

**Title:** The Winter Soldier Investigation: Accounting for the Horror of the Vietnam War  
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From January 31-February 2, 1971, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War sponsored a meeting called the Winter Soldier Investigation. Over 100 Vietnam War veterans spoke about their experiences, hoping to inform the American public about the horrors of the war. Soldiers believed that they were sent to Vietnam to fight for the freedom of Vietnamese people who were combating communism. Yet their experiences showed genocide against the Vietnamese people, inhumane treatment of civilians, and a complete disregard for human life, not “brotherhood of man,” “preserving the peace,” and “defending the Vietnamese people” (“Opening Statement of William Crandell”). Speakers testified how the senseless murder of children, elderly Vietnamese, and women were part of their standard operating procedures and defined genocide as “the systematic destruction of a people” (“Closing Statement”). They argued that this was not a war fought just between American soldiers and Vietnamese soldiers, but one also against unarmed Vietnamese civilians. Through vividly unrelenting imagery of human slaughter and the violation of individuals’ bodies, strong and moving diction portraying American actions as war crimes, and shocking statistics of the number of Vietnamese civilians killed, the veterans argued that the United States neglected to adhere to the Law of War Manual which “forbids the infliction of suffering, injury, or destruction unnecessary to accomplish a legitimate military purpose” (“Department of Defense Law of War Manual” p. 100). Instead, their superiors commanded them to commit atrocities and adopted a policy of “full and final genocide” (“Opening Statement of William Crandell”) against Vietnamese people.

## Works Cited

- “Winter Soldier Investigation.” Winter Soldier Investigation: 1st Marine Division, 28 Jan. 1999, [http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/WS\\_02\\_opening.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_02_opening.html).
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- “Winter Soldier Investigation.” Winter Soldier Investigation: Closing Comments, 28 Jan. 1999, [www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter\\_Soldier/WS\\_53\\_Closing.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_53_Closing.html).
- “Department of Defense Law of War Manual.” Defense.gov , General Counsel of the Department of Defense, June 2015, [archive.defense.gov/pubs/law-of-war-manual-june-2015.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/law-of-war-manual-june-2015.pdf).