I. Bill Benefits and Enrollments: How did Vietnam Veterans Fare?" *Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (December 1978):537.

Matilla also argues that Vietnam veterans did not take advantage of their G.I. benefits as much as World War II veterans.<sup>4</sup> The representative of veterans on campus at Cal Poly named John Enos also claimed that the “VA [was] not doing enough to encourage the men to return to school. But the agency [insisted] it is doing more than ever before to make sure the returning veterans [knew] what [was] available in benefits.”<sup>5</sup> Despite his claim that Vietnam veterans did not take advantage of the benefits to the extent that World War II and Korean war vets did, enrollment of veterans at Cal Poly increased significantly in the 1970s. In an article published in the *Mustang Daily* in February of 1970, the reporter stated that enrollment of student veterans at Cal Poly increased by 94 percent from 1967 to 1970 while enrollment as a whole only increased by 53 percent.<sup>6</sup> Even though they did not receive comparable benefits or take advantage of the limited benefits they were offered despite the VA’s claims, veterans still made up a significant portion of the population on campus. The increase in veteran enrollment reveals that Cal Poly specifically did experience an overall increase of student vets even if the statistics show that Vietnam veterans’ use of G.I. benefits across the country was low in comparison to veterans of previous wars.

In another article titled “Stepchildren of Archaoes: An Ethnography of a Support Group for Vietnam Veterans at the Florida State University Campus,” author Michael Horan argues that Vietnam veterans at Florida State did not receive enough support from within the university.<sup>7</sup> Horan states that “Vietnam veterans did not have the luxury of viable support groups as a

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<sup>4</sup> Matilla, “G.I. Bill Benefits and Enrollments: How did Vietnam Veterans Fare?” 535-545.

<sup>5</sup> Kenyon, “College war veterans rapidly increase.”

<sup>6</sup> Gary Kenyon, “College war veterans rapidly increase,” *El Mustang*, February 6, 1970.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Horan, “Stepchildren of Archaoes: An Ethnography of a Support Group for Vietnam Veterans at the Florida State University Campus,” Institute of Education Sciences, Janaury 1990, accessed March 3, 2018, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED347331.pdf>.

campus resource.”<sup>8</sup> This paper and will attest to a similar argument, that Vietnam vets received inadequate support from the university administration at Cal Poly as well. Similar findings at Cal Poly and Florida State point to the possibility of there being an overall lack of services on college campuses for veterans of the Vietnam War throughout the country.

Florida State and Cal Poly veterans experienced similar circumstances. Horan concludes in his article that “services outside the FSU campus are the primary means by which Vietnam veterans establish contact with fellow veterans.”<sup>9</sup> I will discuss later that almost all of the services offered to veterans at Cal Poly were not affiliated with the university itself. This lack of campus outreach and services is what inspired the formation of student veteran groups. The similarities between Florida State University and Cal Poly point to a disappointing truth that Vietnam veterans were done a huge disservice by their universities.

Another Cal Poly student, Jennifer Freilach, focused her research on protests and movements at Cal Poly which provides insight into the overall political climate on campus. She argues that Cal Poly students were participating in the protests of the 1960s and 1970s but in a less radical way compared to other college students on different campuses throughout the country and state of California. Fitting student veterans into this discussion reveals an important aspect of their participation that, like the rest of Cal Poly students, veterans were speaking out about the Vietnam war but not taking a radical approach in doing so.<sup>10</sup> The research presented in this paper further proves that activism on campus was not violent or out of control even though students felt passionately about the Vietnam war. Freilach’s research introduces the topic of

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<sup>8</sup> Horan, *Stepchildren of Archaoes*, 5/7.

<sup>9</sup> Horan, *Stepchildren of Archaoes*, 14/16.

<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Freilach, “Cal Poly: Liberal, Not Radical,” *La Vista* 1, no. 1 (2015): 25.

veterans on campus but only analyzes their involvement in protests to fit into the greater story of activism at Cal Poly during the 1960s and 1970s. This paper will focus solely on veterans and their overall experiences as Cal Poly students.

