

# Vet Kerrey Now Sees War as Politicians Did

By C. David Kotok

Washington Herald Staff Writer

Santa Barbara, Calif. — Bob Kerrey stood at the front of a lecture hall and told 1,000 college students that he has as strong a sense of duty to his country now as when he went to Vietnam 18 years ago.

The former Nebraska governor, whose right foot and lower leg were blown off during battle in Vietnam, told the students he disagrees with many political decisions surrounding that war and thinks the United States should have avoided involvement.

He said, however, he does not think it was a mistake for him to serve his country.

"Everybody has a duty," he said.

Kerrey is guest lecturer for a class on Vietnam at the University of California-Santa Barbara. This week will be the fourth of his lectures in the twice-a-week class, which runs through the middle of March.

Kerrey said that since he became a politician he has better understood decisions concerning the war made by former Presidents Johnson and Nixon. He said he can now relate to Johnson and Nixon as well as to the men who fought the war.

During his lecture Thursday, Kerrey talked about the political decisions made from the time of President Kennedy's death in 1963 to Nixon's campaign five years later, in which he pledged to end the war.

"I look at that period and want to avoid it," Kerrey told the students.

Kerrey said he has found that he now



Doug Pensinger

Kerrey argues with students Deborah Lacerenza, left, and Daniel Swartz, right, after class . . . Kerrey "really has an anti-communist bias," she said. "I feel like Kerrey is more of a politician."

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# Vet Kerrey Tells Students He Now Sees Politicians' Side on Vietnam

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views the world as a politician.

Reading now about the decisions presidents made to send his generation to war, Kerrey said, he understands better why they were made.

"I'm a politician," he told a reporter while strolling across campus, "and I see those decisions are like the ones I made."

Johnson was pushing civil rights and his domestic Great Society policies when one group of advisers told him to negotiate the best deal he could in Southeast Asia and another group argued for a military solution, Kerrey said.

"So he hits it right down the middle," Kerrey said of Johnson's decisions, which slowly escalated the Vietnam conflict. "I know what it's like to have priorities and make decisions that end up hurting people."

"I see the man Richard Nixon and the man Lyndon Johnson making decisions based on what they think is right."

"I see them differently than I saw them before," Kerrey said. "That doesn't mean I think their decisions were right."

At the center of his Thursday lecture were statements about duty to country — statements that some students said show Kerrey is a "cold-war warrior."

"I still — even after my experience in Vietnam, and coming to the conclusion that it was an effort we should have never made — still feel strongly in a sense of duty," he said. "Still feel strongly that as a human being there are times when, in love, I should respond and say that duty alone will carry me."

Citizenship requires duty to country, just as being a parent requires duty to family, Kerrey told the students.

"And if I have a nation that I am blessed to be born in, I as well have a duty to serve that nation," Kerrey said. "I still feel as strongly today about that sense of duty as I did when I was in Vietnam in 1969."

## 'Government Is Us'

Students gathered after class to question Kerrey on what he meant by duty to country. No, Kerrey answered, he was not talking about "duty, right or wrong."

Deborah Lacerenza, a 24-year-old student who said she dropped out of college in 1970 to protest the war, shouted at Kerrey that the government isn't trusted.

"Our government is us," Kerrey responded. "The alternative is to have the military running things. Do you want government of Nicaragua?"

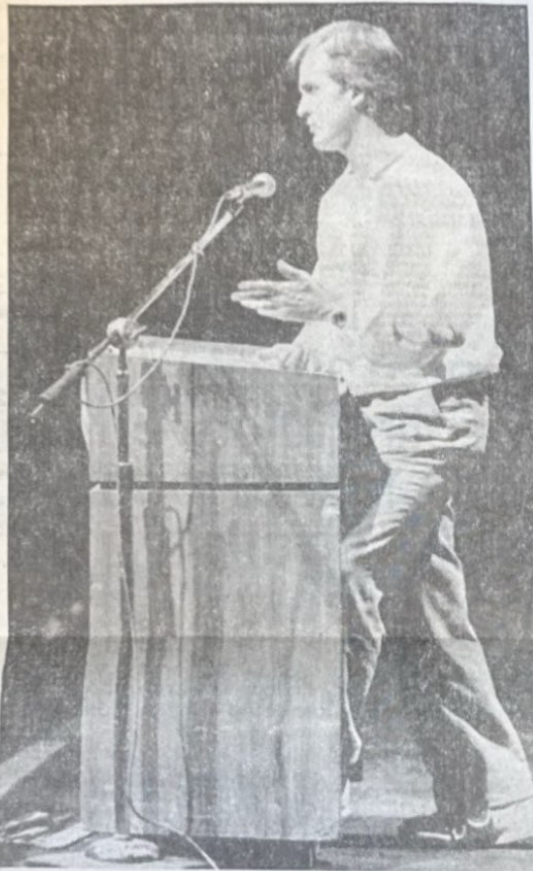
Lacerenza said in an interview Kerrey "really has an anti-communism."

