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Senator Edward M. Kennedy

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STATEMENT BY SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY

ON THE VIETNAM WAR

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After the cessation of bombing last November, the President issued an order to the field that American military forces were to maintain a constant and steady pressure upon the enemy. As a result, the levels of combat and casualties did not remain the same but actually increased. The number of U. S. offensive actions making contact with the enemy grew significantly; the total number of U. S. battalion size operations was raised; the amount of bomb tonnage dropped in the South rose to a total greater than the amount of bomb tonnage previously dropped on the North and South. In effect, the President's order of last November to maintain steady and constant pressure has not only been carried out by our military commanders in the field, it has been carried out to the letter and then some.

President Nixon in his April 18th press conference reaffirmed President Johnson's earlier directive by stating that he has not ordered, nor did he intend to order, any reduction of our activity in Vietnam. He explained that this was in the interest of maintaining the strength of our bargaining position in Paris.

I am compelled to speak on this question today for I believe that the level of our military activity in Vietnam runs opposite to our stated intentions and goals in Paris. But more importantly, I feel it is both senseless and irresponsible to continue to send our young men to their deaths to capture hills and positions that have no relation to ending this conflict.

President Nixon has told us, without question, that we seek no military victory, that we seek only peace. How then can we justify sending our boys against a hill a dozen times or more, until soldiers themselves question the madness of the action? The assault on "Hamburger Hill" is only symptomatic of a mentality and a policy that requires immediate attention. American boys are too valuable to be sacrificed for a false sense of military pride.

I was most disappointed that the President did not ask for a significant decrease in military operations and personnel in his speech of May 14th. I would ask him now to issue new orders to the field -- orders that would spare American lives and perhaps advance the cause of peace.