### **Students' Opinions on the Vietnam War:**

The opinion of the entire student body serves as important context information when considering the veterans' opinions on the Vietnam war. At Cal Poly, there were mixed feelings about the Vietnam war with opinions on both sides of the spectrum and in between. The school's student newspaper, *The Mustang Daily* reported on many issues about the Vietnam war ranging from nationally reported news stories to Cal Poly based polls and opinion pieces. The student newspaper reflects the attitudes of the students and the Vietnam war was written about frequently. One article written by a student named Paul Simon from the *Mustang Daily* titled, "War escalation seems a poor route to peace" expresses a skeptical opinion on Nixon's announcement of the bombings of Vietnamese harbors. The student author clearly states his disagreement with the president's actions and the war itself. He condemns the president when he states, "that's right, Mr. President. Malm and burn and kill the Vietnamese until they give in. Destroy a few thousand civilians and their homeland while you are at it. And then, go ahead and kindle World War III. If this is your way of bringing the war to an end, the people want no part of it."<sup>11</sup> The following issue of the *Mustang Daily* on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1972 provided an article from the letter with a counter argument to Simon's. The author acknowledges that the attitude expressed in Simon's article reflected the majority of students at Cal Poly. Still, he criticizes Simon's position when she states that "Mr. Simon seems aghast at the bombing but totally unconcerned about the thousands killed and the hundred thousands rendered homeless by the North

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Simon, "War escalation seems a poor route to peace," *Mustang Daily*, May 10, 1972.

Vietnamese.” He then calls the student body to acknowledge all sides when he writes, “I urge everyone to step back and look at Pres. Nixon's actions and see why they are necessary and justified.” This juxtaposition of beliefs reflects the ongoing debate that happening at Cal Poly throughout the duration of the war. It seems, based on these two opinions what both sides of the spectrum were represents in the reporting of the *Mustang Daily*.

The articles in the *Mustang Daily* were representative of the entire student body. Polls on campus also expressed a mixture of opinions on the war. In the *Mustang Daily* on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1972, an article titled “Poll shows mixed ideas” revealed that there was a significant group on campus who supported Nixon’s decision to bomb Vietnamese harbors. “Just under one half of those polled, 47 percent, were adverse in their reactions to the latest Nixon war move. Of the remaining number, 43 percent commended his actions, with 10 percent undecided.”<sup>12</sup> This is an interesting statistic especially since every article in the paper condemned Nixon’s actions. This poll did only record the opinion of 104 students which may not be reflective of the whole campus. It is important to note, though, that some students at Cal Poly were supportive of the president and the War in Vietnam. The varying opinions of the war reveal differences and similarities between veteran and civilian students’ opinions on the war

Veterans’ opinions on the war were predominantly against the violence and involvement in Vietnam. On the day of the Moratorium protest in 1969, a Vietnam vet named Jim Eliot made a comment about the war. He shared his story that “[he] was drafted in 1967 and [he] went because [he] thought [he] should do what [his] country wanted [him] to do.” He goes on to say that, “if [he] were drafted again, [he] would not go.”<sup>13</sup> In an article from the *Mustang Daily* in

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<sup>12</sup> John Teves, “Poll shows mixed ideas,” *Mustang Daily*, May 10, 1972.

<sup>13</sup> Dave Verbon, “Moratorium Rally speakers blast Nixon, Vietnam war,” *San Luis Obispo Tribune*, October 16, 1969.

1975, a vet named Glenn Baxley said that “American involvement of combat troops beyond advisors to the South Vietnamese army was a mistake” and that he “had quite a few friends who died [in Vietnam].” In the same article, a veteran, Captain Henry Wendling addresses the issue that Veterans were often criminalized for their involvement in the war. He said that “its distressing to me that we don’t hear the hue and cry against the North Vietnamese like we heard against ourselves.”<sup>14</sup> Most veterans agreed that the war was unsuccessful and that the United States should no longer be involved in Vietnam. There are a few instances where veterans’ insights reveal an alternative view, which highlights the complexity of the issue.