Like Kerrey is more of a politician, she said. "He's up there covering himself. What are his real feelings about his political ideology?"

He explained last Tuesday to Walter Benson, the religion professor.

Benson graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1979 and invited Kerrey to teach part of the course this year. She asked that someone else be invited to offer an anti-war viewpoint.

Capps called Kerrey an "anti-war



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Simmons, however, said he sees the purpose of the course as "more peace and healing than politics and war."

Kerrey also teaches a graduate seminar on state government to 12 students. He said he enjoys that class more than the course on Vietnam.

## 'I Hate War'

"It doesn't hurt as much," he said. In an interview, Kerrey described why — despite his stated opposition to the Vietnam War after his discharge and his disagreement with President Reagan's policy in Central America — he is seen here as something of a hawk.

"I see an enemy out there who is playing it for keeps," Kerrey said. "We are not going to change their minds by throwing our arms around them and whispering in their ears, 'Make love, not war.'"

"I hate war. I look at Vietnam and say it was avoidable. But we can't avoid terrorists or religious fanatics

world is to destroy the West."

Dan Gisel, a 44-year-old former Green Beret who was in Vietnam in 1965 and 1966, said Kerrey's presence is having a positive impact on the Vietnam veterans, some in wheelchairs, who attend the class.

"He's a Medal of Honor winner, an ex-governor who is still one of the guys," Gisel said. "It can't help but have a positive effect on those who see us as losers and crybabies and all. Here he comes and blows all those stereotypes out of the water."

Other students interviewed described Kerrey as a dynamic speaker.

Robin Taylor, a 21-year-old female student in the front row of the auditorium, said Kerrey gives a "whole new dimension to the course. You keep your eye on him the whole time."

Capps said Kerrey is taking his role as a teacher seriously.

"I haven't seen anyone since the Kennedys who can inspire the kids like he can," Capps said. "You think of Bobby and think of Jack."

Bob Lyman, a 22-year-old Santa Rosa, Calif., student, said Kerrey ended his first lecture by asking the students for "a volunteer to take students back

and reinforced Kerrey's request "to be treated not as a star but as a professor," Lyman said.

The students seemed to enjoy what graduate assistant Jim Hurley called Kerrey's "cowboy politician style."

For 23-year-old Becky Shaw, Kerrey's presence has helped curtail some of the kidding she said she has received about Nebraska since coming here after graduating from Omaha Central High School in 1982.

"I know his history," Miss Shaw said. "He knows who he is and where he came from."

Kerrey was applauded by the students as he ended his portion of class Thursday.

Just before turning the class back to Capps, Kerrey said the Vietnam War "had an impact unpredictable on all of us. Not just those who waged the war but those who avoided the war and those who are the sons and daughters who experienced it..."

"Most who experienced it came to the conclusion that there is great work to be done and to sit idly by and assume somehow right will triumph over wrong on its own... dooms us to make worse mistakes in the future," Kerrey said.

"War turns people inwardly. I feel very strongly that one of the biggest lessons that came out of Vietnam — one of the most encouraging things that happened in the anguish of Vietnam — was individuals not only committed themselves to build a better nation and avoid the mistakes of the past, but to build themselves as individuals."

Capps, voted Cal-Santa Barbara's top teacher the last two years, said he did not know how to follow Kerrey's 40-minute speech.

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Kerrey, dressed in corduroy pants, sweatshirt and tennis shoes, said he came to teach at the university against advice given him by some who were concerned that he would create "an image of drifting off to California."

"I don't want to leave the world, take a sabbatical," he said. "I'm not off here to be a hermit. I'm not trying to figure out what I will be when I grow up."

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Kerrey calls his time on the campus

"taking vacation" that begins most mornings with a 7 a.m. run along the beach.