During the protest on May 9, 1972, a veteran of the Vietnam war and student at Cal Poly spoke at the rally. This student, named Peter Knudson was a member of a club on campus called Veterans Against the War in Vietnam, and spoke about President Nixon’s actions. He agreed that troops should be withdrawn if all prisoners of war were freed and a ceasefire be agreed upon.<sup>15</sup> This is an interesting perspective because this student was agreeing with Nixon’s policies even though the protest began in response to his statements. It seems that Knudson’s support of the President did not reflect an overall support for the war considering his membership in an anti-war group and his participation in a war protest. His voice provides a valuable observation that disagreement with the war itself could also permit some modest support for the president.

Captain Wendling made another claim in the article that from a moral perspective, he saw it that the United States was providing necessary help to a struggling country.<sup>16</sup> These perspectives offer additional information to the context that leaves room for more debate on the issue. Mixed opinions on behalf of veterans have reasons rooted deeply in their experience in the

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<sup>14</sup> Connie Beccio, “Veterans speak on Conflict,” *Mustang Daily*, April 23, 1975.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Keugnitz, “Protesters hit Nixon’s moves in Vietnam war,” *Mustang Daily*, May 10, 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Beccio, “Veterans speak on Conflict.”



service. They were forced to commit to a cause whether or not they agreed with it. After providing that service, a complete disapproval would negate their involvement. This is why, in many cases, veterans were unsupportive of the war but willing to acknowledge the value of some actions in order to bring it to an end. Having dedicated a year or more of their lives to the war, it would be reasonable for them to support a prolonged ending since they sacrificed so much, even if it wasn't a cause that they initially supported. Unlike veterans, conservative supporters of the war could more easily support Nixon and sending troops overseas because they did not risk their lives for the cause. It would have been easy for civilians to support the war just for the sake of being patriotic. A spectrum of opinions from veterans offers a realistic point of view and a vital component of the discussion of the Vietnam War at Cal Poly.

Overall, it appears that the general student population and student vets shared similar opinions. Veterans spoke more explicitly about the war and their disapproval of the President. Both groups expressed opinions ranging from complete disapproval to reserved conditional support. Nonetheless, a veteran's insight adds an integral element to discussion and that is the unique perspective that they alone have.

### **Campus Activism:**

Protesting on campus was an important way that students expressed their opinions of the war. Veterans also participated in these protests. On October 15, 1969, Cal Poly organized its own moratorium. This protest in particular stirred up significant controversy and ultimately, the issue made its way to the desk of Robert E. Kennedy, President of Cal Poly. The moratorium was a day-long protest against the war. Its purpose was to “demand for an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all US troops in Vietnam and for an end to the draft.”<sup>17</sup> Events on

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<sup>17</sup> “Vietnam Moratorium Meeting” Robert E. Kennedy Box 35, folder 380, Wesley Word, Vol IX no. 2, University Archives and Special Collections.

campus included a showing of films about Vietnam and a meeting of the Mobilization Committee in the days leading up to the moratorium itself. An open discussion took place on the library lawn followed by a rally and candlelight march.<sup>18</sup> The events came to the attention of President Kennedy who had to both respect the wishes of the students while also upholding the rules of the State College administration. Kennedy takes a strong position and states that on the day of the moratorium, “the college will not be shut down” and that “no classes will be excused, that student protest will be regulated and that “any disruption or threat of disruption of normal activities of the college, by force or violence, will result in disciplinary action.”<sup>19</sup> The Moratorium Mobilization Committee was working to bring publicity to the event while administration was trying to minimize it. Students were supportive of the rally while administration was not. The rally ultimately came to fruition. At that rally, Jim Eliot, a Vietnam veteran made his powerful testament that he “would not go” if he were to be drafted again.”<sup>20</sup>

On May 10, 1972, an article in the *Mustang Daily* stated that “approximately 1,200 students turned out Tuesday to hear anti-war speaker protest Pres. Richard Nixon's mining of North Vietnam's harbors.”<sup>21</sup> Later that week, “An estimated 1,000 people repeatedly chanted for peace as they marched in a candlelight procession from the College Union to the Mission Plaza.”<sup>22</sup> These protests help illustrate the dominant anti-war sentiment at Cal Poly. Thousands of people were marching around the university and city to contribute to peace movements across

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<sup>18</sup> “Vietnam Moratorium Meeting” Robert E. Kennedy Box 35, folder 380.

<sup>19</sup> “Cal Poly Report Tuesday October 12, 1971,” Robert E. Kennedy papers, Box 35, folder 380 Cal Poly University Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>20</sup> Verbon, “Moratorium Rally speakers blast Nixon, Vietnam war.”

<sup>21</sup> Steven Keugnitz, “Protesters hit Nixon’s moves in Vietnam war.”

<sup>22</sup> Linda Harter, “Candle march a 'beautiful thing',” *Mustang Daily*, May 15, 1972.

the country. In the *Mustang Daily*, one student reported the statement of city councilman T. Keith Gurnee. He made a moving point, “people think that power and violence go together. This march isn’t violence, but it sure is power.”<sup>23</sup> Students at Cal Poly and San Luis Obispo felt strongly about ending the war and they protested to make their opinions known.

Veterans’ involvement in the protests added an invaluable element to the anti-war movements. In her article on Cal Poly protests and liberalism, Jennifer Frielach addresses the Vietnam war protests at Cal Poly. Her paper argues that Cal Poly students were not radical despite their political activism on campus. In her analysis of the Vietnam protests, Freilach offers additional insight to her main argument when she states that the value of a Vietnam veterans opinion was especially powerful when one spoke at an anti-war protest in 1972.<sup>24</sup> The voice of a veteran who served in Vietnam during a protest adds an important tone to the protest. Their willingness to speak about their experience provides an honest and personal note to the protest.

### **Veterans’ Affairs on Campus:**

Life as a student veteran at Cal Poly was anything but easy. One student vet commented on Veterans Day in the *Mustang Daily*. His perspective offers a glimpse into the reality of life as a student veteran. “The real unknown soldier is probably sitting next to you in your chem class at Cal Poly. He's buried under the avalanche of file numbers, forms, and worksheets that are the bread and butter of the Veterans Administration bureaucracy.”<sup>25</sup> The G.I. Bill offered educational benefits to Vietnam veterans nationwide. As discussed previously, the literature on the subject suggests that Vietnam veterans received less benefits than veterans of the Korean War or World War II. Despite the unfair amount of benefits received, many Vietnam vets took

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<sup>23</sup> Harter, “Candle march a ‘beautiful thing’”

<sup>24</sup> Freilach, “Cal Poly: Liberal, Not Radical”

<sup>25</sup> Bryan Kennedy, “Vietnam vet’s view of Veteran’s Day,” *Mustang Daily*, November 10, 1977.

advantage of their educational opportunity and enrolled at Cal Poly. The G.I. Bill benefits are distributed through the federal government and then applied to the cost of the university chosen by the veteran. This process of receiving benefits involved mountains of paperwork which was confusing and difficult to execute. Even understanding the services offered required guidance which was not made readily available at Cal Poly. The majority of information about G.I. Bill benefits was given by Joe Enos, a “veteran’s service officer for San Luis Obispo.”<sup>26</sup> On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1974, he was brought to campus by the Cal Poly Veterans Club to discuss “the added benefits that would be available to vets under pending legislation.”<sup>27</sup> Enos frequently spoke on campus and as a former Cal Poly student and Marine, he was able to provide some of the information that vets needed to access. Still, this one man based in Los Angeles was not sufficient to provide the services that hundreds of Cal Poly veterans needed.