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Those actively seeking the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination have contacted him, Kerrey said.

"I tell them all that I'm very close to Gary Hart," although he has not made a firm commitment to the former Colo-

rado senator for 1988. Kerrey caught an airplane to Denver after class Thursday to attend a hospital fund-raiser at Hart's invitation.

When the college term ends in March, Kerrey said, he intends to return to Nebraska. He plans to open a branch of a New Jersey investment banking business and teach at Central High in Omaha.

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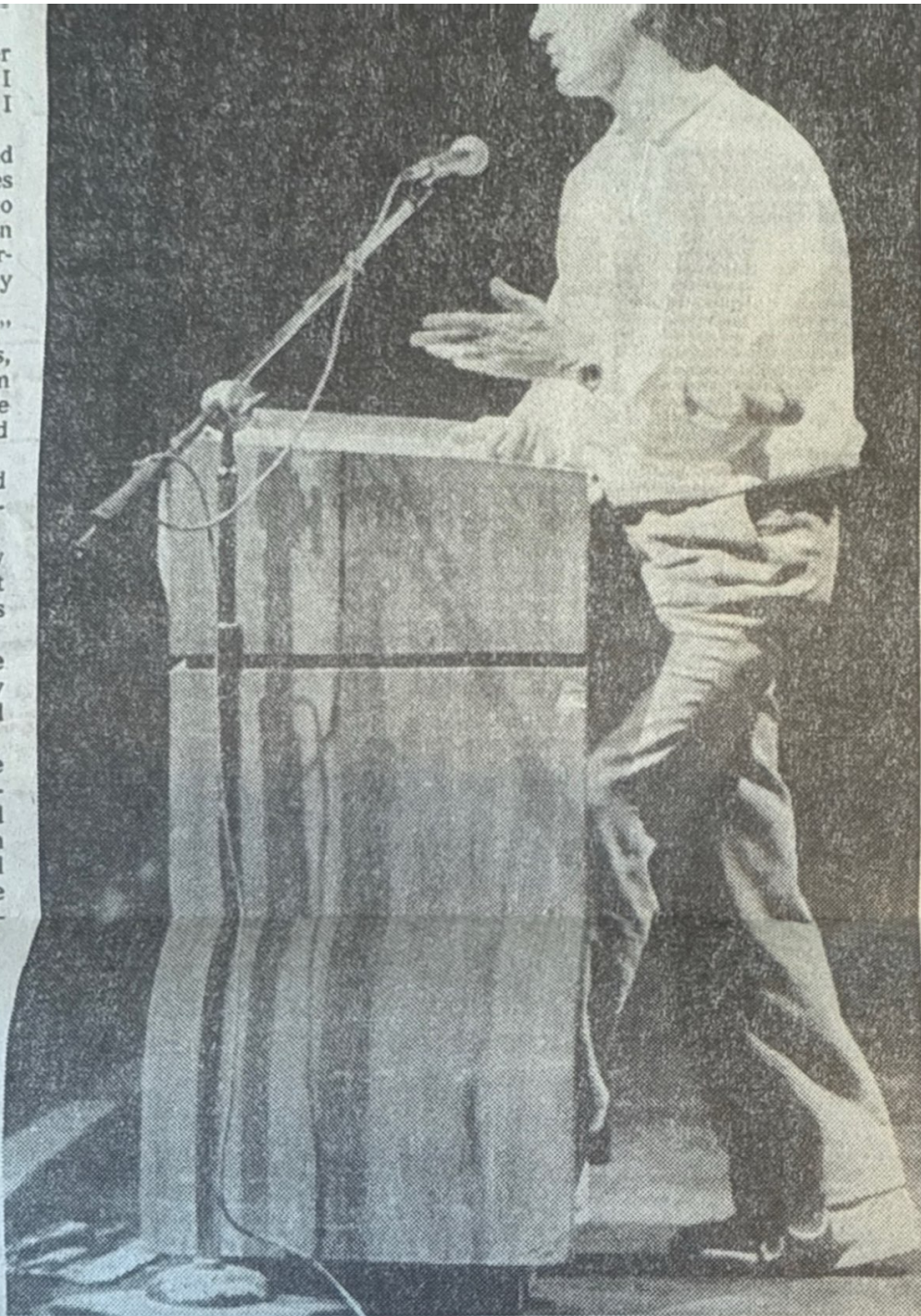
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