Most of the benefits that veterans received from the state and federal government had strict requirements which placed limitations on the services that veterans had offered to them. In an article of the *Mustang Daily*, the topic of a state-funded veterans assistant is explained. The articles states that “veterans who were California residents at the time of their entry to military service and who served after August 6, 1964 are eligible for educational payments of up to \$100 a month.”<sup>28</sup> One condition of this benefit is that the veterans must have “exhausted their federal G.I. entitlement, attend school fulltime (11 units or more) and have received federal payments in the last four years.”<sup>29</sup> Another benefit offers payment for civilians and military employees who served during the months of October, November, and December of 1972, since some of their

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<sup>26</sup> “Vet Benefits topic of talk,” *Mustang Daily*, April 3, 1974.

<sup>27</sup> “Vet Benefits topic of talk.”

<sup>28</sup> “Veterans receive more assistance,” *Mustang Daily*, September 30, 1974.

<sup>29</sup> “Veterans receive more assistance.”

funds were “withheld by President Nixon.”<sup>30</sup> The very nature of these benefits made it even more difficult for veterans to take advantage of them if they were even eligible.

Another one of the benefits that Cal Poly veterans were offered was a work study program. Veterans were able to participate in a federally funded work study program that allowed vets to work in offices doing clerical work. The program was offered first to veterans with 80 percent disability.<sup>31</sup> The main purpose of the work study program was to provide services to disabled veterans who otherwise would have a more difficult time finding work.<sup>32</sup> The work study program exemplifies the nature of the types of benefits that veterans received. All funding and benefits for military servicemen were federally or state funded and often times had specific requirements that restricted many veterans and made the process of acquiring the benefits confusing and inconvenient. The difficulty of actually getting the benefits available provides a testament to the student veteran’s statement and his feeling of being “buried under the avalanche” of paperwork that went along with the stress of reintegrating to civilian life. The benefits available were not provided in way by Cal Poly. Any assistance that veterans received was organized through the G.I. Bill and not through Cal Poly. For this reason, Cal Poly failed to properly support it veterans.

### **Neglect from Campus Administration:**

In many ways, Cal Poly could have better served its student veteran population. One of these ways would have been to have a veterans’ service office which eventually came into existence in 2013. The limited ways that Cal Poly provided services for its veterans reveals the general lack of priority that the university’s administration gave to vets. The few services that

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<sup>30</sup> “Veterans receive more assistance.”

<sup>31</sup> “Work-study program available to veterans,” *Mustang Daily*, September 20, 2973.

<sup>32</sup> Janet Herring, “Veteran survey informs campus,” *Mustang Daily*, February 20, 1974.

Cal Poly provided to its student veterans were insufficient. One was the liaison who served as a connection between Cal Poly and the Los Angeles veterans affairs office, John Enos. An article in the *Mustang Daily* called, “Veterans have a new office for complaints” covers the addition of this new office to campus. The name of the article itself suggests that there were enough complaints from veterans on a regular basis to warrant the creation of an office on campus to serve these complaints. The article states that “Jim McBay and Dennis Holmes, Cal Poly's Vet Reps, have set up shop in the University Union, room 103. Both men are from the United States Veterans Administration Office from the Los Angeles Region.”<sup>33</sup> Even though this office was located on Cal Poly’s campus to serve Cal Poly student vets, the university administration was not the main organizer of the office. Since the representatives were from the Los Angeles office, it becomes clear that even on a local level, the federal and state governments had the biggest influence over veterans’ issues on campus. It is important to acknowledge that the service was provided but it adds to the argument that Cal Poly could have done more for veterans. The services provided by the government could have better served the students if they had been supplemented by additional university administration services.

The *Mustang Daily* reports that Cal Poly had veterans’ representatives. One of Cal Poly’s veterans’ representatives named Ron Jackson from 1979 had an interesting story of his involvement with the Vietnam war. He entered into the volunteer service and was called to ship off to Vietnam twice. Both times, he never actually made it all the way to the warzone but remained in the service. It is reported in the article that he “felt the war had little meaning” and that he “did not possess strong feelings toward the war” during the time of his service or at that

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<sup>33</sup> “Veterans have new office for complaints,” *Mustang Daily*, September 19, 1974.

time in 1979.<sup>34</sup> Acting as a representative of the veterans at Cal Poly, it seems inappropriate that their most available ally on campus did not share the same experience in combat overseas.

These two services offered on campus at Cal Poly were hardly sufficient in providing the necessary resources that student veterans needed and deserved. Even though they were affiliated with the campus, they were not provided by administration who did not seem to have any regard for the wellbeing of veterans on campus. In response to this, the veterans themselves were responsible for forming their own support system as did Vietnam veterans at Florida State University.

Opinions and news reports published in the *Mustang Daily* on such a frequent basis reflect the entire student body's interest in the war. Student journalists reported on the war on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. What is interesting, however, is that Cal Poly's administration paid almost no attention to the issue of the Vietnam war and its veterans. Since the purpose of the publication is to inform the students on pertinent issues, it seems as though the administration would have paid a considerable amount of attention to it as well. This was not the case. Despite the student interest in the issue, administration did the bare minimum when it came to veterans.

### **Formation of Student Groups:**

Out of necessity, Vietnam vets at Cal Poly organized themselves into groups that allowed them to form connections on campus. In 1967, the club named Chi Gamma Iota was seeking charter. The goal of the group, expressed in an article of the *Mustang Daily*, was to "bring together ex-G.I.s who, after serving their country, are now seeking an education."<sup>35</sup> At the first meeting at the beginning of fall quarter in 1967, forty-two members were present.<sup>36</sup> In 1970, the

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<sup>34</sup> Lori Umberger, "Vietnam vet aids other Poly vets," *Mustang Daily*, February 13, 1979.

<sup>35</sup> "Vets form campus society," *Mustang Daily*, July 14, 1967.

<sup>36</sup> "Vets organization offers membership," *Mustang Daily*, Oct 2, 1967.

student newspaper covered this student veterans club in a spread of two articles over two days. One article, titled “Veteran’s club meeting place for ex-servicemen” covers the role of the veterans’ club on campus and its goals. One of the goals stated in the article was to “promote the American way of life, encourage mature leadership and promote inter-branch fellowship.”<sup>37</sup> This type of group on campus encouraged veterans to branch out in an effort to feel connected to their fellow students and their school. One of the faculty advisors to the club said in a newspaper article from the following day that “Veterans, who feel they’re too old for getting into fraternities, have created a club for guys with a common bond to share a positive experience.”<sup>38</sup> Creating a college experience for veterans was difficult because they were often much older than the average college student and had faced many more challenges. These clubs allowed for student veterans to create a community. Still, these veterans had to start and operate this club themselves in order to receive the support they needed. Cal Poly administration did not discourage veterans from supporting each other but it certainly did not facilitate any community building. This club provided veterans with the services and sense of community they needed to succeed. As mentioned previously, this club was responsible for bringing in speakers that helped veterans understand their benefits and other matters. When Cal Poly itself could not provide vets with the resources they needed, they took matters into their own hands. They created the environment that provided the resources that Cal Poly failed to give them.

### **Conclusion:**

Student veterans at Cal Poly faced many more obstacles to academic and social success than civilian students. In expressing their unique perspective in the student newspaper and at

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<sup>37</sup> “Veterans club meeting place for ex-servicemen.”

<sup>38</sup> Kenyon, “College war veterans rapidly increase.”



protests and rallies, veterans contributed to the anti-war movement at Cal Poly. Through the G.I. Bill, they received the overwhelming majority of their services and benefits from the state and federal institutions. Ultimately, Cal Poly's administration fell short in providing the services that student veterans needed along with their G.I. Bill benefits. These services included community building groups, information regarding their benefits and an overall support system on campus. Because of the administration's lack of services, the veterans formed their own group and organized these services for themselves. This group of resilient and resourceful students represented a group of people who were constantly surrounded by controversy caused by a war that most of them fundamentally disagreed with. Still, they were successful Mustangs who, through their courage, left a legacy at Cal Poly that continues to thrive.

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